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# Flesh as Trauma: First Thoughts on the Transhumanist Traumatic view of the Human Body

# La carne como trauma: primeras reflexiones sobre la visión traumática transhumanista del cuerpo humano

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**Abstract**

In this article, I examine the concept of flesh as a source of trauma through a transhumanist lens. I argue that our embodied existence exposes us to vulnerability and limitations imposed by nature. First, we face the inevitability of diseases, ageing, and death. Second, our physical bodies constrain us from certain activities and lifestyles. I investigate this by presenting a transhumanist perspective, highlighting four conditions of flesh as trauma. In section 3, I propose that embodiment is inherently traumatic, with flesh serving as the origin of existential trauma. I also contend that as long as existential risks persist, trauma will escalate. Sections 4 and 5 explore how trauma endures beyond our biological existence, affecting future posthuman generations. I conclude that while some transhumanist arguments have merit, the notion of flesh as trauma lacks plausibility. However, it gains traction within a discourse fuelled by transhumanist ideology, especially in cultures undergoing rapid technological advancements. This conception of trauma functions as a political and ideological artefact, reflecting discontent with the traditional human condition, particularly in affluent societies.

*Keywords*: transhumanism; posthumanism; trauma; flesh; biopolitics; embodiment; bioethics; mortality; existential risk; human enhancement.

**Resumen**

En este artículo, examino el concepto de la carne como originadora de trauma desde una perspectiva transhumanista. Sostengo que nuestra existencia encarnada nos expone a la vulnerabilidad y las limitaciones impuestas por la naturaleza. En primer lugar, nos enfrentamos a la inevitabilidad de las enfermedades, el envejecimiento y la muerte. En segundo lugar, nuestros cuerpos físicos nos impiden realizar determinadas actividades y llevar ciertos estilos de vida. Investigo esto presentando una perspectiva transhumanista, destacando cuatro condiciones de la carne como trauma. En la sección 3, propongo que la encarnación es intrínsecamente traumática, y que la carne es el origen del trauma existencial. También sostengo que, mientras persistan los riesgos existenciales, el trauma se intensificará. Las secciones 4 y 5 exploran cómo el trauma perdura más allá de nuestra existencia biológica, afectando a las futuras generaciones poshumanas. Concluyo que, si bien algunos argumentos transhumanistas tienen mérito, la noción de la carne como trauma carece de plausibilidad. Sin embargo, gana fuerza dentro de un discurso alimentado por la ideología transhumanista, especialmente en culturas que experimentan avances tecnológicos rápidos. Esta concepción del trauma funciona como un artefacto político e ideológico que refleja el descontento con la condición humana tradicional, particularmente en las sociedades prósperas.

*Palabras clave*: transhumanismo; posthumanismo; trauma; carne; biopolítica; encarnación; bioética; mortalidad; riesgo existencial; mejora humana.

My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it.

Joë Bousquet (in Deleuze, 1990, p. 148)

## 1. Transhumanism, trauma, and flesh

The difficulty in defining flesh as trauma lies not in defining trauma, but in building a plausible transhumanist[1] argument in favour of the thesis that flesh originates trauma. More properly, the challenge is to build a straightforward transhumanist argument according to which flesh can be understood as a source of trauma. Flesh, as is here understood, reports to the carbon-vessel that comprises the tissues, organs, muscles, bones, and different systems that collectively make up the complex framework of the human body. As Thomas Philbeck rightly puts it, transhumanists rely "on outdated notions from a crumbling humanist paradigm" (2014, p. 181), drawing a sharp distinction between body and mind. The body is, above all, the flesh, the material platform *in* which we exist, but to which we cannot be reduced nor condemned to. The self is something more than just the physical body; it is, above all, the mind, which is some sort of truer self. It is our minds that are imprisoned in the body. Uploading our minds to a silicon platform (cfr. Fuller & Lipinska, 2014, p. 92) would permit us to discard the flesh and its messiness altogether, thus freeing our minds, and possibly

[1] For the purpose of this paper, I understand transhumanism as a broad philosophical and scientific movement driven by the goal of employing emerging and converging technologies to radically enhance human capacities and improve the human condition. These interventions are aimed at altering virtually all dimensions of our human existence and experience: from the enhancement of our cognitive, physical, and emotional capacities to the radical extension of our health and lifespan. Once we have augmented capacities such as these, we will have transitioned from humans to posthumans.

avoiding the traumatic experiences it gives origin to.[2] In any case, the dualism mind/body is one of the indispensable and constitutive tenets of transhumanism.

Hence, the first difficulty one runs against is the idea that trauma requires a causing event. Traumatic events are defined as incidents that expose a person to a significant threat of severe harm or death (cfr. VandenBos, 2015). A further difficulty is to clearly identify when flesh was first perceived as a source of trauma, assuming this is a reasonable hypothesis. At first glance, it is doubtful whether it can be compared to an accident, a violent attack, or a natural disaster.

But consider a different understanding. In some instances, trauma is much more the result of a continuing process rather than a singular incident. Cases of ongoing stress resulting from childhood abuse, prolonged illnesses, residing in an unstable or unsafe environment, or sharing life with someone we perceive as leading a distressing and traumatic existence can all contribute to an understanding of trauma as a process. It is this understanding that I want to explore here because it seems to be the one most coherent with the hypothesis under analysis.

For transhumanists, this process starts with the fact that our embodied existence is a major obstacle to the goal of achieving a posthuman state, one in which we no longer have to deal with the pains and sufferings caused by diseases, old age, the loss of cognitive and physical abilities, our moral flaws, and, ultimately, death. Hence why transhumanists advocate for the "direct application of medicine and technology to overcome some of our basic biological limits" (Bostrom, 2003, p. 494).

But where does the suspicion and apprehension regarding our embodied human condition come from? Since it cannot arise from a positive account of what living a fully disembodied life might entail, it must stem from another source. Could it be a problem of degree? For instance, a completely disembodied life would necessarily involve the absence of a physical body and the associated negative experiences, which transhumanists often emphasise, rather than focusing on the positive aspects of bodily experiences. Bostrom (2008, p. 3) lists a number

[2] Advocates of a distinctive posthuman tradition often criticise the implausibility of this conception of the body as a reductionist (Cartesian) understanding of the human being (cfr. Ferrando, 2014, p. 222).

of these bad experiences that cause early death: infections, violence, malnutrition, heart attacks, cancers.

If it is a matter of degree, we can think of various stages before full disembodiment.[3] Our progressive cyborgisation might be a way of progressively weakening those negative experiences. This suggests that there exists a pathway towards increased indeterminacy, or freedom, as transhumanists advocate. The reduction of our physical reliance on flesh amounts to greater freedom and less suffering due to the negative experiences that humans endure.

This is much in line with a central transhumanist feature identified by Michael Hauskeller: "it is not our abilities that determine our nature, but rather the lack of certain abilities: not what we can do, but what we cannot do" (2013, p. 65). Certainly, this aligns with the transhumanist adherence to the tradition of thought that embraces the concept of progress.

[3] Here, it is important to bear in mind that the present investigation focuses on a very specific and original problem in the context of the literature, namely whether and in what ways flesh is a source of existential trauma from a transhumanist standpoint. Certainly, the perspicacious reader will not fail to understand that there are a number of other challenges that are somehow prior or that are constitutive to the one I'm looking at here (*e.g.*, cyborgisation, the survival of consciousness in non-organic bodies, identity through transition, etc.). Although the feasibility of *posthumanism*, our cyborgisation, and the preservation of identity in non-organic structures are crucial discussions within the broader context of transhumanism (cfr. Ferrando, 2014; Philbeck, 2014), they fall outside the scope of this particular analysis. For the purposes of this discussion, I am generally and generously assuming that the transhumanist project will be feasible in the future, allowing for philosophical and ethical speculation regarding its implications. My focus here is to critically assess how transhumanism frames the body as an *object* made of flesh as a source of existential trauma. While these foundational debates are important, I contend that even if these projects were technologically feasible, the question of trauma's persistence—particularly the way it is tied to human experience—would remain a key concern. An investigation of flesh as trauma would certainly benefit from a different approach, one that focuses on posthumanist rather than on transhumanist philosophy and ethics as its starting point. My investigation of this topic is also significant, and it will have fulfilled its purpose if it stimulates such a debate. I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this point.

I believe this is where trauma begins to manifest. We are trapped inside a biological, organic vessel that sets ample limitations to what we can do; our "body is a deathtrap" (Bostrom, 2008, p. 3). Our embodied, corporeal existence determines what we are, but we *know* we are much more than embodied beings. On this, transhumanists are happy to quote Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1965) when he claimed that our nature is to have no nature at all (cfr. Bostrom, 2005). In fact, what we are now is not what we *really are*, or, at least, what we have the potential to be. What we really are, what is "characteristically human", is for us to honour that ontological indeterminacy that prescribes us no limits, that renders us beings unwilling to acquiesce to any external constraints, even those imposed by our physical existence. If determinacy imposes constraints on what we can be, we should strive for indeterminacy. Greater indeterminacy amounts to greater freedom.

This dualistic, Manichean conception of a corporeal, physical nature that necessarily imposes limits on what we are, and an immaterial nature comprising aspects like agency and thinking that unavoidably stands against it, piggyback humanism's dualist ontology (Philbeck, 2014, p. 179). But there's hardly anything new in pointing out the transhumanist Cartesian dualistic approach. They insist that we *have* bodies and minds but claim that it is our minds that dictate us that we overcome the biological, organic limitations that our blood, flesh, and bones impose on us. The transhumanist body is an object to be acted upon, one over which we should exert our powers as intelligent designers; it is an open project requiring completion. A transhumanist would surely subscribe to the slogan, "I am myself and *this* body, and *this* body is the primary reason why I am 'everywhere in biological chains'" (Young, 2006, p. 32).[4]

[4] To enquire on how transhumanists have the capacity to understand and conceive our biological, organic body as this separated entity is not the purpose of this study. But it is safe to say that we have never existed and have never experienced what a fully incorporeal life might be. The phenomenological tradition has much to say about this. For example, Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 93) has argued that one can never observe one's own body unless one had a second (and also unobservable) body to do so. On this view, the body is the indispensable structure of both one's experience of the world and one's behaviour. It cannot be an alien object or a mysterious, half-independent phenomenon that I observe and conceive as something to be acted upon, as it is for transhumanists.

Henceforth, the desirability of living a fully disembodied life finds its main source of justification in this dualistic conception of human nature. It is tied to the subjective unpleasantness intrinsic to our current embodied human condition. To live an embodied life is a traumatic experience. Diseases, ageing, and death are the most evident signs of that traumatised existence, along with our vulnerability towards the elements of the external world (among which physical interaction with other individuals is a major one), the scents our bodies secrete, our perceptible presence expressed through spontaneous bodily gestures, the emotions we cannot control, our limited physical and cognitive capacities, and our moral and ethical imperfections. All these factors contribute to our traumatic experience of life.

Let's look the American Psychological Association's definition of "trauma". They define "trauma" as:

> […] any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning. Traumatic events include those caused by human behavior (e.g., rape, war, industrial accidents) as well as by nature (e.g., earthquakes) and often challenge an individual's view of the world as a just, safe, and predictable place (VandenBos, 2015, p. 1104).

The problem with this definition is that it lacks practicality for our case. From a transhumanist perspective, it would be reasonable to claim that to live an embodied life is a disturbing experience because of its vulnerability and limitations. It would also be plausible to assert that this embodied condition is a source of fear, helplessness, or other profound emotional disturbances capable of producing enduring adverse effects on a person's attitudes, behaviour, and other aspects of functioning.

However, it appears overly exaggerated to argue that our embodied condition is a traumatic event. How could we classify it as such? Is it an event caused by nature, much like an earthquake, or should we, like in cases of rape and war, categorise it as a traumatic event caused by human actions? A naturalistic approach would provide arguments in favour of the former idea, whereas a justice-based approach would offer arguments for the latter. Let me quote Bostrom and Savulescu at length

so I can advance a tentative answer to this problem. Here's what they say:

> Human enhancement has moved from the realm of science fiction to that of practical ethics. There are now effective physical, cognitive, mood, cosmetic, and sexual enhancers—drugs and interventions that can enhance at least some aspects of some capacities in at least some individuals some of the time. The rapid advances currently taking place in the biomedical sciences and related technological areas make it clear that a lot more will become possible over the coming years and decades. The question has shifted from "Is this science fiction?" to "Should we do it?" (Bostrom & Savulescu, 2009, p. 18).

The more we make widespread use of methods like surgery and pharmacological enhancement, and the further we develop gene editing technologies, cyborg technologies, and digital technologies, the more our responsibilities and obligations expand towards granting every individual access to these technologies. Neglecting to do so under high standards of democratic regulation, securing safety, accountability, and fairness could reinforce the idea that our embodiment is a traumatic event resulting from our inability to take action. Indeed, it would challenge a person's view of the world as fair, secure, and predictable due to the lack of access to these technologies.

If we take the naturalistic argument seriously and contend that we have always been cyborgs since the advent of *Homo sapiens sapiens* (cfr. Sorgner, 2022, p. 13), we could say that our current carbon-based organic existence is only one phase from which we will soon transition. Our traumatic experience of embodiment will necessarily cease to exist as soon as we are able to upload our minds and exist entirely *in silica*, as *entia virtualissima* (cfr. Martins, 2011, pp. 370-371).

This is also the position of famous transhumanist Ray Kurzweil, who defined technological singularity as the "future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed" (2005, p. 24). Eventually, an intelligence explosion will be responsible for triggering the exponential growth of technological developments that will end in the creation of a superintelligence superior to human intelligence. The transformation

of human life will be so radical that "there will be no distinction […] between human and machine or between physical and virtual reality" (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 25), as these will have merged completely. The uploading of the human mind to a human-made machine is the most representative stage of posthumanity. According to Kurzweil, this is an inevitable outcome with a profound spiritual significance: "evolution moves inexorably toward this conception of God, although never quite reaching this ideal. We can regard, therefore, the freeing of our thinking from the severe limitations of its biological form to be an essentially spiritual undertaking" (2005, p. 284). The boundaries between the human and the divine are thus removed by the merging of humans and intelligent machines.

And so, the APA definition of trauma does not afford us much flexibility to advance the possible transhumanist argument that flesh is the source of trauma.

Therefore, I'll follow a different route to build a more robust argument in favour of my hypothesis. I will explore the conditions put forward by Chirag Mehta (2003) to define trauma. Although Mehta presents eight necessary and sufficient conditions, I will focus more thoroughly on four of them. I will work on the assumption that *i)* the existence of trauma requires human victims, that *ii)* trauma is intangible, that it *iii)* does not manifest as a physical entity, and that *iv)* it is fundamentally a subjective feeling, an emotional experience.

In the remainder of this paper, I will use Mehta's other four conditions to define trauma. Although too incipient and with no relation whatsoever to transhumanism, the conditions that make up the general framework of Mehta's paper can be useful to further explore the problem I'm addressing here. The remaining four conditions are the following: *v)* being an effect, trauma is something that is caused and can generate further trauma; *vi)* if there are underlying causes of trauma, its prevalence is likely to persist and potentially even rise; *vii)* even when the triggering element of trauma is no longer present, its effects can fade away, but trauma can still endure over time, affecting the descendants of its the victims, eventually receding into the subconscious; and *viii)* trauma never truly fades away, even after the passing of all those who directly and indirectly experienced it, but it is instead preserved in the shared collective memory in the form of age-old legends, myths, and countless forms of artwork.

## 2. Trauma is a consequence of something that must be endured or experienced

To the transhumanist, embodiment is the ultimate source of trauma; trauma originates in the flesh, and it generates more trauma.

The project of radical human enhancement that transhumanists espouse seeks to address this issue. For example, in the fourth version of the *Transhumanist Manifesto* published on her webpage, Natasha Vita-More asserts that "augmentation and enhancement to the human body and brain are essential for survival" (2020). David Pearce (1995), another well-known transhumanist, has argued that we ought to use biotechnologies to eliminate suffering and that genetic engineering and brain stimulation could create a future where pleasure and well-being are maximised.

But when did this traumatic experience manifest itself for the first time? In his general definition of trauma, Mehta claims that there was a time in which trauma did not exist. However, this cannot reasonably apply to our human existence, as we have always existed as embodied beings. So, either our human existence is itself identified with and defined as traumatic for the simple fact of embodiment being its basic necessary and indispensable existential condition, or our perception of our traumatic existence is something that emerged at some point in our evolutionary history and is the result of a particular and contingent social setting. In the former perspective, trauma is viewed as an inherent aspect of the human experience, whereas the latter perspective regards trauma as a contingent outcome of specific social and cultural contexts.

The plausibility of the first perspective rests on the claim that our human existence is inherently identified with and defined as traumatic due to the fundamental and indispensable condition of embodiment. A transhumanist argument for this would rest on the idea that from the moment of birth, we experience the world *with* and *through* our bodies, and embodiment is an inescapable aspect of the human condition, although not its most important and defining aspect (cfr. Weiss, 2014). The vulnerabilities, pain, and suffering to which our physical body exposes us and that are constitutive of our human experience are the prime facilitators for trauma to occur. Additionally, our questioning

the meaning of life,[5] suffering, and death might give rise to an acute awareness of our own mortality, the transitoriness of our physical form, and our inevitable demise. These existential dilemmas highlight the lack of control we have over our lives and how the physical body constitutes a primary source for human suffering. On the one hand, the recognition of our mortality might lead to fear and existential anxiety because of both our own finitude and the unknown beyond our death. On the other hand, the transient nature of our existence reinforces our sense of vulnerability and fragility, increasing our awareness of how susceptible we are to decay.

This still seems insufficient and uncompelling.

The other perspective I referred to above suggested that our perception of human existence as traumatic emerged at some specific point in human history, influenced by particular social and environmental factors. A tentative answer could come down to saying that our perception of existence marked by trauma can only be possible after the cognitive revolution that unfolded between 70,000 and 30,000 years ago and marked the advent of new modes of thought and communication (cfr. Harari, 2014, p. 24). According to this account, the emergence of legends, myths, gods, and religions coincided with the start of this cognitive revolution. While language was already around by that time, it was only during this period that "*Homo sapiens* acquired the ability to say, 'The lion is the guardian spirit of our tribe.' This ability to speak about fictions is the most unique feature of Sapiens language" (Harari, 2014, p. 26).

[5] I have already touched upon what a meaningful life entails for transhumanists, but I would like to highlight the perspective of one transhumanist in particular. Max More, one of the foremost thinkers in the transhumanist movement, is unequivocal about what constitutes a meaningful life: "it is the continuation of the process of improvement and transformation of ourselves into ever higher forms" (1996). This, More claims, is both a goal and a process of "expansion and transcendence" of our bodies, our minds, and current forms of social organisation, and is the source of all "meaningfulness" (1996). As such, it is imperative that humans assume their cosmic office as soon as possible. The ageing and death that biology entails are the main agents undercutting our possibilities of living meaningful lives, since they both prevent us from pursuing what More says is the "unlimited process" of "our own expansion and progress without end" (1996).

Hence, the idea of trauma as a constitutive aspect of human existence might have gained greater prominence when symbolic thought developed, and humans started representing abstract concepts like gods and formulating the notions of disembodied spirits and immortality. These enhanced cognitive capacities might have led to our envisioning ourselves as entities transcending the mortal realm, questioning the meaning of our suffering and mortality. With the emergence of religious and mythological narratives, humans could compare their vulnerable and finite embodied existence to the perceived qualities of immortal, disembodied gods.[6] Alternatively, they might attribute to those gods the qualities they lacked and aspired to possess. Whatever the case, this comparison would presumably intensify our awareness of the limitations and vulnerabilities of the human body.

Moreover, we can plausibly think that specific social and environmental circumstances are responsible for increasing our traumatic experiences of our body. For example, a continuous and persistent state of warfare, social turmoil, or economic instability can impact our subjective perception of how vulnerable our human condition renders us in the face of these threats. And so, just like religion, scientific knowledge, education, and societal awareness are crucial factors in rendering trauma contingent.

This position is compatible with Hauskeller's (2015) notion of the transhumanistion of culture that pervades contemporary Western societies. This idea reports to the not so new belief that "[t]

[6] Major religions have always enquired into the idea of human suffering and how traumatic the human condition can be. For example, in Judaism and Christianity, one of the most important questions is why a benevolent God allows suffering to exist. The ideas of Original Sin and the Fall both explore the notions of suffering and trauma as consequences of human ambition, disobedience, and separation from God. Take the example of James Hughes (2004, p. 9), a well-known Buddhist transhumanist. A claim made by those endorsing such a position is that "transhumanism, neuroscience, and the teachings of Buddhism are compatible because they aim to alleviate suffering and pain and attain a stable state of happiness" (Borrmann, 2013, p. 1). Borrmann compellingly argues for the difficulty of making compatible the use of human enhancement technologies, like mind uploading, to alleviate our traumatic human existence, and the Buddhist goals of freedom and liberation. The primary challenge lies in the complete reliance of freedom and liberation on the technological tools we develop to advance our quest for indeterminacy in relation to the natural world.

ranshumanism is entering the mainstream culture today" (Bostrom, 2003, p. 5). It accurately refers to the integration of transhumanist ideas and values into various aspects of society and human experience. Our cultural narratives, artistic expressions, ethical and political discussions, and societal structures all incorporate many of the key conceptual notions that fuel the transhumanist ideology (*e.g.*, technological optimism, human enhancement, obsolescence of biological evolution, transition, digital immortality, accelerationism). As these ideas become more culturally ingrained, they end up shaping the ways we perceive ourselves, our relationship with technology, and the very essence of our humanity and what is good for us.

Therefore, the two perspectives are fundamentally coincidental and are interconnected. The former emphasises the constitutive nature of human vulnerability and suffering, stressing that embodiment is the original source of existential trauma. The latter emphasises the contextual nature of trauma as being associated with the sociohistorical moment when humans were first able to conceive of complex abstract narratives that enabled us to put in place religious, political, and administrative institutions that might have played a key normative role in shaping our perception of what a traumatic existence is, and perhaps even exacerbating it, as we will see in section 5.

In any case, to the techno-futurist discourse of transhumanism, the argument is clear-cut: we were always embodied beings, prisoners to this framework with which we experience the world *and* that limits the range of our existential experiences. Flesh goes hand in hand with trauma, and it is in the future that the possibilities of the reduction of trauma lie. Less flesh can only amount to less trauma, but because flesh was always present and has always determined and limited us, trauma must have always been present.

Trauma also develops from the persistent and enduring sense that our current biological and organic constitution lacks adequate defences against the many foreseen and unforeseen existential risks that currently and increasingly threat human existence on Earth (*e.g.*, nuclear war, pandemics, climate change, artificial general intelligence, bioterrorism). This triggers feelings of helplessness in the face of near-term, real, existential danger, and it stresses the urgency of radically enhancing and transforming ourselves. Note that this is something more than just encountering nature, stuff from which we are made, in the form of external barriers to our flourishing. It is all about our existential

inability to survive the apocalyptic scenarios ahead of us. This traumatic experience is the major cause of pre-traumatic stress disorder, fuelling the idea that the human condition is, essentially and necessarily, a traumatised condition.

As a result, given that existential threats to human life continue to increase and manifest in multiple ways, it is only natural that trauma also continues to increase. If the causes that originate trauma are still present and are aggravated, trauma will continue to develop, and its intensity will predictably grow.

One reason supporting this claim is the slow pace of scientific and technological development. Despite the significant scientific and technological advancements in the realm of superseding our biomechanical limitations and determinacy (*e.g.*, mapping the genome, NBIC and CRISPR technologies, increased cyborgisation, artificial organs, brain-machine interfaces), these are yet insufficient in the face of the various current proofs of our existential vulnerabilities. Similar advances are recognisable in battling the climate crisis, but extreme anxiety about the future and cases of ecophobia and pre-traumatic stress syndrome are expected to increase the harms done to individuals (cfr. Kaplan, 2020).[7] This is verifiable in numerous existing feelings of anxiety, from existential anxiety to ecoanxiety, nuclear war anxiety, and death anxiety.

Another reason has to do with the ongoing "transhumanisation of culture." The visions of human beings progressively merging with technologies and the imperative of accelerated transition convey the pervading idea not only that something is intrinsically wrong with humanity and in urgent need for a cure, but that our enduring human condition is a permanently diseased one, or one of disability (cfr. Hauskeller, 2015). Just like animals, humans also need uplifting,[8] and

[7] As E. Ann Kaplan argues, this "pre-traumatic stress condition may well be quite common among ethnic groups already experiencing climate conditions so disrupting that people leave their homes for places as yet less affected" (2020, p. 96).

[8] It is worth highlighting James Hughes's work on the uplift imperative. He is very clear about this: because autonomy is a prime good, as important as pleasure, humans have an obligation to uplift animals (cfr. Hughes, 2004, p. 225). Another transhumanist who has defended this project was George Dvorsky (2008).

human enhancement becomes the cure and a moral imperative (cfr. Harris, 2007). These images of a disabled, permanently unsatisfied being characterised and defined by the limitations imposed on him by embodiment are alternative to and challenge the familiar understanding of the human as a finite, limited being that ought to live in harmony with himself and the external world. The prevalence of these transhumanist images structures and reinforces the idea that nature exists only to be challenged. Both the internal and external worlds are made up of the same stuff and they determine us in ways that limit and prevent us from being the types of beings we really are (cfr. Hauskeller, 2013, p. 64). Hence, our life must be a permanent and enduring conflict to overcome these limitations. Interestingly, FM-2030, one of the earliest transhumanist thinkers, identified signs of this transition in everyday, seemingly mundane activities. According to him, we embarked on this transitional journey long ago, marked by our gradual merging with machines, whether through the use of cosmetic surgery to counter the visible effects of ageing, or through the adoption of implants and the replacement of limbs and organs with artificial alternatives. For FM-2030, ageing and death are the motivators of "the most tragic horror story facing each of us humans" (1989, ch. 19).

## 3. Trauma lives on even if its cause no longer exists

Now, suppose our "fleshware" has been completely supressed and exist as "*entia virtualissima.*" Do we have reasons to say that trauma is no longer present? My argument runs in the opposite direction. As long as the direct victims of trauma and their descendants live, trauma will not disappear, notwithstanding the fact that it can start to fade away as time goes by (cfr. Mehta, 2003).

Why does trauma endure even after we abandon embodiment? Here, I examine three possible reasons.

### 3.1. Psychological resonance

First, trauma persists due to its psychological resonance in individuals or communities that have experienced trauma frequently throughout their history. They continue to grapple with traumatic feelings even after the traumatic events no longer manifest themselves in their lives. Individual and collective memories, emotions, and psychological damages associated with trauma persist, as the examples

of war memories, childhood abuse, natural disasters, indigenous peoples' historical trauma, the Holocaust, slavery, or the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings continue to show us today.

Expectedly, the biological limitations that characterised our human existence have left deep psychological imprints on our posthuman descendants. For millennia, we have existed as embodied beings, and our fragile human condition has shaped our understanding of the self, our relationships with others, and our place in the world. Max More famously acknowledged that humans are in a transitional stage, "standing between our animal heritage and our posthuman future" (1998). If we were always natural-born transitional beings (cfr. Pedace *et al.*, 2020) at odds with nature, this has been crucial to determine our identity. After the transition to a post-biological existence, we will still retain the memories, emotions, and psychological damages caused by our previous embodied condition.[9]

A dissonance arises between our human past and our envisioned posthuman future as we transition from flesh to silica. It is this dissonance that can cause memories and emotional responses that are related to our past traumatic experiences originated by the limitations of the human body and the determinacy that characterised us. Recall Hauskeller's argument: it is our lack of capacities, the things we *cannot* do because of our determinacy, that best defines us (2013, p. 65).

So, take the example of an individual who has experienced a life-threatening disease and who may carry the emotional damages of that experience, even if he was physically enhanced and is no longer dealing with the cause of that traumatic experience. The memory of vulnerability and suffering might persist, influencing his worldview and behaviour in his new posthuman condition. Memories of past trauma that have been suppressed can give rise to debilitating psychological problems, like depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (cfr. Khoddam, 2021). Research shows that "[p]eople tend to remember more trauma than they experienced, and those who do tend to exhibit more of the 're-experiencing' symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (Strange & Takarangi, 2015, p. 1).

[9] It could be contended that, given the technological possibility, we will be able to choose which memories to retain or even actively creating or acquiring new memories, thus overcoming this difficulty.

This phenomenon is not exclusive to individuals; it also applies collectively. Consider a group of individuals who, for hundreds of years, were the object of enduring and persistent discrimination because of their biological attributes. Not only is this group's identity greatly affected by the history of violence imposed on its members across generations, but its traumatic outcomes are embedded in their shared identity (cfr. Hirschberger, 2018), which is structured around inegalitarian and oppressive relations prone to further increase trauma. Collective trauma constructs social meaning, and therefore, even if collective enhancement was possible and a technological transition enabled the members of these groups to live a disembodied existence that no longer determined their biological attributes, it could be argued that the trauma of their collective past continues to resound in their collective memory and culture, giving meaning to their existence.

This psychological resonance of trauma is verifiable in the meaning that victims derive from their traumatic experience and transmit as part of their cultural heritage, nurturing the development of a collective personality or identity that is further embedded across generations. It is this shared historical and cultural memory of trauma that helps amplifying existential concerns and that sets trauma as an origin of symbolic meaning systems. Consequently, not only trauma survives through collectively shared culture and memories, but it is also a constitutive element of group cohesiveness and identification (cfr. Hirschberger, 2018, p. 2). As Gilad Hirschberger (2018, p. 2) notes, the profound meaning derived from collective trauma perpetuates its memory, becoming the focal point of group identity and shaping how members interpret their social environment over time.

### 3.2. Inter-generational transfer

Trauma can be transferred across generations, this being the second way it reinforces its persistence even after its causes are no longer present. As before, the transhumanist argument here is that the traumatic experience of our embodied existence can be embedded in the individual and collective cultural memory and symbolic meaning systems structuring the lives of radically enhanced posthuman beings. Experiences such as those of the Holocaust, genocide, and slavery exemplify this.

Surely one can argue that flesh as a source of trauma cannot reasonably be compared to the trauma brought about by events like

the Holocaust, genocides, or slavery. Yet, the transhumanist claim does not focus on assessing the intensity of the traumatic experience or the degree to which it is transmitted and established across generations. It is solely a matter of acknowledging how traumatic the human embodied condition might be and how urgent it is that transition to post-humanity is made.[10]

One might wonder about the significance of this for our posthuman descendants. How might these reverberations of trauma affect their lives? One possibility is that trauma embedded in the collective memory of a group serves as a guide for future generations, instructing them on how to identify threats and respond to them effectively (cfr. Hirschberger, 2018, p. 4). Hirschberger retrieves an interesting example of this from a study conducted by Jessica Mercer *et al*. (2012). The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami resulted in high mortality rates, contrasting with a 1930 tsunami in Papua New Guinea of similar magnitude, but much lower death toll. Mercer and her colleagues attribute the difference to oral traditions: the Papuan culture's generational transmission of a clear directive to flee to higher ground during a tsunami substantially reduced casualties. In contrast, communities heavily impacted by the 2004 tsunami lacked such traditions because they were mainly made of recent immigrants with no collective memory or established defences against tsunamis. This comparison highlights how the memory of collective trauma, or its absence, directly influences group survival by shaping life-saving efficacy.

[10] Here, I'd like to highlight the following point: the analogy between cultural-historical traumas and the ontological trauma of the flesh, while useful to demonstrate the persistence of trauma, must be treated carefully. Cultural traumas, like slavery or the Holocaust, are tied to specific historical and social conditions that can be changed or eliminated, whereas the trauma associated with corporeality or embodiment is existential in its nature, bound to the very nature of our human experience. The organic body, as both subject and object of experience, is not merely an incidental source of trauma, but a fundamental part of our being. In this way, even in disembodied beings, the conditions for trauma are likely to persist in forms that transcend their purely physical form. Hence, if it is true that some traumas persist (through memory), this does not negate the importance of eliminating the causes of those traumas (*e.g*., eliminating slavery or the Holocaust, despite their enduring effects). I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this point.

Another example of how these reverberations might endure in the absence of their causes can be explained by considering evolutionary factors. If indeed there exists an "adaptive function of keeping the memory of trauma alive" (Hirschberger, 2018, p. 5) to raise awareness against new traumatic events stemming from the same perpetrator, what occurs once that perpetrator or any other threat is no longer present? To focus on our case: what occurs when posthuman individuals adapt to an environment in which the existential threat of flesh is no longer real? Can a plausible case be made in favour of the position that the vigilance stemming from trauma may not be directed at a specific element or source of trauma because it is no longer present or real, but can instead generalise into chronic and diffuse vigilance towards all other possible hypothetical sources of trauma?[11] If that is the case, could our posthuman, disembodied descendants perceive the material silicon-based devices ensuring their existence as a potential existential threat comparable in magnitude to that of flesh? To the transhumanist, every form of materiality fundamentally implies and requires determinacy. Could this induce on them a higher sense of hostility towards everything that is material, thereby perpetuating the idea that not only flesh is trauma, but that all forms of materiality are an indistinguishable source of trauma and actual existential threats?

This seems plausible. If that is true, transhumanist utopian visions fail to acknowledge that the posthuman existence is profoundly shaped by trauma. In this sense, we are dealing with what Hirschberger *et al*. (2017) identify as a "post-traumatic worldview," one characterised by a perspective marked by heightened vigilance, an obsessive focus on potential threats that might coincide with overlooking positive signals from other groups, and a pervasive feeling that the group is isolated in the world and must independently safeguard its interests. This is not surprising given the predominantly individualistic philosophical foundation of transhumanism.

Likewise, it can raise questions concerning social relationships between posthumans. Consider the possibility that certain posthumans rely on distinct hardware materials to maintain their disembodied existence, with the physical differences already mentioned above (resistance, durability, thermic stability, storage capacity and stability,

[11] I am here paraphrasing Hirschberger (2018, p. 5).

processing speed, and energy efficiency). Could this serve as a justification for the emergence of separate groups within the utopian community? Would some posthumans develop a sense of heightened vigilance and obsessive attention to potential threats arising from other groups due to the different material hardware foundations that support their digital existence? Could this motivate justice-based claims? For instance, if certain hardware maintenance or upgrade necessitates a larger allocation of scarce resources, resulting in social inequality and discontent among posthumans.

Similarly, security risks that could pose life-threatening situations may arise due to variations in material strength. This suggests that one's digital identity, existence, and integrity could be vulnerable to cyber-attacks, or that their capacity to store and process vital information is meaningfully constrained.

Therefore, the collective acknowledgment of past human vulnerabilities in the face of numerous existential threats, as well as the present precarious existence of posthumans reliant on material means to exist as digital beings, can continue to influence the perception of future generations and their understanding of life's susceptibility to trauma.

### 3.3. Identity and memory

In the transhumanist pursuit of transcending flesh, individuals will carry with them the memories and emotional burdens of their embodied human past. The relation between past, present, and future identities highlights the idea that trauma can live on, influencing how individuals perceive themselves.

Take, for instance, a person who lived with sickle cell disease for thirty years, enduring devastating episodic crises of "sudden, excruciating bouts of pain," risking permanent organ damage, or facing the threat of a "stroke or a heart attack at any time" (Stein, 2019). Now, imagine this person volunteering for a highly innovative and exceptionally risky treatment that poses a significant threat to her life.[12] She felt imprisoned by her body, experiencing emotional trauma due to the limitations imposed by the disease, so she undergoes the treatment, which proves successful, and enjoys many more years free

[12] I am here referring to the case of Victoria Gray, who submitted to CRISPR gene therapy to cure her of sickle cell disease (cfr. The Royal Society, 2023).

from the disease. Yet, despite this, she still carries the memories and emotional burdens of her past struggles. She cannot entirely escape the emotional wounds associated with her previous condition. Even though the disease has been eliminated, the trauma of feeling a victim of her body and being trapped in it continues to affect her self-perception and emotional responses.[13]

This same example could be used to describe a person who went a radically transformative process to replace her natural limbs and organs with advanced cybernetic prosthetics. The enhanced mobility and physical abilities that come with this transition may lead her to reexamine her identity and reassess her memories. I mentioned already that people often recall more trauma than they actually experienced, and individuals who do so tend to display a greater prevalence of the re-experiencing symptoms linked to PTSD (cfr. Strange & Takarangi, 2015, p. 1). Hence, even after the transition, memories and emotional burdens can persist. Trauma associated with one's embodied human past would shape one's ongoing perception of oneself, one's relationship with one's new posthuman body, and one's place in the posthuman world, where biological limitations would have been (at least partially) transcended.

Again, this also applies to collective trauma. Imagine a society where a group of individuals, all having experienced the traumas associated to embodiment, unite to advocate for and engage in advanced life extension technologies. Their slogan can be a more radical version of that currently advocated by the Methuselah Foundation: "Making 90 the New 50 by 2030" (2023). What these technologies promise is to radically extend human lifespan, potentially eliminating the suffering associated with ageing. We can envision this group as being comprised of highly motivated individuals for whom the experience of ageing, with its associated gradual decline of physical and mental faculties, is deeply traumatic. They collectively share the experience of witnessing both themselves and their loved ones succumbing to the impacts of ageing, ultimately facing death. The trauma of witnessing and experiencing these deteriorations and losses deeply affects their emotional well-being.

So, even if they are successful in radically extending their lives and live as long a life as Methuselah, they might carry with them the emotional traumatic burdens associated with their collective human

[13] Cases of posttraumatic stress disorder are here paradigmatic and the literature on this is rather extensive.

past. The memory of ageing and its associated traumas would continue to shape their collective identity and commitment to the cause of life extension.

If one adheres to the hypothesis that flesh is a source of trauma under the conditions I have been developing here, this argument would be reasonably plausible. Yet, it is highly doubtful that the processes of ageing, experiencing diseases, or coping with death exert such a decisive and enduring influence on our lives to categorise them as traumatic.

But it is important to note a further aspect as well. I am constructing the argument that, while some transhumanist arguments have merit, the notion of flesh as trauma lacks plausibility. This is so for one reason: my argument does not deny the persistence of trauma in memory but rather emphasises the futility of reducing the body to the sole source of trauma. While I acknowledge that trauma could persist through memory even *after* the elimination of the organic body (and generously assuming, as I have been doing all along, that such a project is tenable), this does not necessarily mean that flesh should be framed *exclusively* as the source of trauma. The view that the body must disappear to overcome trauma oversimplifies the complex nature of traumatic experience, which extends beyond the corporeal into memory, identity, and even cultural frameworks. This is why I talk of the reverberation of trauma through myths and working as a sort of cultural, political, and ideological glue (I delve into this in the next section). Thus, eliminating the flesh does not guarantee liberation from the existential and psychological burdens that shape human experience.[14]

Ultimately, this might raise the question whether flesh is the only source of existential trauma. While an answer to this would escape the immediate scope of this article, one could venture that there are eventually other sources of existential trauma as well. Here, I simply try to show that trauma would persist in a very particular way even after our disembodiment, but I admit that this conclusion might be frustratingly disappointing to the transhumanist advocate who would wish to get rid of flesh as a source of trauma and suffering.

[14] I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this point.

## 4. Trauma haunts eternally

Mehta's (2003) final condition is that trauma haunts eternally. This means that even when all survivors of trauma are no longer present, and subsequent generations have also vanished, the presence and memory of the traumatic experience will endure. The main reason for this is that the lasting impact of trauma is linked to its incorporation into narratives and myths surrounding the ancient times when we were embodied beings. *In illo tempore*, ours was a fragile condition; not only were we at the mercy of the gods or nature and open to numerous existential threats, but we lived a diminished, child-like or animal-like condition that prevented us from fully experiencing higher-order goods and virtues, like rationality, morality, wisdom, courage, and justice (cfr. Mill, 2015, p. 123; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1174a). From a transhumanist standpoint, this vulnerability that opens us to existential threats also displays our lack of control over our existential conditions, robbing us of the freedom to live a flourishing life.

But disembodied posthumans will no longer experience the pains of the flesh. As James Hughes claims, the uploading of our minds to computers will allow us to "think at chip speeds […] and add additional hardware a lot easier than we will be able to add capacity to organic brains" (2004, p. 41). According to Hughes (2004, p. 140), a democratic transhumanist, there is something "unethical" about not preventing hampering conditions like diseases or genetic disorders. As Hava Tirosh-Samuelson puts it, mind uploading will grant us the immortality that traditional religions have always promised: "salvation will finally be attained in the 'disembodied paradise' of cyberspace" (2012, p. 726). If this is so, how can trauma still haunt those who have never experienced an embodied condition?

I alluded to the cultural and historical factors already, which involve the memory that is preserved in myths, narratives, stories, and cultural artefacts that carry trauma to future generations. This is a way in which the enduring nature of cultural and historical memory transcends its physical form and persists across generations, projecting trauma into the future. Hence, there is at least a possible line of argument in favour of the claim that trauma is socially and culturally reproduced through the pervasiveness of narratives, if not discursive practices, that aim at reinforcing how traumatic human existence was and how undesirable

it is to experience humanness. In Bostrom's *Letter from Utopia* (2008), we can see some glimpses of this in the condescending words of our posthuman descendants.

But the transhumanist discourse is also one of power: the non-instrumental badness of humanness is an idea meant to grant cohesiveness to a particular endeavour directed at shaping the identity of a posthuman societal project. Past trauma serves as a unifying link deployed to produce and reproduce a perception of a shared collective feature (trauma) that goes back to a common and defining moment to which we can still refer to reinforce a collective posthuman memory, identity, and cultural continuity. Not only that, but also to further develop the transhumanist project and continue to *trans-form* one's mode of existence. These narratives embed the memory of trauma in the consciousness of our posthuman descendants with multiple purposes (*e.g.*, unifying them as a community, mobilising them towards further and renewed forms of disembodiment, prevent any regression in this process).

Even so, this line of argument appears rather insufficient, or at least unsatisfactory. Can we extract any more conclusions from this socioculturally enduring form of trauma? A plausible argument can point us in the following direction: the thought patterns that posthumans would have developed in response to the traumatic experience they recollected from those stories and myths may become deeply ingrained in their consciousness, shaping their beliefs, decisions, and relations. Expectedly, the interpersonal dynamic between individuals is likely to be burdened by trauma, and social relationships among posthumans will bear the imprint of this trauma. We can only speculate whether and to what extent this latent but persistent and pervasive presence of trauma can perpetuate cycles of relational dysfunction across generations. A 2019 study revealed that, in certain cases, the intergenerational consequences of traumatic events may only manifest themselves many years later (Dashorst *et al.*, 2019, p. 24). Here, we can think of how childhood trauma can impact adult interpersonal relationships. For example, emotional and sexual abuse during childhood is "significantly associated with general interpersonal distress and several specific areas of interpersonal problems in adulthood" (Huh *et al.*, 2014, p. 1). Nevertheless, these cases still report to one's lifespan and, potentially, the lifespan of one's direct descendants. In the case of posthumans, we are considering a significant gap spanning multiple generations between the last individuals who

experienced any instance of embodiment and those living disembodied existences many years later.

Immortality presents an additional challenge. We can only suppose when the radical increasing of our lifespan will give place to some form of digital immortality.[15] But in the intermediate stages of this transition, trauma will find its ways.

We can also wonder whether the nature of trauma will remain the same or suffer transformations of its own. Can it manifest in new forms, such as digital or virtual traumas resulting from experiences in simulated environments or interactions with advanced technologies? A plausible answer would be that emerging technologies will give rise to specific instances of trauma. Consider again the problems related to the material reliance needed to support our digital existence. The dependence on these advanced materials for essential functions such as communication, mobility, or healthcare exposes us to a risk of trauma related to technical material failure. What would be the consequences of malfunctions or system breakdowns in the crucial technological infrastructure on which our digital life relies? If different people rely on different systems and one of these fails, do we risk losing family and friends in this process, be it permanently or temporarily? And in the case of the different components of our digital identity being stored and powered by different systems, what happens if one or more of these systems fail? Can we lose memories, feelings, faculties?

Although this case seems too farfetched, there is some likelihood to the claim that the increasing digitalisation of personal information and data-driven technologies can cause trauma. Take the rapidly evolving field of brain-computer interfaces. The capacity to extract information from one's brain without one's awareness can raise concerns about trauma resulting from potential data breaches or cyberattacks (cfr. Burwell *et al.*, 2017, p. 8). One could consistently face the fear of permanent surveillance, becoming a victim of cyberbullying, or having sensitive personal data stolen and exposed, which could lead to feelings of vulnerability and psychological distress.

Therefore, individuals involved in this transition to posthumanity can experience some form of trauma related to existential or identity

[15] Could it be that the first person to live up to one thousand years old is already alive, as claimed some twenty years ago by Aubrey de Grey (2004), the renowned biomedical gerontologist?

crises that derive more from the harms caused by the process of disembodiment than from flesh itself. Psychological distress and trauma can result from our progressive cyborgification and loss of contact to one's sense of self that embodiment gives us.

What this suggests is that the very meaning of trauma may suffer a transformation as individuals inhabit digital or augmented realities. While our understanding of trauma is anchored in our humanness, meaning that it depends on our physical embodiment, our progressive cyborgification, our inhabiting of digital spaces, and our disembodiment will likely redefine the concept of trauma. In addition to the examples of new sources of digital trauma just mentioned, consider also virtual reality simulation designed to replicate traumatic events, like a natural disaster or war. This may be intended to provide immersive learning experiences, but some people may experience great distress from the realistic portrayal of traumatic events within a virtual environment.[16] The same reasoning can apply to the use of augmented reality enhancements in which one's contact with a traumatic accident, injury, or crime can amplify the emotional impact of the traumatic event.

Content moderators provide a similar example. Their work concerns affectivity, the capability to be affected by distressing content, enabling the identification and labelling of such material: "It is the propensity to be affected psychologically and emotionally—indeed to be traumatized—that is put to work here" (Pinchevski, 2023, p. 5). As Pinchevski (2023, p. 6) argues, it is the inherent human vulnerability and propensity for trauma that remain indispensable elements in their labour. It is significant how content moderators describe their posttraumatic symptoms as "an internal video screen" (Pinchevski, 2023, p. 9) replaying distressing images inside their heads. What this suggests, as Pinchevski (2023, p. 9) notes, is that there is a migration of the technical logic of replay to one's psyche, where distressing images become internalised and continue to replay, perpetuating the recurrence of trauma; trauma arises not from a singular, unexpected and unimaginable event, but from its repetitive,

[16] Take the *Quake* example. *Quake* is a thematic immersive experience that uses a simulator with video, mapping, and special effects to recreate the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755. As advertised on the website of the Lisbon Earthquake Museum, "[g]oing on this immersive experience, you will walk through the streets of the lost city, re-visit the horrors and wonders of that era, and watch the drama unfold before you" (2024).

routinised audiovisual reproduction, both during the traumatic event and in posttraumatic reexperiencing. This adds another dimension to trauma: human vulnerability and susceptibility to trauma are commodities for which some people are paid.

Numerous and yet unpredictable forms of trauma are expected to arise as our merging with machines takes place and we migrate to digital spaces and live increasingly digital lives. The idea that trauma haunts eternally might not immediately be associated with our recollection of what an embodied existence was like, it might report more directly and immediately to the process of disembodiment itself. I am here referring to disembodiment as a comprehensive process, one that entails the ongoing and permanent transformation of ourselves, even after our physical body no longer serves as the basis of the self.

I am aware that this presents a different interpretation from what was anticipated regarding the notion that trauma haunts eternally. Naturally, on a transhumanist account, the idea of an eternal trauma pervading our lives and originated by embodiment would much more likely resemble the kind of trauma we associate with Holocaust survivor offspring (HSO), as discussed by Dashorst *et al*. (2019). From the studies they analysed on this topic, they concluded that "having two survivor parents resulted in even higher mental health problems" (Dashorst *et al*., 2019, p. 25) for children, and one of the intergenerational effects is "heightened vulnerability for stress in HSO" (2019, p. 25). Other studies point to the transgenerational epigenetic inheritance of trauma, something that would better express the idea that trauma haunts eternally. However, the occurrence of "epigenetic changes associated with a preconception trauma in parents that may affect the germline, and impact fetoplacental interactions" (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018, p. 243), is not applicable to our case. A digital existence no longer necessitates or depends on conventional reproductive methods and DNA transmission. Hence, the most insightful perspective regarding the notion that trauma haunts eternally remains the one that portrays trauma as a mythical, cultural, political, and ideological glue.

## 5. Conclusion

One of the versions of the ancient tale of a man who is suddenly transformed into a donkey is attributed to Lucian of Samosata and its titled *Lucius, or the Ass*. In this tale, Lucius is transformed and imprisoned in a donkey's body, despite his human mind and intellect remaining

intact, and he soon realises how vulnerable he is to the ruthless whims of his masters. From that moment on, all Lucius desires is to be fully human again, a metamorphosis that will eventually occur after his eating some red roses petals—a subtly suggestive form of enhancement? But would our utopian descendants share the same desire? The answer can only be a resounding no. There would be no compelling reasons to persuade a posthuman to be human again. Transhumanism is a philosophy of progress, scientific and technical, and progress is all about moving forward, going on, and breaking barriers into the unknown. Any regression to a previous state is non-instrumentally bad for the individual. To regress to a distinctively human existence, regardless of how broadly it is defined along a continuum of possibilities, can only be non-instrumentally bad in terms of the loss of access to the goods and activities that enable a posthuman to exert and develop her post-humaneness.

The theoretical strength behind the transhumanist argument in favour of flesh as the main source of existential trauma depends entirely on the progressive ideology fuelling transhumanism. In this paper, I provided a glimpse into what such an argument might entail by looking at what the main obstacles to a transhumanist conception of the good life might be. In 1929, J. D. Bernal, one of the three British prophets of transhumanism, wrote a text titled *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* and gave it the suggestive subtitle: "An Enquiry into the Future of the Three Enemies of the Rational Soul" (2018). Contemporary transhumanists speak highly of this text. Flesh was one of the enemies of the rational soul because of its physicality and the constraints it imposes on the transcendence of human consciousness. The rational soul seeks to ascend beyond the constraints of the material world, but our material determinacy, our biological and organic constitution, places limits that hinder this process of intellectual and spiritual advancement. As an obstacle to our progress, flesh can only be an enemy.

We saw that there are two dimensions to the argument that flesh is the source of trauma. Both are related to this idea of the limits flesh imposes on us. What characterises us *now* are, above all, these limitations to our capacities and to what we can do. But there is a fundamental dissociation between our current mode of existence and the beings that we *really* are. The things that we experience now are not the things that we *ought to be* experiencing precisely as that type of beings we *really* are. It is all about human potential: it is our lack of capacities, the things

we *cannot* do because of our flesh, that best define us in our current human state. And in our current human state, we have to face all the vulnerabilities to which our flesh exposes us to: diseases, disorders, ageing, the loss of our various faculties, and the process of death.

And it is as a process that trauma is best understood. As I presented it here, the trajectory of trauma increases in intensity until reaching a certain threshold. After this, although not vanishing entirely, it undergoes a transformation, and it turns into one of the unifying and distinguishing elements within the posthuman society. Trauma is mainly used as a discursive tool to further the transhumanist agenda, portraying how the posthuman condition aligns more closely with the types of beings we really are, and the types of lives better suited to us as such. On such an understanding, trauma can only be a political and ideological artefact, and it is as such that we should understand it. There can be instances where diseases, disorders, or death can lead to trauma, but transhumanist arguments run into difficulties when presenting alternatives. The transition and our posthuman existence are still contingent upon materiality. This remains the major contradiction transhumanists need to solve.

Hence the reason why I believe that the best way to understand trauma is as a discursive and political artefact that serves the purpose of fuelling the highly progressive transhumanist ideology. The use of this artefact can hold water with some prospects of success in the context of the transhumanisation of culture that is rapidly accentuating our feelings of discontentment with our human condition as we have always perceived it, especially in hyperdeveloped and affluent societies. As such, there are reasons to say that trauma haunts eternally, but not because of flesh *per se*, but because trauma is itself rendered as a political category to continue shaping the identity and cohesiveness of the posthuman community.[17]

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