The Humanity of the Human Body: Is Homo Cybersapien a New Species?

José M. Galván, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Italy
Rocci Luppicini, University of Ottawa, Canada

ABSTRACT

The importance of the human body within traditional bioethical debates is amplified within the field of technoethics as scholars attempt to grapple with conflicting views of what it means to be human and what attributes are core to human beings within the era of human enhancement technologies. A technoethical perspective of the human being is presented to highlight defining characteristics of humans within a technological society. Under this framework, symbolic capacity and technical ability are assumed to be grounded within the free and ethical nature of human beings. Ideas from Modernity and Postmodernity are used to demonstrate the need for a more encompassing view of humans which accommodates both its technical and ethical dimensions. The concepts of homotechnicus and cybersapien are introduced to help provide a more unitary vision of the human being and the priority of ethics over technics within this technological society.

Keywords: Freedom, Human Body, Modernity, Postmodernity, Science, Technoethics

TRANSHUMANISM AND THE POST-HUMAN DREAM

In recent years, new advances in human enhancement technologies have stimulated academic interest about the future of human-technology relationships. Transhumanist scholarship is one major area where the transformation of the human condition through technological enhancement is being discussed. However, the transformation of humanity proposed within popular transhumanist writing is not a new notion and harkens back to the story of the Great Flood found in the Book of Genesis. In this story God provides Noah with the tools to survive a great flood that will wipe out everything and provide opportunity for a re-birth (or transformation) of humanity:

And God said to Noah, “I have decided to put an end to all mortals on earth; the earth is full of lawlessness because of them. So I will destroy them and all life on earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood, put various compartments in it, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you shall build it: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make an
opening for daylight in the ark, and finish the
ark a cubit above it. Put an entrance in the side
of the ark, which you shall make with bottom,
second and third decks. I, on my part, am about
to bring the flood (waters) on the earth, to destroy
everywhere all creatures in which there is the
breath of life; everything on earth shall perish.
But with you I will establish my covenant; you
and your sons, your wife and your sons’ wives,
shall go into the ark.” (Genesis 6:13-18)

Common to both transhumanist specula
tions and the story of the Great Flood was the
idea of human longevity beyond normal human
parameters. In the story of the Great Flood,
human lifespan prior to the Great Flood was
much longer than within contemporary society.
Noah was noted to have lived nine hundred
and fifty years, an unfathomable lifespan for
humans today.

What is unique about the current context
of human transformation focused on by the
transhumanists it that the means of this trans-
formation are not viewed in terms of divine
intervention or e concrete historical terms of
post-industrial advances in technology that
have allowed humans to survive and harness
control over the environment. Rather, within
the current context of human transformation
there is a focus on the advancement of human
enhancement technologies that directly affect
the human body and mind. This “inward turn
of technology” (Luppicini, 2010) presents new
ethical challenges to address that humans have
never had to deal with in real life circumstances
at any other point in human history. Prior to this
inward turn, such considerations were restricted
to the arts and entertainment domain where
science fiction writing and film sparked the
imagination without the social responsibility to
worry about any real life implications. However,
the inward turn of technology has closed the
gap between the imagination and the real as we
struggle to grapple with new technologies that
could potentially threaten how human beings
are conceptualized and (de)valued. This is the
problematic with which this article is concerned.
To this end, a technoethical framing is offered
which attempts to provide a conceptualization
of human beings that accommodates the com-
plexity of human, technological, and ethical
relations present within a technological society.

THE BODY AS
TECHNOETHICAL MATTER

In the past decade, the discussion of the nature of
the human body has been the basis of bioethical
debate, conditioning the form of judging many
of the emerging biotechnologies, both in medical
and surgical fields. Bioethics has lost the body
(Meilaender, 1995). One of the most significant
examples is a recent book by Campbell (2009),
in which the need “to re-establish the impor-
tance of the human body in bioethics” (p. 1) is
indicated. The author shows the need for such
a rediscovery in the biomedical sciences and
the humanities and social sciences to combat
possible risks of reducing the body of the per-
son to a mere instrument, “a branded body” (p.
75). The risk does not concern the alternation
or elimination of the human body but rather a
substantial loss of its anthropological signifi-
cance as a result of inappropriately applying
new human altering technologies.

One must recognize that within the tech-
nological society we live, the human body is
not only subject to alteration through biotech-
nologies. There are many other human altering
technologies to consider, including prosthetic
appendages, neurotechnologies, and nano-
technologies. Thanks to the development of new
 techno-sciences, scientists are able to integrate
the organic and inorganic in new and powerful
ways. Thus ever-increasingly, a plethora of new
technologies are becoming available to integrate
into our physiological make-up, opening new
topic areas not covered in traditional bioethics.

In our current world where technological
enhancement of humans is possible, we treat
the human body as a technoethical subject,
largely because we need to question the, more
or less, intrusive presence in the organism of
devices with different degrees of autonomous
functioning. This includes simple tools as well
Material Cultures and Moral Mediators in Human Hybridization
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