

# Post and Transhumans

## Post y transhumanos

**José Enrique Gómez Álvarez\***  
Universidad de Navarra, Spain

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**Olvera Romero, Caleb.** *Post y transhumanos*. Mexico: Laberinto; 2020.

A topic of discussion in recent years is the transhumanist proposal in bioethics. In his work, Dr. Caleb Olvera presents the thesis on the modification of the concept of human being throughout history and the impossibility of finding an essence in “the human”. As the author explains in the presentation, his work is made up of two main texts, the first derived from an interview, which is edited for this publication, and the second derived from a piece written for a collection on issues related to culture. As the author reflects, his objective is to bring together these two texts “given that they maintain a thematic axis in what is man and his relationship with culture, with the design of himself through technology and institutions” (p. 13).

Technology has changed the way humans see themselves. Science fiction, in that sense, has been ahead of its time. The author explains that his essays are “philosophical prospective” in that they

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\* PhD in Philosophy from the University of Navarra, Spain. CISAV researcher. E-mail: [jegomezalvarez@yahoo.com](mailto:jegomezalvarez@yahoo.com) <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8964-2207>  
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aim to approach “the possibility of thinking about the philosophical problematics that lie ahead” (p. 18).

In the first chapter “Post and transhumans” (pp. 19-73), the meaning of the two terms that guide the work: culture and human, is exposed and analyzed. The author analyzes the different cultural and technological conditions of current and future societies. A common thesis throughout the chapter is the changing concept of the category “human” throughout history. The author insists on the non-existence of “the human” as a something or a substantial entity or identity, but rather as a historical category. When the term was established in the late Middle Ages, it alluded to a religious background: man is mud or mud. In the Modern Age, the emphasis was given to being a “subject of knowledge”. Our present age, which is not the product of chance but of technological intervention, has caused some individuals to transform themselves, and given rise to another type of man. Likewise, the concept continues to change and “transhumans” have become present, that is, those who are in the process of change, but who coexist with other humans who remain stable. In this sense, the author points out that there are pre-modern cultures that do not even handle the concept of human as conceived in the West. The author summarizes this reflection as follows:

... the idea of the posthuman is the idea of the result and generation of a new species, designed under the technical possibilities and oriented by scientific knowledge. But the transhuman is the reflection and generation of this change; it is the intermediate and borderline concept” (p. 28).

There are many issues involved in the term “posthuman”: artificial intelligence, the emergence of rights of conscious machines, the overcoming of human limitations through technology, the elimination of the idea of substantial identity of the human being, among others. The human has already changed due to the mediation of technology. Virtual spaces and the way of relating in these environments is an example of this transformation; currently we can observe

a change in the perception of human sexuality where the increase of sexual encounters by the use of technological applications is notorious.

The beginning of the transhuman condition is difficult to pinpoint in time, but it occurred when "... we noticed and propitiated the change in the narrative of who we are through technology" (p. 37). In fact, Olvera questions the concept of the substantial identity of the human by pointing out that, rather, we are a narrative. When we look for a fixed element in human identity we realize that nothing is stable, not even the genetic code itself, which can be modified by technology that, in our time, can transform almost any human element, that is, it has become a "design of substances" (p. 32).

The author also explores the risk of becoming extinct as a species and shows the case of overexploitation of resources, a hyper-implementation of technology, which would put human viability in jeopardy. He rightly points out that our culture is a culture of concealment, where we pay money not to see the damage we cause to the environment and affirms that, at the current rate of consumption, by the year 2045 we will have exhausted resources, particularly access to water.

It also analyzes the change of perception or sense of life and death; it questions the possibility of extending human life to long periods, for example, hundreds of years. The meaning of existence is linked to finiteness and its temporal limit, thus, by having an extended life, this would make us wonder about what kind of life and death we would expect in a posthuman future.

For Olvera, in industrialized countries we live in a true culture of virtualities. An enormous amount of time is spent in contact with screens, in a literal sense: the amount of time where we see reality, or the new reality through communication technologies, is enormous. In addition, this virtual life makes us subject to control and surveillance that science fiction predicted. An example of the above is the control of our consumption, or at least, the way in which advertising has been individualized to our tastes, for example, in Facebook ads

that are selected according to our Internet browsing habits. Today's power is a computational power.

The second chapter reflects on the concept of culture and its implementation (pp. 75-91) which applies to all human activities. The author considers that it has become a sign of domination:

Culture is a mechanism of domination, an extension of war, a way for peoples to legitimize their being in the world... if culture is the cultivation of humanity, why make cultural centers, why emphasize the care of cultivation (p. 80).

Talking about "cultures" implies a division of humans, those who live in "more advanced" cultures and those who do not. In this regard, Olvera points out that, "... what lies behind it is always the same, discrimination in pursuit of a power and an idea of the world." (p. 85). In addition, a little further on, he remarks "... Whoever monopolizes the term culture monopolizes the designations of what is human, and thus is the one who creates first and second class humans, marginalized and uneducated humans, barbarians" (pp. 86-87).

For the author, the institutes of culture assume that others must be cultivated. Depending on who is dominant, this distinction between cultured and uncultured is applied, that is, considers that to cultivate is to dominate and this is evident in neoliberalism where everything has a price.

Olvera mentions that the concept of culture could be modified to imply inclusion. Thus, the term "culture" would apply to everyone without distinctions of race or nationality.

One of the virtues of this work is its approach to transhumanism and the concept of the posthuman itself, which has philosophical assumptions that imply not only a change of era but also a radical transformation in the conception of the human. Likewise, the author makes an interesting analysis of the concept of man in our world, already in transition (transhuman) and that has changed, at least in culture. It could be considered objectionable to take for

granted the non-existence of a defense of the human from a classical metaphysical point of view.

The fact that the author raises several questions about the possibility of the human makes for an engaging read. Likewise, Olvera seems to have, in general, a not very optimistic view of the possible future scenarios of humanity that he warns about in the text. His reflections on culture, especially in the second chapter, are apt in demonstrating how this term has discriminatory uses that serve to divide humanity. It is a text that works very well to raise those questions that can generate issues related to technology and human modification.

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