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Transhumanism and Its Promises: An Assessment from Personalist Bioethics Based on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

El transhumanismo y sus promesas: una valoración desde la bioética personalista, a partir de la novela *Frankenstein* de Mary Shelley

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Abstract

This paper is a philosophical analysis of the claims of transhumanism, its elements and characteristics as a synthesis of science, technology,

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philosophy, ideology, and pseudo-religion, using Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein*, *or The Modern Prometheus* as an example. The project of "improving" and "overcoming" human limitations reminds us of Dr. Victor Frankenstein in his obsession with defeating death and dominating life, creating an "abomination" whose result ends up reversing the initial claim, because the creature destroys the doctor's loved ones. Thus, Shelley's novel can help us anticipate certain characteristics of the transhumanist project, as well as consider some ethical and bioethical problems in the development of this vision and meditate on the anthropological and ethical implications of its scope, from a personalist ethical and bioethical perspective and from Christian humanism.

Keywords: scientific romanticism, humanism, posthumanism, dehumanization.

Contribution

The main contribution of this essay is to show the relevance of the novel *Frankenstein,* recognizing its prescient and critical nature, by placing it in dialogue with the categories and claims of the transhumanist project, as well as with the challenges it poses regarding the "future" of human nature. At the same time, it introduces the contemporary philosophical and bioethical debate on the limits and scope of the "modification" of the human and on those limits that define our human nature, from a personalist and Christian humanist perspective.

1. Introduction

Since its inception, humanity has had to face the limitations inherent in its nature, a phenomenon that manifests itself both in its physical and biological vulnerability and in its constant search for transcendence and knowledge. Concerns about death, illness, pain, and the purpose of life have accompanied human beings throughout history,

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inspiring ancient civilizations to seek answers through myths, religions, and scientific advances. In recent centuries, scientific progress has offered more direct solutions for improving the human condition, especially with increasing intervention in the human body, opening the door to new possibilities such as prolonging life and improving physical and mental abilities. In this context, transhumanism emerges as a movement that proposes to overcome the natural limits of human biology, aspiring to create a future in which humans can enhance their cognitive, physical, and emotional abilities using advanced technologies. However, these proposals raise fundamental questions about the ethical limits of such interference and the risks associated with modifying human nature. Is it morally acceptable to alter what defines us as a species in order to achieve an improved future? Where should the limits of technological intervention in the human body be drawn? In this paper, we aim to introduce the ethical and bioethical debate surrounding transhumanism, drawing parallels with Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1), published in 1818. The story of Victor Frankenstein, who seeks to overcome death and human limitations, offers disturbing reflections on the dangers of unbridled science, without adequate ethical consideration of its consequences. By analyzing the similarities between the impulses and promises of contemporary transhumanism and the story of Frankenstein, this paper seeks to identify ethical, social, and philosophical- y issues that arise when considering the possibility of modifying the human condition through biotechnology and other scientific innovations. Finally, a critical assessment will be proposed from a personalist bioethical perspective, and brief conclusions will be offered from a Christian humanist standpoint. The methodology adopted in this research is phenomenological-hermeneutical in nature, that is, *experiential, interpretative*, and *comprehensive*. As can be inferred from the general aim of this work, the concepts that define the transhumanist project and its explicit and implicit vision of the human being will be analyzed to understand and interpret this proposal and, at the same time, elucidate its ethical and social

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consequences and implications in the not-too-distant future. This approach is based on Heidegger's concept of *phenomenological hermeneutics,* understood as a process of self-understanding and reflection on life itself and its meaning (2).[1] In this way, the relevance of the novel can be recognized by comparing it with the categories and claims of the transhumanist project, as well as by the challenges surrounding the "future" of human nature that are narrated in the novel and in the contemporary philosophical and bioethical debate on the limits and scope of the "modification" of the human. Within this framework, the possibility opens up for self-reflection on what makes us truly human, what constitutes our essence, nature, or human condition, on the deepest dimensions of our human nature, which reinforces the relevance of the chosen methodology.

2. Statement of the problem: our humanity in question

Since ancient times, humans have faced limitations inherent to their bodies, such as death, pain, and disease, driving their search for solutions to transcend these barriers. Thanks to their technical and intellectual abilities, humans have developed technologies that improve their quality of life, but in recent decades, science has begun to inter-

1 Phenomenology is a philosophical proposal put forward by E. Husserl, who, to base scientific knowledge on original knowledge and an unquestionable foundation, concludes that the relationship between consciousness (I) and the content of consciousness (world) is paramount, forming a single reality that cannot be separated. The conclusion he reached is that, in simpler terms, what precedes (a *priori)* science, the insurmountable foundation from which it starts, is phenomenological experience, understood precisely as that encounter between the self and the world (consciousness and the content of consciousness), but that experience does not occur on the level of the senses, as in English empiricism, but in subjectivity itself (in interiority) (3). In this sense, every relationship with the world presupposes the subjectivity of the relating subject. That is why, according to Heidegger (2, §§7 and 32), phenomenology is at the same time hermeneutics, that is, interpretation and understanding of reality, always putting the human subject first, whereby the subject understands itself.

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vene directly in the human organism and transhumanism, with the aim of improving physical and cognitive abilities, especially in terms of longevity and well-being. This advance has given rise to transhumanism, a movement that proposes human enhancement through advanced biotechnologies, in principle, compensating for biological limits and challenging the ethical limits represented by nature or the human condition. While emerging technologies such as nanotechnology and artificial intelligence promise great improvements, they also raise risks and ethical dilemmas, such as whether it is morally right to modify human capabilities, or whether there should be limits on technological intervention in the human body. The bioethical debate generated by transhumanism involves questions of justice and equity, identity, dignity, and human rights, requiring an analysis that considers not only scientific advances but also the fundamental ethical values that will guide the relationship between humanity and technology in the future. The novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus,* published in 1818 by British writer Mary Godwin Shelley, anticipates elements that are present in transhumanist projects and highlights problems that carry ethical implications that are worth continuing to debate.

3. Approach to transhumanism

In 1957, biologist and naturalist Julian Sorell Huxley used the term "transhumanism" to define his belief in the ability of humans to transcend their limits through scientific advances:

> The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself, not just sporadically, one individual here in one way, another individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps "transhumanism" will serve: man, remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature. [...] "I believe in transhumanism" (4, p. 17).

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In recent decades, we have indeed witnessed extraordinary advances in the sciences and technologies applied to human life. It seems as if the human organism has become obsolete in the face of the rapid development of new technological proposals. This perception has given rise, in some biotechnology research circles, to projects and proposals aimed at achieving, soon, so-called "human enhancement." Among these projects, the World Transhumanist Association, currently known as Humanity+, founded by British David Pearce and Swedish Nick Bostrom, stands out. These scientific initiatives, together with emerging technologies focused on improving human capabilities, have aroused enormous interest in recent years, which is evident both in the scientific field —where fields such as nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, Big Data, and medicine are experiencing rapid development— as well as in the humanities, precisely because of the debates generated around the ethical and social implications of these scientific and technological advances. Disciplines such as philosophy, bioethics, law, sociology, education, and cultural sciences have begun to address these transformations from many perspectives, generating concerns, expectations, and relevant debates.

Below are two definitions of the concept of transhumanism. The first is offered by Nick Bostrom himself, philosopher and co-founder of *Humanity*+, and the second by Max More, philosopher, futurist, and founder of *the Extropy Institute* (5,6,7). As for Nick Bostrom's definition, this philosopher does not consider transhumanism to be a philosophical system (8). His approach avoids controversy and debate about the concepts used or the associated ethical implications. Instead, he highlights only the practical and useful ends of transhumanism: the use of technology to improve the human condition, even if it means surpassing the current physical and cognitive capabilities of human beings. Bostrom defines it as a cultural, intellectual, and scientific movement that affirms the moral duty to improve the physical and cognitive capabilities of the human species and to apply new technologies to humans to eliminate the undesirable and unnecessary aspects of the human condition: suffering, disease, aging, and even mortality (9).

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As can be seen in Bostrom's definition, transhumanism seeks to improve the current human being, based on the idea that their natural condition is insufficient and requires modifications to adapt to future scenarios, such as the so-called metaverses. Underlying this position is a view of human beings as obsolete entities whose nature needs to be transformed. At the same time, in the Swedish researcher's view, there is an implicit anthropology in this ideological current that is based on scientific biologism. From his definition, it is clear that Bostrom longs to overcome any obsolescence inherent in the human condition. This approach allows us to identify more clearly the three key promises that structure the transhumanist vision, which Albert Cortina (10,11) describes as follows:

1) Promise of *superintelligence*: transhumanists, based on the development of artificial intelligence, propose the fusion of humans with this technology, allowing them to appropriate its capabilities. This would result in a significant improvement in brain and mental performance, including an increase in intelligence, memory, analytical skills, complex calculations, and language learning, among other abilities.
2) Promise of *superlongevity*: Supported by advances in biotechnology and cybernetics, transhumanists suggest the possibility of stopping or slowing down the aging process and diseases, maintaining a healthy lifestyle and postponing death as long as possible. This ideal is commonly summed up in the phrase: "The death of death."
3) Promise of *super-well-being*: Transhumanists seek to eliminate or reduce human suffering with technologies that promote well-being. One such proposal is so-called "moral bio-enhancement," which involves genetic manipulation to prevent physical and emotional suffering in future generations (10, pp. 320-333).[2]

2 These promises will be analyzed and evaluated in the following sections of this paper, from a personalist ethical and bioethical perspective and from certain elements of Christian humanism.

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Regarding the definition proposed by philosopher Max More, this author proposes the following:

> Transhumanism is a set of philosophies that seeks to guide us toward a posthuman condition. Transhumanism shares many elements with humanism, including a respect for reason and science, a commitment to progress, and an appreciation of human (or transhuman) existence in this life rather than in some supernatural ¨life¨ after death. Transhumanism differs from humanism, however, in recognizing and anticipating the radical alterations in nature and in life possibilities that will result from the development of various sciences and technologies, such as neuroscience and pharmacology; research on life extension, nanotechnology, artificial ultra-intelligence, and space exploration, combining all of this with a rational philosophy and value system (12, pp. 32-33).

More considers transhumanism to be a set of philosophies, and three key aspects can be highlighted in his definition. First, he emphasizes the goal of transhumanism: the search for the posthuman condition. This perspective reveals transhumanism's intention to improve the human condition, surpassing the ideas that underpin classical humanism, in order to achieve a posthuman state that redefines what it means to be human.[3] Second, it presents a confrontation with humanism, which is simultaneously valued and questioned. Although it shares some common elements with humanism, such as respect for reason and science, commitment to progress, and appreciation of temporal existence, transhumanism distances itself from it due to

[3] The terms 'posthumanism' and 'transhumanism' are sometimes used interchangeably. However, technically they have different meanings and there is a fundamental difference: while transhumanism proposes to improve the current human being through technology, maintaining its essence as a rational and conscious species, posthumanism questions even the foundations of what it means to be "human," rejecting the centrality of man in the universe (to the model of Renaissance Humanism) and proposing an ontological overcoming that can dispense with the traditional human form. See, for example, Braidotti (15).

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the implications its proposals have on the bodily and mental modifications necessary to improve the human condition. Finally, regarding the use of science and technology, Max More presents a list of technological tools summarized in the acronym "NBIC" (13), which includes nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive science (12). This challenge is interesting, as it is not yet clear to what extent these tools will be able to advance, nor whether their use will truly benefit humanity (14).

Both perspectives of the representatives or ideologues of transhumanism confront us with a series of complex problems that must be addressed from a bioethical standpoint. We can summarize them in these fundamental questions: Is it ethical for humans to modify their bodies to improve their health, beyond the mere purpose of coping with disease? What are the criteria for determining whether it is morally correct to undergo a process of enhancement? Is it morally acceptable to use the technical tools available to improve the human condition? Where should the limits be set in the enhancement of humans?

Before analyzing how the promises and ideals of transhumanism are present in the 1818 Gothic novel *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1),[4] let us briefly contextualize the ideas that gave rise to this literary work.

4. Frankenstein: interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary context of its creation

2018 marked the 200th anniversary of the publication of Mary Godwin Shelley's (1797-1851) novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*

[4] This article does not seek to provide a literary analysis of Shelley's work, nor even to analyze its content, but rather to highlight those elements that anticipate transhumanism and its claims from a critical (philosophical and ethical) perspective. To illustrate the content of the novel more dramatically, we recommend the film adaptation by K. Branagh (16), which is very illustrative of the emphasis placed on criticizing the pretensions of "human" science to play the role of God and assessing, after "everything gets out of control," what the possible negative consequences might be. Incidentally, a new adaptation of the novel was released this year by Mexican filmmaker G. del Toro (17).

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(1818), which raises questions that currently deserve deep reflection on the limits of science, on the one hand, and excessive human ambition, on the other. That is why, in our opinion, its themes resonate in the context of contemporary transhumanism, particularly because of the implications and consequences that can be derived from both issues (5).

Mary Shelley's education and thinking were marked by a rich family heritage and privileged exposure to the major debates of her time. First, she received a radical philosophical inheritance, as she was the daughter of philosopher William Godwin (1756-1836) —a precursor of English utopian socialism, liberal thinker, and defender of emancipatory reason—, and proto-feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). Although her mother died shortly after giving birth, Mary was an attentive reader of her writings and was educated from a perspective that valued equal access to culture, science, and social criticism (18). Secondly, Shelley received a vast scientific and cultural education from an early age, combining literature, politics, and science as part of her living environment. On the other hand, although influenced by Godwin and Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley reworked their ideas in an original way. According to Pamela Clemit (19), she radically expanded and imagined the legacies of her parents, positioning herself as an independent author. In this environment, she personally met poets such as William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and had access to scientific lectures by figures such as Humphry Davy (1778-1829), Luigi Galvani (1737-1798), and most likely Alessandro Volta (1745-1827) as well. She also became familiar with theories about life, electricity, and matter, especially through the vitalism of Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), whose ideas about the generation of life from decaying matter were discussed by Mary, her husband Percy Shelley (1792-1822), and Lord Byron (1788-1824) during the summer of 1816 in Geneva, where the idea for Frankenstein was conceived, as the author herself indicates in the prologue to the work (1, p.7).

It can be said that M. Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* in an intellectual environment deeply influenced by the philosophical, scientific, and

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literary transformations of the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, especially in England, which was somewhat paradoxically called "scientific Romanticism" in the context of what has been considered the "Second Scientific Revolution".[5] In this sense, it is understandable why the literary tradition ly places Shelley as an intellectual of Romanticism, a movement that combined artistic sensibility with an interest in science. In this context, emotions, imagination, and fascination with the unknown were not at odds with rational knowledge. This mixture gives rise to what historian Richard Holmes (18) calls "romantic science", a field where scientific experimentation intersects with the aesthetics of wonder and terror, reflected in the tone and themes of *Frankenstein.* The creature is not the result of the supernatural, but of experimental science, in a context marked by revolutionary ideas and tensions of scientific Romanticism that developed in England at the time. The novel is thus both a response to inherited rationalist ideals and a warning about their excesses, especially when science becomes power without ethics or emotional

[5] During the period when Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein,* Europe was undergoing a time of profound scientific and intellectual transformation which, according to Richard Holmes (18), is considered the "Second Scientific Revolution." Unlike the previous revolution (16th and 17th centuries), dominated by figures such as Galileo, Newton, and Descartes, this new stage of thought was characterized by a shift toward the organic, the vital, and the dynamic, at a time when science was beginning to touch on the realm of the marvelous. In this context, scientific knowledge not only expanded, but did so accompany the aesthetic sensibility typical of Romanticism: discoveries were no longer solely rational processes, but also emotional, symbolic, and sometimes spectacular or quasi-mystical experiences. It was a time when positivism had not yet permeated culture decisively with its division of scientific knowledge, but rather the figures of the time embodied a new attitude towards nature, where science was not distinguished from philosophy, while at the same time being combined with alchemy, magic, religion, deism, and so on. It is in this scenario of fascination and ambiguity that Shelley conceives the figure of Victor Frankenstein: the scientist whose thirst for knowledge does not differentiate him too much from the researchers of his time, but who, through fiction, projects the risks and ethical questions that this new science brought with it. In this sense, *Frankenstein* not only represents the fusion of science and art but also reflects the concerns of an era in which reason began to intertwine with the unknown (20). For other influences that appear in the work, see Hernández Valencia (21).

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responsibility. This context forms the basis of the novel's transdisciplinary approach. Mary Shelley not only reacts to her time, but also foreshadows contemporary problems, such as the limits of knowledge, the relationship with technology, and the very definition of what it means to be human.

5. Frankenstein and transhumanist promises

Although Shelley's work was written long before the term "transhumanism" existed, we argue —as an implicit thesis of this essay— that it contains prescient philosophical elements that allow us to establish a meaningful connection with current transhumanist ideals. The story of Dr. Victor Frankenstein, the scientist who attempts to transcend the natural barriers of mortality, intersects with today's transhumanist aspirations: to overcome the limitations of the human body, such as aging, disease, and death, through advanced technologies such as genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, and cryonics. As noted above, Albert Cortina (10) proposes a description of these three promises of transhumanism —superintelligence, superlongevity, and superwell-being— so this section will propose an interpretation of how these promises are present, implicitly or explicitly, in *Frankenstein,* which will in turn allow us to interpret the novel as a critique or warning about the dangers of pursuing such promises without reflecting ethically on their consequences.

First, Victor Frankenstein's desire to create life through scientific methods can be interpreted as an early quest for "superintelligence" or at least a superior form of life. By creating life without divine intervention or the natural process of reproduction, but rather through technical and scientific means, the origin of life is shifted from the theological or biological realm to technoscience, something central to current discussions on biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and robotics. By merging science and technology (albeit rudimentary, from our current perspective), Victor attempts to emulate or even

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surpass the role of nature or God in the creation of life. An excessive ambition for knowledge leads Frankenstein to transcend natural limits by manipulating inert matter to give rise to an intelligent and conscious being. Furthermore, the creature acquires remarkable intelligence: it learns languages, philosophy, history, plays the flute, and develops a complex moral conscience. This reflects the transhumanist ideal of expanding cognitive abilities. However, Shelley does not celebrate this achievement; rather, she presents it as a tragedy. Not only does creation escape its creator's control, but its suffering and alienation show the risks of heightened intelligence without empathy or ethical responsibility.

The second promise is seen when Victor Frankenstein indirectly seeks to master death. By reanimating dead tissue, he is playing with the boundary between life and death, something that today could be seen as a precursor to biotechnology and extended longevity. His obsession with defeating death and creating eternal life (albeit artificial or by unnatural or unscientific means) reflects the transhumanist ideal of stopping or slowing down aging. There is also a kind of "immortality" in the creature's legacy: the monster outlives Victor and promises to extinguish only itself, suggesting that the problem of creation outlives its creator. However, Shelley questions whether it is worth transcending death if it means ignoring natural limits and responsibility towards creation. Victor's death, hastened by his obsession, shows that his ambition for immortality ends up backfiring, shortening his own life.

As for the third promise of transhumanism, which aims to eliminate physical and emotional suffering through genetic or technological interventions, in *Frankenstein* manifests itself in various ways. For example, the monster is created with the intention of being physically perfect (in fact, Victor says he is taller and stronger than the average man), but he will suffer profound emotional and social pain. Also, when he considers the possibility of creating a companion for the monster as a way to remedy his loneliness and improve his well-being, he decides to abandon the idea due to fear of unforeseen

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consequences. However, the project of improving well-being through genetic engineering or artificial creation clashes with the reality that well-being does not depend solely on physical or biological conditions, but also on affective and emotional factors, social relationships, acceptance and self-acceptance, as well as a sense of belonging and identity, which is problematized in the novel by the creature. In addition, Shelley implicitly raises a key ethical question: do we have the right to create beings according to our own expectations of well-being, without considering their autonomy?

In relation to the above, we could add that Victor's phrase about "being blessed as the creator of a new *species"* reflects the deep human ambition to achieve a form of transcendence. Similarly, transhumanists dream of reconfiguring the human future, although in their case through gradual improvement, while Victor seeks an immediate and definitive solution. This is how the author narrates it:

> Life and death seemed to me to be imaginary boundaries that I would be the first to break, to then spread a torrent of light throughout our dark world. A new species will bless me as its creator, and many happy and wonderful beings will owe their existence to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his children as completely as I would deserve theirs (1, p. 38).

The ethical implications of the above are enormous, since the *modern Prometheus* never stops to consider the consequences of his actions until the creature comes to life, triggering unforeseen chaos.[6] This lack of ethical reflection in the use of science and technology reflects

[6] An important consideration to bear in mind is that in Greek mythology, Prometheus is regarded as the one who, by stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humans, thereby gives them a power that places them on a par with the gods, which is considered not only a transgression but also a threat and a risk both to mortals themselves and to the entire world (22). The *modern Prometheus* is this individual who believes himself to be a god, capable of creating a new species. However, as the novel suggests, the consequences of this excessive pretension are catastrophic, because the creature itself rebels against its creator and seeks to destroy everything that is part of its world.

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one of the most disturbing problems facing current transhumanist initiatives: the possibility that the use of technologies such as genetic editing or neurological implants could result in unforeseen consequences, such as the creation of inequalities or the irreversible alteration of human nature. This dilemma is clearly illustrated in the case of Chinese scientist He Jiankui, who genetically edited human embryos, sparking a global debate on the ethical responsibility of such interventions (23,24).

The issue of rejection of what has been created is also central to both Shelley's work and transhumanism. In the novel, the creature is rejected by its creator and society, despite being sentient and conscious, because of its appearance and unnatural origin. Similarly, transhumanism faces the possibility that "posthumans," as More (25) referred to them, genetically modified people or those with enhanced abilities through technology or artificial intelligence, may be subject to rejection or discrimination by a society that does not perceive them as part of the "natural" world. This fear reflects a recurring theme in human history: the fear of the unknown and the different. Thus, new social divides could be created between "natural humans" and "enhanced humans," fueling tensions and ethical conflicts (26). But this problem can also arise in the opposite direction, in that transhumans may effectively assume superiority over humans, which can be anticipated given the economic inequalities between those who have access to these interventions and those who do not. The most illustrative example of this latter phenomenon is the case of Bryan Johnson, the billionaire who "invests" his money to avoid aging (27,28).

Finally, the issue of responsibility and ethical limits are also fundamental concerns in both *Frankenstein* and transhumanism. The irresponsibility of Victor Frankenstein, who creates life without foreseeing the consequences, reminds us of the need to establish clear ethical limits before embarking on disruptive scientific projects. Although international regulations already exist, there is no guarantee that emerging technologies, such as advanced artificial intelligence or

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genetic modifications, will not be used in destructive or dehumanizing ways. This is an ethical dilemma that humanity faces in its quest to improve its capabilities, and one that must be addressed with deep reflection on the impact of these technologies on society and future generations (26).

Other contemporary issues anticipated by the novel can be seen in the way the creature embodies a hybrid and ambiguous identity, with no fixed place in society or nature, which positions it as an emblematic figure of the transhuman subject, as described by contemporary criticism. At the same time, the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and his creation blurs the boundaries between creator and creature, revealing a decentering of the individual, autonomous, and rational subject, the foundation of classical humanism. Furthermore, far from offering a naive view of progress, Shelley presents a warning about the ethical consequences of un r irresponsible science, questioning human privilege on the scale of life. In this way, *Frankenstein,* in addition to founding modern science fiction (29), stands as a visionary text that anticipates the dilemmas surrounding the future of humanity in the midst of the digital and techno-scientific era (25,26).

6. Assessment from the perspective of personalist bioethics and Christian humanism

In this section, we consider it appropriate to offer a brief assessment of the issue from a personalist ethical and bioethical perspective. First, personalism, which places the intrinsic dignity of the person at the center of ethical reflection (30,31), offers a critical perspective on the problems raised by both transhumanism and the transhumanist intuitions of the 1818 novel. Looking more closely at the first of the transhumanist promises, for personalist bioethics, the human being is a unity of body and soul, and their identity does not reside solely in their brain or cognitive abilities, but in their unity as a

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person, endowed with rationality, freedom, affectivity, and morality. The search for superintelligence can lead to reducing the person to mere technological support, diluting their personal identity and moral autonomy. Furthermore, the fusion with artificial intelligence, as projected by transhumanism, raises dilemmas about free will, since it is impossible to determine whether someone connected to algorithms that condition them is still free, nor is it possible to know where the boundary lies between the self (consciousness) and the machine (32). Now, in the case of Frankenstein's creature, we know that it would have above-average intelligence, but that does not guarantee happiness or social acceptance. Furthermore, it is clear that the creature is treated as an experiment rather than as a being with intrinsic value, which implies a violation of its dignity. Similarly, transhumanism could be questioned if it prioritizes functionality and perfection over the essence of the person. In this sense, the work confronts us with an instrumental view of the human being that is unsustainable from the point of view of personalist ethics and bioethics. Superintelligence is not enough if it is not accompanied by moral maturity and a comprehensive understanding of the human person.

As for the second promise, for personalist anthropology, and the bioethics that derives from it, death is part of the natural design of the human being. It is not considered an absolute evil, but a limit that gives meaning to life and ethical responsibility (if meaning is given to life, meaning is given to death). Attempting to eliminate death is tantamount to denying human finitude and, therefore, altering the very identity of the human being. This is what M. Heidegger called "inauthentic existence" (2, §§52-53), which is nothing more than failing to recognize that death is also part of what makes us human. Extreme longevity poses challenges such as the loss of meaning in existence, the saturation of resources, distributive injustice (who will have access to these technologies?), and the possible loss of a sense of transcendence. As mentioned above, Victor attempts to conquer death by creating life through unnatural means, but his obsession leads to physical and psychological destruction.

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The monster lives beyond his creator, but his prolonged existence is torture: he is condemned to live without love, without belonging, and without clear purpose. This leads us to reflect that prolonging life without respecting its integrity and natural purpose can become a form of suffering, not happiness, fulfillment, or realization.

With regard to the third transhumanist promise, which seeks to eliminate physical and emotional pain through genetic, pharmacological, or technological manipulation, even before birth, the personalist perspective assumes that suffering is not always avoidable or necessarily negative; it can have pedagogical, moral, and spiritual value.[7] Seeking perfect well-being through genetic engineering or technological manipulation carries the risks of covert eugenics and reducing human diversity. It violates the fundamental principle of personalist bioethics, which is to respect the human being as a person, with unconditional (absolute) dignity, as an end and not a means, from conception and in all their vulnerability until their natural death. It also violates the personalist principle of the value of physical life. As noted above, the monster is created with the intention of physical perfection but will suffer deeply from social exclusion. Victor does not take responsibility for the well-being or suffering of his creature, reflecting an instrumental attitude toward life. The proposal to create a companion for the monster as a solution to its loneliness shows a utilitarian view of the other, something that personalist bioethics also criticizes. In this sense, true well-being is not achieved by manipulating biology, but by caring for relationships, justice, and the dignity of each person, regardless of their specific conditions of existence. Furthermore, personalist bioethics emphasizes moral responsibility towards future generations, warning of the risks of transforming human nature without considering the consequences for people's identity, dignity, and rights.[8]

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[7] This is why personalist bioethics, to resolve dilemmas, admits the use of principles or resolution strategies such as "the principle of the lesser evil," "the principle of double effect," and proportionality between greater benefit and lesser harm.

[8] In this sense, Pope Francis' message (33) at the celebration of World Peace Day in 2024 (34) can be read and interpreted.

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Now, we would like to make a brief clarification from the perspective of 'principalist' and 'utilitarian' bioethics, with the sole intention of highlighting that even these perspectives, which we could consider 'liberal', present serious problems. The former is based on four fundamental principles, namely: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. From this perspective, several ethical challenges can also be identified in both the case of *Frankenstein* and transhumanism. In relation to autonomy, both scenarios pose major contradictions. For example, the creature created by Victor Frankenstein does not choose to exist, and his life is determined by the decisions of his creator, while in the context of transhumanism, humans of the future could face a society where technological improvement is practically imposed, thus restricting their self-determination, an issue already noted by J. Habermas (35). The principle of non-maleficence also comes into play, as in both cases there are unforeseen consequences that cause harm. In the novel, chaos and tragedy are the result of Victor's creation, while in the field of transhumanism, the risks include the social and biological impacts of advanced technologies, such as genetic manipulation and editing. On the other hand, the principle of justice faces significant challenges, since, as mentioned above, technological advances could deepen inequalities, creating divisions between those who have access to these improvements and those who do not, resulting in a kind of "technological elitism." Finally, from a utilitarian perspective, which focuses on maximizing overall well-being while minimizing the means, costs, or possible harm, ethical and bioethical dilemmas may also arise. In both *Frankenstein* and transhumanism, it is worth questioning whether the potential benefits, such as prolonged life or enhanced abilities, justify the associated risks, including social inequalities and unintended consequences. While the intentions of Victor Frankenstein and transhumanists may be considered "noble" or "good," aimed at increasing human happiness, their methods could be objectionable if they generate more suffering than well-being, such as the social exclusion of the "enhanced" or the discontent of future generations

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in the face of a technologically unequal world. Not to mention the dire consequences that Shelley foresees in her novel.

The lack of ethical reflection and the ambition to transcend human limits highlights in the novel, implicitly and explicitly, the need for bioethical guidance that integrates respect for human dignity without necessarily renouncing technological advances. The three bioethical perspectives agree that, while the pursuit of improvement and transcendence may be legitimate, it must be balanced with a careful evaluation of its ethical implications to avoid dehumanizing or destructive effects.

Finally, we propose a critical observation based on the ontological assumptions of Christian humanism. The vision of man affirmed in this perspective is understood on the basis of four pillars, namely: (a) the supreme dignity of the human person; (b) the universality and equality of such dignity; (c) finitude and contingency, as well as the interdependence that emanates from the biblical concept of creation; and (d) a vindication of the notion of natural law (36). As can be seen, both Shelley's novel and the transhumanist project bring these pillars into play. First, because there is no defined limit to the effective respect for the absolute and unconditional value of the person through scientific and technological intervention, through the modification of our biological and bodily constitution, or through supposed "improvement." Therefore, the constant suspicion of instrumentalization can hardly be refuted. On the other hand, as has been said, transhumanism carries with it the seeds of discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization of those who are not able to undergo these techniques or who do not have the resources to do so. An insurmountable barrier will be erected between trans or posthumans and those who are not, and as a result, the universality and equality of personal dignity will be denied. The case of *Frankenstein* is very eloquent, although perhaps in the opposite sense, as the creature experienced rejection and exclusion for being different. Furthermore, Christian humanism does not propose a supernatural view of man, but rather, as a humanist, it starts from the premise of the

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condition of being a creature and, consequently, of our natural finitude and contingency, from which our vulnerability as humans derives. In this sense, transhumanism and posthumanism would not be very "humanistic" (14), because being human means being at the mercy of existential limits; it is from this awareness of finitude that the impulse to search for a sense of ultimacy for life and existence can be explained, a sense of transcendence that is authentically "transcendent," since, paradoxically, the transcendence promised by transhumanism is immanent, unable to overcome the coordinates of space and time. As creatures, one of our limits is defined by our own temporal condition, our relative duration in time and space, but transhumanism cannot ensure that we transcend this. Finally (*last but not least)*, the notion of natural law, which, although not exclusive to the Judeo-Christian tradition—even though its spread in the West has been favored by the influence of that tradition—presupposes a theistic and personalist conception of the divine as the ultimate foundation of the moral order of the world. Although intuitions similar to this idea can also be identified in various philosophical and cultural traditions, this notion implies the existence of an order inherent in human nature and the cosmos, which is clearly questioned both by Dr. Frankenstein's ambitions in Shelley's novel and by the proposals of transhumanism. From the perspective of modernity, the idea of natural law has been rejected on the assumption that it has a cryptometaphysical and cryptotheological basis. This rejection has, in turn, implied the denial of a natural order of things, granting the human subject almost unlimited powers to control, manipulate, and transform nature, especially for the purposes of power and domination. However, Shelley prophetically warns us about the possible consequences of this challenge to natural order. Although the concrete consequences of transhumanism cannot yet be predicted with certainty, negative suspicions about it are clearly anticipated in the novel, which shows the ethical and existential risks of a science that disregards limits. These concerns have been widely discussed in the analysis of the bioethical implications of transhumanist tech-

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nologies, as such practices call into question what essentially constitutes us as human beings, thus violating the fundamental principles underlying the idea of natural law. Now, if one does not want to take a theistic position, what can be understood by natural law?

> It is the very nature of man insofar as it serves as a guiding principle for his conscious and free activities and directs them to their ultimate end. "This is the concept of natural law, which, being the action of a legislator, is in a formal and proper way, as in itself, in the legislated. (...) Thus, we call natural law the very essence of man." While laying the foundations for a normative ethic, it expresses full freedom in addressing the question of how human rights should be realized, guaranteed, and promoted (36, pp. 20-21).

It is an unwritten law, but one that is deeply inscribed in human nature, whose moral demands have universal value. This law transcends differences of race, culture, space, and time, and stands as the foundation of moral and legal judgment. In other words, it is not imposed as an external constraint but is perceived by human conscience as a guide that allows for the authentic exercise of freedom, oriented toward full personal fulfillment with respect for the dignity of human beings and of every person without exception. In fact, the idea of "human rights" presupposes a notion of natural law founded on human nature and its essential dignity. Both in the novel and in Both in the novel and in transhumanist promises, transgressions of that natural order of things to which this notion of universal and transcendent law refers can be anticipated.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of transhumanism and its relationship to the ethical dilemmas raised in the novel *Frankenstein* leads us to reflect on human nature and the limits of scientific intervention in our biology.

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While transhumanism offers promises of a radical improvement in human capabilities, both physical and cognitive, this vision also raises serious questions about the morality of modifying what defines our humanity. Mary Shelley's novel, presenting the story of Dr. Victor Frankenstein, offers a warning about the consequences of scientific arrogance and a lack of ethical reflection in the pursuit of knowledge and power. Like Victor, transhumanists may be running the risk of creating an uncontrollable and unexpected reality, the consequences of which could be both destructive and dehumanizing.

Although technological advances such as genetic editing and artificial intelligence allow us to overcome certain biological limitations, they require a rigorous ethical and bioethical approach to prevent social divides from widening or new forms of discrimination from emerging. The creation of genetically modified or enhanced beings through advanced technologies could lead to a division between "natural humans" and "posthumans," a phenomenon that reflects universal fears of the unknown and the different. Bioethics must therefore play a key role in guiding these advances, ensuring that the fundamental principles underpinning human dignity and identity are not lost sight of.

In this sense, transhumanism must be evaluated not only from a scientific perspective, but also in terms of its impact on society and future generations. The story of Frankenstein is relevant today as a reminder that the pursuit of progress, however well-intentioned (33,34), must be accompanied by ethical reflection that considers the long-term consequences. Ultimately, the question remains: how far are we willing to go to improve humanity without losing what makes us human, including our finitude and vulnerability?

From the perspective of Christian humanism, human dignity does not depend on physical, intellectual, or technological capabilities, but rather on our status as unique and unrepeatable creatures, made in the image and likeness of God. This vision is opposed both to the excessive ambitions of Dr. Frankenstein, who creates life without considering his moral responsibility toward it and to transhumanist postulates that seek to redefine human beings based on

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criteria of efficiency and functionality. Christian humanism, rooted in a transcendent and personalist conception of man, warns against the instrumentalization of human life and rejects any vision that reduces human beings to mere products of technology. In this sense, Frankenstein and transhumanism represent a double warning: when science disregards ethics and the recognition of the inherent dignity of every person, the result is not progress, but dehumanization.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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