RETURN TO *HUMANITAS*, A CHALLENGE OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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Abstract. Ideologies like Transhumanism or Posthumanism propose the "enhancement" of the human existence in a manner that, from an ethical perspective, has disastrous effects on the relationship of the humans with the self, with the others, with time and space. In order to avoid all these, the humans of the third millennium should rediscover themselves by accessing the humanity lying within, by revealing those inner resources that amplify the authenticity and the value of an ephemeral body.

Keywords: *humanitas*, science, technology, transhumanism, posthumanism, ethics.

The Scipionic Circle is known for having given birth to *humanitas Romana*[1], imagined on the one hand as a whole of features which distinguish us from animals[2] and, on the other hand, as a consequence of polishing these features, represented by education[3], culture and refinement in a broad sense[4]. Our ancestors demonstrated that *humanitas Romana* was not an artificial concept, artfully described by Cicero, but a way of living a peaceful life, as *humanitas* refers to affection, respect, forgiveness, brotherhood, indulgence, charity, mercy, gratitude and responsibility for the mankind (and, extensively, for the whole creation). All these feelings and attitudes already exist within us, but they don't create our reality unless we allow them to, unless we learn how to activate and express them. According to Cicero, religion plays an important part in the process. In *De legibus*, he underlines that Athens liberated humans from barbarism and led them to *humanitas* with the help of mystery religions[5]. In other words, by accepting their

[1] The concept of *humanitas Romana* was inspired by the Greek *paideia.* About their relationship*, uide* Nybakken 1939, 396–413; Morton Braund 1997, 15–32; Riposati 1949, 246–266; Elsner 2013, 136–152.

[2] Cicero considers the following: caution, wisdom, ability to do many things, intelligence, gratitude, reason. *Cf.* Cic., *De leg*. I, 22: *Huc enim pertinet: animal hoc prouidum, sagax, multiplex, acutum, memor, plenum rationis et consilii, quem uocamus hominem* (…).

[3] *Cf.* Cic., *De or.* II, 17, 72; Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att*. XIII, 17, 1. He will insist upon the second meaning of *humanitas*, that of education, culture: *Huius enim scientiae cura et disciplina ex uniuersis animantibus uni homini datast idcircoque humanitas appellata est*.

[4] *Cf.* Glare 1968, *s.u*. *humanitas*.

[5] *Cf.* Cic., *De leg*. II, 36: *Ego uero excipiam. Nam mihi cum multa eximia diuinaque uidentur Athenae tuae peperisse atque in uitam hominum attulisse, tum nihil melius illis mysteriis, quibus ex agresti immanique uita exculti ad humanitatem et mitigati sumus* (...).

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humble position and understanding the fragility of their temporary existence as a common burden to carry, people learnt to look at each other with human eyes[6].

Unfortunately, in the third millennium, *humanitas* has lost much of its glow and is no longer a way of living a peaceful life. In the last decades, science and technology have accomplished a lot, but at the expense of jeopardizing the essence of the human being, its place and mission in the world. Nowadays, there is a rich bibliography on the topic, but most of the times it spreads "encouraging" statistics and praises the results, focusing on the means used and the great satisfaction for having materialized ideals. Nevertheless, this bibliography overlooks the huge loss caused not only to the human nature, but also to the ecosystem in which it develops. I noticed that studies on emergent ideologies like Transhumanism or Posthumanism are rather scarce. Most of the times, they exalt high level technology, but minimize its risks. This is why I think such studies should be treated more cautiously.

Transhumanism[7], also called "Hiperumanism"[8] or "Demiurgic ideology"[9], gathers scientists from areas such as biology, medicine, chemistry, physics, informatics, engineering, robotics. It appeared in the USA and lately has gained popularity in Western Europe. Transhumanism (sustained by various private associations, companies and non-profit organizations) pretends to look for an "enhancement" of the human nature, seen as a durative process whose aims are[10]: 1) *the optimizing of human nature* (with focus on the psychological and physical features[11]), by means of genomic selection. This may look interesting to groups who consider the idea attractive and can afford its costs, but to all others it is in fact extremely dangerous. The ideal prototype of human being, extremely intelligent and strong, could thus be reached, yet it would be deprived of authenticity.

How will *alteritas*[12], a key-notion for a better understanding of the *humanitas* concept, be affected? We define ourselves by reflecting on others, so technology might steal from us the chance to discover who we really are, which is essential in shaping an identity;

[6] *Cf.* Plin. *Nat. Hist*. II, 5: *deus est mortali iuuare mortalem* (…).

[7] The term "Transhumanism" appeared in 1957 and was created by Julian Huxley. The preposition *trans* underlines that the purpose of this ideology is to go beyond the human essence of mankind and produce unnatural optimized added characteristics by means of technology. Its similarity to the term "metahuman" was pointed out. *Cf.* Tirosh-Samuelson, Mossman, 2011, 29.

[8] Ranisch, Sorgner, 2014, 10.

[9] Alexandre, Besnier, 2019, 42.

[10] The aims are presented at length and dismantled, with arguments, in Alexandre, Besnier 2019, the first eight chapters.

[11] This is Max More's (transhumanist and co-founder of the Extropy Institute) opinion about extropy, the principle of the transhumanist ideology: *Extropy entails strongly affirming the value of science and technology. It means using practical methods to advance the goals of expanded intelligence, superior physical abilities, psychological refinement, social advance, and indefinite life spans. Cf.* Tirosh-Samuelson, Mossman, 2011, 274–275.

[12] On *alterity*, *uide*: Chung, 2012; Mendez, 1999, 552–567; Skafish, 2008, 3–40; Parfitt, 2010, 675–692; Tengelyi, 2004, 92–122; Ålund, 1995, 311–322.

2) *the access to permanent well-being, which is similar to happiness*. That is to say that the man's mental and organic functions will be completely secured. Creating a permanent state of well-being means skipping bad moods or emotions, healing diseases and consequently, postponing or even eliminating death. To extend life expectancy, considerable investments have been made in cryonics, in cellular regeneration, in projecting nanorobots, in creating artificial organs – and the list is still open. Experiencing happiness has become equivalent to living more, without suffering: suffering from organic disorders, suffering from what others do or tell, suffering from our personal mistakes. Unable to feel pain and grief any longer, the human being could be reduced to a machinery performing simple operations. The process of healing facilitated by the inner forces (such as courage, hope, patience) could be thus endangered, as there will be no room left for empathy. Postponing or completely eliminating a natural phenomenon like death is by far the most appealing promise. But to what extent could immortality be of use? During their growth, humans learn about their mortality. Limited in time and space, they unconsciously search for ways to leave a trace behind them. Being secured about tomorrow weakens determination, desire of change, motivation not only to improve oneself, but to inspire and help others improve (and here we refer not only to the institutionalized learning, but also to the self-example, which has a strong cultural component).

Posthumanism is a distinct ideology from transhumanism. However, for many researchers, it coincides with a phase in the transhumanist thought, in which humans will have completely subordinated nature to their own desires[13]. Posthumanism resembles postmodernism in many respects, the destruction of dualisms being maybe the most striking (e.g. the so-called "cyborgs"). In Francesca Ferrando's opinion, posthumanism and transhumanism share the notion of *technogenesis*, but the way in which they approach it is different. While transhumanists believe that technology could literally reinvent humans, considered imperfect, and supply them with all the technological characteristics necessary to live a better and longer life, posthumanists find technology relevant for a new ontology[14]. The humans will no longer be placed in the center of the universe, as the humanistic tradition taught us. They will be seen more as bio-mechanical entities who "worship" artificial intelligence.

The two transhumanist directions mentioned above, together with the posthumanist thesis disregard ethics and stress upon the creationist model[15], thus

[13] *Cf.* Tirosh-Samuelson, Mossman, 2011, 29: *As a result, posthuman phase in the evolution of the human species will emerge in which humans will live longer, will possess new physical and cognitive abilities, and will be liberated from suffering and pain due to aging and diseases. In the posthuman age, humans will no longer be controlled by nature; instead, they will be the controllers of nature. Those who welcome the vision of the posthuman phase are known as transhumanists.*

[14] *Cf.* Ferrando 2013, 26–30.

[15] Sadly reflecting on the aims presented, it seems like transhumanists tend to substitute themselves to God. In addition, they take into account the existence of a "sacred cyberspace", thus creating new notions of space and time. *Vide* Graham 2002, 65–80.

seriously affecting the relationship with the divine. In theory, they tend to "enhance" the human condition, but they end up by "augmenting" the human nature, as bio-conservationists reckon. This augmentation is not strictly necessary. It is generated by an excessive vanity, by a *hybris* which threatens humans with future extinction. Right now we live in a world where technology is welcome as long as it is subordinated to humans. But can we remain entirely humans in a world where we laugh and cry using emoticons? In a world where sensitivity is seldom mocked, where the appearance counts more than the essence, where the virtual appreciation replaces a handshake, a hug or a face-to-face interaction? I think that, in this apocalyptic scenery, where science is revealing its double face and its negative impact, the return to *humanitas* should be our foothold and become our priority.

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