

BETWEEN SELF-OVERCOMING AND TECHNOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENT: A NIETZSCHEAN REFLECTION ON TRANSHUMANISM

Ofonakara, Chamberlain Uchenna

Department of Philosophy,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
ofonakarauc@gmail.com

Prof. Maduabuchi Dukor

Department of Philosophy,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Abstract

As technological progress and the quest for human enhancement continue to redefine the frontiers of human existence, comprehending the philosophical foundations of these advancements becomes imperative. Against this backdrop, this study critically examines the tension between Nietzsche's notion of self-overcoming and the transhumanist pursuit of technological enhancement. The study, utilizing the philosophical methods of hermeneutics and analysis, demonstrates that Nietzsche's ideas, especially the "Will to Power" and the "*Übermensch*," profoundly impact transhumanist principles, informing its perspectives on human enhancement and life extension. The findings emphasize that Nietzsche's impact on transhumanism prompts significant ethical and metaphysical inquiries on its consequences for human life, highlighting the necessity for a more profound comprehension of their connection. The study concludes that analyzing the relationship between Nietzsche's philosophy and transhumanist ideology is essential for informing public dialogue regarding the ethical and social implications of transhumanism, thereby providing guidance for responsible and ethical choices in the advancement of transhumanist technologies.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Transhumanism, Self-Overcoming, Human Enhancement, Ethics of Technology

1. Introduction

The emergence of transhumanism as a distinct intellectual movement has transformed contemporary debates about the future of human beings and the conditions under which enhancement becomes both possible and desirable. Popularized in his 1951 essay, Julian Huxley describes transhumanism as "the idea of humanity attempting to overcome its limitations and to arrive at a fuller fruition ... the realization that both individual and social development are processes of self-transformation."¹ His account presents human development as an open-ended project rather than a fixed biological destiny. Decades later, Nick Bostrom advanced a similar understanding of the human being as unfinished entity. He defines transhumanism as "the intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason," especially through technologies capable of eliminating aging and vastly enhancing human capacities.²

The vision of human becoming has naturally invited comparisons with Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of self-overcoming and transhumanist's goal of human enhancement. Since both emphasize the possibility of surpassing human limitations, many scholars have explored whether Nietzsche's thought provides a philosophical foundation for transhumanism. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, for instance, in "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and

Transhumanism,” argues that Nietzsche’s idea of the *Übermensch* offers a conceptual cornerstone for understanding human enhancement in the transhumanist sense.³ For Sorgner, both Nietzschean self-overcoming and the transhumanist conception of the posthuman involve the emergence of a being whose capacities exceed those of present humanity, albeit through different modes of transformation. On this basis, he concludes that Nietzsche’s philosophy offers a useful framework for interpreting transhumanist aspirations to transcend biological and cognitive limits.⁴ Manuel Knoll supports this reading. In “Nietzsche and Transhumanism: The Case of the Overhuman (*Übermensch*),” he argues that Nietzsche’s writings consistently show a concern for the improvement and future development of the human being.⁵ For this reason, Knoll maintains that Nietzsche can legitimately be regarded as an early precursor to transhumanism. However, this continuity has received great objections from such scholars as Mariano Rodríguez González, Michael Hauskeller, and Allen Porter who argue that Nietzsche’s project of existential revaluation stands in sharp contrast to transhumanism’s technocratic pursuit of perfection and elimination of suffering.⁶ Their critiques raise a central question that continues to animate the debate: does Nietzsche’s conception of self-overcoming genuinely support, complicate, or challenge the technologically driven aspirations of transhumanism?

This paper therefore, investigates the points of convergence and tension between the transhumanist drive for enhancement and Nietzsche’s ideal of self-overcoming. It examines how Nietzsche’s critique of traditional humanism, his notion of the *Übermensch*, and his conception of the will to power both illuminate and challenge the philosophical assumptions that underlie the transhumanist project. The study argues that, while both perspectives share a belief in humanity’s unfinished nature and its capacity for transformation, they differ fundamentally in their ethical and metaphysical orientations. In doing so, the paper aims to show that Nietzsche’s philosophy provides a critical lens for rethinking what human transcendence means in an age increasingly shaped by technological innovation.

2. Nietzsche’s Critique of Traditional Notion of Humanism

Humanism is commonly understood as “a philosophy or set of beliefs that holds that human beings achieve a system of morality through their own reasoning rather than through a belief in any divine being.”⁷ In both its Renaissance and Enlightenment expressions, humanism places human dignity, rational autonomy, and moral universality at the centre of meaning. It presents “man” as the measure of all things and the culmination of cultural and historical progress. Nietzsche, however, sees in this elevation of humanity a profound continuity with the Platonic-Christian tradition. As he observes in *Twilight of the Idols*, even modern thought is “plagued by the shadow of God” in its reliance on secularized moral absolutes.⁸ Humanism, in his view, is not a decisive break from metaphysics but its subtle survival: a translation of Christian ideals into a secular idiom that preserves illusions of a stable human essence, universal values, and objective meaning.

Nietzsche’s genealogical critique, especially in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, undermines the core assumptions of humanism by showing that morality is historically contingent rather than transcendent. The values cherished by humanism, such as equality, altruism, and compassion, are, for Nietzsche, the products of the “slave revolt in

morality,” in which the weak redefined the values of the strong.⁹ Far from being eternal truths, these ideals are instruments of ressentiment that inhibit vitality and creativity. Brian Leiter emphasizes this in *Nietzsche on Morality*, noting that Nietzsche “rejects the idea that moral values can be justified by appeal to a universal standard of reason or human nature; their authority is strictly historical and psychological.”¹⁰ This challenges the central humanist presupposition that values such as dignity or equality rest on an intrinsic and universal human essence.

Nietzsche also challenges the anthropocentric assumptions of humanism. Enlightenment thought portrayed humanity as the highest achievement of nature, a telos in itself. Nietzsche instead insists that “man is something that shall be overcome,” describing humanity as a rope stretched between the animal and the *Übermensch*.¹¹ Humanism’s portrayal of man as the apex of history is, in Nietzsche’s analysis, a dangerous illusion, one that denies the dynamism of becoming and the necessity of self-overcoming. Leiter highlights this point when he observes that Nietzsche’s critique of humanism entails “the denial that ‘man’ has any special metaphysical status in the order of things,” exposing humanism’s anthropocentrism as another disguised theology.¹²

Furthermore, Nietzsche attacks the universalizing tendency of humanist morality. He contends that in elevating values such as equality and altruism to the status of universal imperatives, humanism entrenches a herd morality, one that prioritizes conformity over the cultivation of greatness. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes that “morality in Europe today is herd-animal morality,” characterized by the drive toward uniformity and mediocrity.¹³ Leiter underscores that Nietzsche’s objection is not simply that herd morality exists, but that “modern culture, under the influence of humanism, increasingly insists that herd values are the only legitimate values.”¹⁴ In this way, the humanist appeal to equality and compassion becomes, for Nietzsche, a mechanism for stifling creativity and greatness.

Against this backdrop, Nietzsche issues his call for a *revaluation of all values* (*Umwertung aller Werte*). In contrast to moral systems grounded in metaphysical absolutes or humanist universals, Nietzsche insists that values must be continually re-created in ways that affirm life, vitality, and creative self-expression. Humanity, within this framework, is not conceived as the telos of history but as a transitional being whose highest task lies in the project of self-overcoming. This anti-humanist orientation, as recent scholarship observes, systematically dismantles the foundational presuppositions of humanism, while simultaneously opening the possibility of new, dynamic modes of existence oriented toward growth and transformation.¹⁵

3. *Übermensch* (Overman) Concept and Transhumanism

The relationship between Nietzsche’s conception of the *Übermensch* and the aspirations of contemporary transhumanism opens a fertile but contested terrain for rethinking the future of humanity. Both perspectives share the conviction that the human being, as presently constituted, is not a final form but a transitional stage. Yet while Nietzsche situates this overcoming in the existential and cultural domain, transhumanism tends to frame it in technological and scientific terms.¹⁶ The result is a fascinating dialogue between philosophy and technology: one that raises the question of whether the *Übermensch* can be legitimately interpreted as a precursor to transhumanist ideals, or

whether transhumanism represents a fundamental misreading of Nietzsche's vision. In order to investigate this problem, the following sections will examine, first, Nietzsche's vision of the *Übermensch* as a paradigm of human potential, and second, the extent to which transhumanist ideals align with - or diverge from - this vision.

3.1. The Emergence of the *Übermensch*: Nietzsche's Vision of Human Potential

The *Übermensch* emerges in Nietzsche's thought as the positive counterpoint to his genealogical critique of morality and his rejection of the humanist elevation of "man" as a static essence. As developed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche conceives the human being not as an end in itself but as a transitional figure: "man is a rope stretched between the animal and the *Übermensch* - a rope over an abyss."¹⁷ This metaphor captures his conviction that humanity is unfinished, suspended between its animal origins and the possibility of self-transcendence. The *Übermensch* thus represents the horizon of human potential, a figure of perpetual becoming, and a creator of new values in the absence of divine or rational absolutes.¹⁸

This vision arises directly from Nietzsche's critique of humanism discussed earlier. Humanism, whether in its Renaissance or Enlightenment form, places the human being at the centre of meaning, presupposing a universal dignity and moral essence. Nietzsche unmasks this anthropocentric ideal as a secularized survival of Christianity - a reconfiguration of the belief in a divine image of man into the language of reason, equality, and progress.¹⁹ Against this, the *Übermensch* embodies the possibility of new value-creation that does not rely on metaphysical guarantees. The human being is not the measure of all things, as Protagoras claimed, but a bridge toward something greater.

Nietzsche sharpens this point through the contrast between the *Übermensch* and the "last man." The last man epitomizes the decadence of modern culture: a figure satisfied with comfort, security, and conformity, incapable of creative striving.²⁰ For Nietzsche, the danger of humanism lies in its tendency to collapse into such mediocrity, replacing genuine self-overcoming with herd values disguised as universal moral imperatives. The *Übermensch* resists this flattening by transforming suffering, finitude, and conflict into sources of strength. Far from being an abstract archetype, the *Übermensch* symbolizes the capacity to affirm life in its tragic dimensions, to say "yes" even to its most difficult aspects.²¹

It is crucial, however, to avoid misinterpretations of the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche does not present it as a biological or racial category, nor as a deterministic endpoint of human evolution. Such distortions, especially in the twentieth century, misrepresent his project. Instead, the *Übermensch* should be understood as an existential and cultural ideal: an orientation toward perpetual becoming and creative self-legislation.²² As Martin Heidegger and later scholars have argued, the concept should be read as a "horizon of possibilities" rather than as a programmatic blueprint for a new species.²³ In this sense, it dismantles both metaphysical absolutes and humanist universals, challenging humanity to recognize its provisional character and to revalue its existence without recourse to transcendent standards.

3.2. Parallel Paths: Exploring Transhumanist Ideals from the Lens of the *Übermensch* Concept

The term *transhumanism*, first coined by Julian Huxley in 1951, describes "the idea of humanity attempting to overcome its limitation and to arrive at a fuller fruition ... the

realization that both individual and social development are processes of self-transformation.”²⁴ More systematically, Nick Bostrom defines it as “the intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.”²⁵ In this respect, transhumanism shares with Nietzsche’s conception of the *Übermensch* the conviction that the human being is not a final product but a transitional entity, open to transformation and capable of surpassing itself.

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, in “*Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism*,” explores the link between Nietzschean philosophy and contemporary transhumanism. He argues that Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* provides a philosophical cornerstone for transhumanist theory. Sorgner situates Nietzsche’s vision of self-overcoming alongside the transhumanist conception of the posthuman - a being endowed with capacities far exceeding those of contemporary humans through technological means. He also compares Bostrom’s and Esfandiary’s visions of the posthuman, noting that whereas Bostrom emphasizes technological enhancement with identity preservation, Esfandiary’s vision bears a closer resemblance to Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*. He therefore contends that Nietzsche’s philosophy provides a strong framework for understanding human augmentation and is consistent with the transhumanist idea of transcending the bounds of present humankind.²⁶

Manuel Knoll develops Sorgner’s argument further. In “*Nietzsche and Transhumanism: The Case of the Overhuman (Übermensch)*,” Knoll defends Sorgner’s position, asserting “that at the center of Nietzsche’s thought is his concern with the future and enhancement of the human being and how this can be promoted,”²⁷ a concern that aligns closely with the core objectives of transhumanism. He identifies two reasons for regarding Nietzsche as a precursor to transhumanism: first, Nietzsche accepted the biological theory of descent and its implications for human self-conception; and second, he was genuinely concerned with the future and enhancement of human beings.²⁸ Although Nietzsche criticized Darwin, Knoll argues that he nevertheless regarded humanity as an evolving entity without a fixed essence, describing the human being as the “yet undetermined animal.” This dynamic interpretation of human nature resonates with transhumanist perspectives, which conceive of humanity as a work in progress, capable of remolding itself in desirable ways.

Loeb, while aligning with Sorgner’s general view, emphasizes an important point of divergence between Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* and transhumanist ideals: the role of eternal recurrence. For Loeb, transhumanism can learn valuable lessons from Nietzsche’s association of the *Übermensch* with the doctrine of eternal recurrence.²⁹ While Sorgner and many transhumanists embrace Nietzsche’s notion of the superhuman, they often neglect the more profound metaphysical conception of recurrence, which Nietzsche considered central. In Nietzsche’s view, the superhuman is not simply the product of evolution but also the embodiment of a fundamental affirmation of life - an embrace of its eternal recurrence. Loeb thus argues that Nietzsche’s vision of the *Übermensch* is inseparable from his cyclical conception of time, and that only by affirming eternal recurrence can human beings transcend natural selection and achieve a higher state of

existence.³⁰

Loeb further stresses that transhumanist theory frequently ignores Nietzsche's core insights into existence and time. To fully realize their goals, he contends, transhumanists must re-examine their relationship to time and engage with Nietzsche's philosophy of recurrence as a deeper foundation for human enhancement. He writes:

Insofar as transhumanists are also spurred by will to power and hope to enhance human beings with new powers and abilities, Nietzsche would claim that here too he was ahead of the curve and had discovered a new power over time that could be the foundation for gaining all the other desired abilities. And finally, insofar as transhumanists are driven by the desire to gain new and extensive knowledge about ourselves and the world we live in, Nietzsche would have urged them to look more closely at what he thought as his most important discovery - that time is actually circular and recurring. This discovery, he believed, showed that the human animal could acquire a new kind of prospective memory that would lead to the emergence of a new superhuman species able to gain complete autonomy, self-affirmation, and self-knowledge.³¹

In "*Nietzsche and Transhumanism: A Reassessment*," Brett Carollo further complicates the debate by distinguishing between affinity and influence. He argues that "the debate over Nietzsche's relationship to transhumanism has amounted to a debate over whether or not, and to what extent, the Nietzschean superman (*Übermensch*) is comparable to the transhumanist ideal of the posthuman." Consequently, he suggests, "the question is not whether or not the superman and the posthuman share a philosophical affinity; the question is whether the superman exerted a significant influence on the conception and development of the posthuman."³²

The parallel, however, is not without tension. Mariano Rodríguez González underscores a fundamental divergence: while transhumanism seeks to alter the human condition externally through technological advancement, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* entails an intrinsic transformation of values and existence. This distinction reveals a deeper difference: transhumanism focuses on enhancing capabilities and extending life, whereas Nietzsche emphasizes the revaluation of values and the tragic affirmation of existence.³³ With respect to values, González stresses that Nietzsche's goal of *transvaluation* is rooted in affirming life through the doctrine of eternal recurrence. This, he argues, is irreconcilable with transhumanism's aspiration to minimize suffering, exemplified by David Pearce's advocacy of the eradication of pain through genetic and technological means. González writes:

It is clear that the ethical effort for the overhuman is not at all a question of eliminating suffering but on the contrary of affirming it tragically, affirming it together with the joy with which it alternates, in the form of *amor fati*. Pleasure and pain are inseparable, and the strength of an individual

is tested in his ability to approve of even the most terrible and enigmatic aspects of existence. Because it is not possible to banish the terrible, the enigmatic from life. It is not possible but neither is it desirable, not even by means of technology, we should add. Otherwise, if it were possible and we wanted to do so, we would immediately be entering pure and hard nothingness.³⁴

Other critics highlight similar tensions. Michael Hauskeller argues that transhumanism maintains a humanist and utilitarian orientation, aiming at the production of “better humans” rather than Nietzsche’s more radical project of creating new values and modes of existence.³⁵ Similarly, Allen Porter, in “*Bioethics and Transhumanism*,” critiques the transhumanist appropriation of Nietzsche. He argues that while transhumanists treat the *Übermensch* as an achievable condition through technology, Nietzsche understood it as a regulative ideal - an inspiration for continual self-overcoming, not a technological end-state. Porter further critiques the essentialism embedded in transhumanist thought, which Nietzsche rejected in favor of fluidity and creativity. Citing Ciano Aydin, Porter notes the paradox at the heart of transhumanism: “on the one hand, transhumanists desire a ‘radical change’ in (or from) the human, but, on the other, they do not wish to jeopardize the humanist values and goals that they claim continuity with.”³⁶ This reliance on humanist values, Porter suggests, undermines transhumanism’s aspiration to transcend the human altogether. Aydin further argues that the transhumanist posthuman resembles Nietzsche’s “last man” more than his *Übermensch*, since it embodies “invariability, uniformity, and independence” - hallmarks of philosophical essentialism.³⁷

Be that as it may, the dialogue between Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* and transhumanist ideals reveals a complex interplay of parallels and tensions. Both frameworks share the conviction that the human being is a transitional entity, open to transformation and capable of surpassing itself. Yet their trajectories ultimately diverge: whereas transhumanism grounds its vision of the posthuman in technological enhancement and the amelioration of suffering, Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* is inseparable from the existential imperatives of self-overcoming, value revaluation, eternal recurrence, and *amor fati*. To collapse these distinct projects into one another risks reducing Nietzsche’s radical challenge to a mere technological program of optimization. Thus, rather than positioning Nietzsche as a simple precursor to transhumanism, it is more fruitful to regard him as a critical interlocutor - one whose philosophy both anticipates the aspirations of human enhancement and exposes their limitations. In this sense, the *Übermensch* and the posthuman run along parallel paths: occasionally converging in their vision of transformation, but ultimately diverging in their ethical foundations and metaphysical depth.

4. Will to Power and the Technological Will to Enhancement

The concept of the *will to power* occupies a central place in Nietzsche’s thought. It represents his attempt to answer the fundamental question of human existence: “*what truly drives human beings?*” In this sense, the *will to power* serves both as an explanatory principle of life and as a normative call to human self-overcoming. It figures prominently in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and in the posthumously published collection of notes and

writings under the title: *The Will to Power*. Nietzsche conceived the *will to power* as the fundamental drive or force underlying not only human actions but also the processes of the natural world. Importantly, it should not be understood literally as the desire for domination over others, but rather as a deeper striving toward self-affirmation, continual self-overcoming, and the realization of one's potential.³⁸ Nietzsche consistently rejected the Darwinian reduction of life to a struggle for mere survival, insisting instead that living beings seek expansion, growth, and creative revaluation. As he observes, "Life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, conquest of the strange and weak, suppression, severity, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation - and at the very least, putting it mildest, exploitation".³⁹ The *will to power*, then, is not reducible to brute domination but signifies the generative energy through which life resists stagnation, creates values, and projects new forms of existence. In this sense, it is inseparable from Nietzsche's vision of the *Übermensch*, the figure who embodies self-overcoming not as a contingent project but as the very essence of existence.

When viewed against the backdrop of the twenty-first century, Nietzsche's *will to power* acquires new resonance in the age of technological transformation. Technology has become the dominant medium through which humanity seeks to transcend its limitations, a role once imagined in primarily metaphysical or existential terms. Contemporary transhumanist projects - ranging from genetic engineering and artificial intelligence to cognitive enhancement and life-extension technologies - can be read as concrete expressions of the *will to power*. They embody the drive not merely to preserve life, as Darwinian survivalism would suggest, but to expand its horizons, reshape its conditions, and even reconfigure its essence. In this sense, modern technology is more than a tool; it functions as a stage on which humanity enacts its striving for self-overcoming. As Babette Babich notes, technological modernity intensifies Nietzsche's insight that the *will to power* is not about static possession but about dynamic becoming, manifesting today in the restless pursuit of innovation and optimization.⁴⁰

Roba Megersa Buta underscores this connection by arguing that the *will to technology* can be understood as a contemporary translation of Nietzsche's *will to power*. For him, technological rationality functions as an extension of the same existential impulse Nietzsche described: the restless striving for expansion, transformation, and mastery over conditions of existence. As Buta observes, "the will to technology can be seen as the historical unfolding of Nietzsche's will to power, in which human beings increasingly externalize their creative energies into technological systems."⁴¹ In this sense, modern technologies - biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and cybernetics - are not simply tools but materializations of humanity's deeper metaphysical drive.

Yet this technological enactment of the *will to power* is not without ambiguity. On one hand, it represents humanity's creativity and its refusal to accept given limits; on the other, it risks reducing Nietzsche's radical philosophy to a program of instrumental rationality. Critics such as Michael Hauskeller caution that transhumanism interprets Nietzsche's *will to power* through the lens of enhancement and efficiency, thereby overlooking its existential and tragic dimensions.⁴² Whereas Nietzsche emphasizes *value-creation* and the capacity to affirm even suffering and finitude, transhumanist discourse often frames the elimination of suffering and the pursuit of control as its ultimate goals.

This contrast exposes a philosophical tension: if the *will to power* entails affirming life in its totality - including its pain, contingency, and tragic weight - then the technological pursuit of mastery risks flattening Nietzsche's insight into a narrow, utilitarian project.

Furthermore, globalization and the rise of digital technologies reveal another layer of Nietzsche's relevance. As scholars such as Peter Sloterdijk and Thomas Carlson observe, the global technological system itself can be seen as a manifestation of the *will to power*, extending human agency into planetary and even cosmic domains.⁴³ Yet such expansion also raises questions about domination, inequality, and ecological consequence. If the *will to power* in the technological age manifests as global control - through surveillance, data economies, or bioengineering - it risks reproducing the very logic of mastery that Nietzsche sought to critique. For Nietzsche, true self-overcoming was never about securing comfort or dominance but about revaluating values and embracing existence in its radical contingency.

Thus, the age of technology forces a rethinking of Nietzsche's doctrine. On one level, technological innovation appears to fulfill Nietzsche's vision of humanity as a "yet undetermined animal," open to transformation and capable of surpassing itself.⁴⁴ On another, it threatens to neutralize the depth of his insight by translating the *will to power* into a technological imperative - an endless drive toward efficiency, control, and enhancement divorced from existential affirmation. The challenge, then, is to discern whether technology serves as a vehicle of genuine *self-overcoming* or whether it reduces Nietzsche's vision to a mechanized pursuit of the "last man," content with comfort, security, and predictability.

In this light, the *will to power in the age of technology* must be interpreted dialectically: as both the engine of human creativity and the danger of its reduction to instrumental rationality. It compels us to ask whether the technological project can be infused with the Nietzschean spirit of value-creation, tragic affirmation, and openness to becoming - or whether it will collapse into a sanitized quest for mastery that ultimately undermines the very possibility of transcendence.

5. Critical Reflection and Conclusion

The dialogue between Nietzsche and transhumanism reveals one of the most significant philosophical tensions of our time: the struggle to balance technological power with moral depth. While transhumanism echoes Nietzsche's call for self-overcoming and the transcendence of human limitations, it diverges sharply in its metaphysical assumptions, moral outlook, and conception of human progress. What emerges from this comparative inquiry is that Nietzsche's philosophy both anticipates and critiques transhumanism: it anticipates it by affirming humanity's potential for self-transformation, yet critiques it by exposing the moral and existential perils of a purely technological conception of transcendence.

A central finding of this study is that both Nietzsche and transhumanist thinkers share a dynamic and evolutionary conception of humanity. For Nietzsche, man is "something that shall be overcome," a being in transition who must rise beyond decadence toward self-mastery and creative affirmation. Similarly, transhumanists regard humanity as an unfinished project, capable of transcending biological and cognitive limitations through technology. Both reject static conceptions of human nature and emphasize transformation as an essential process of becoming. However, their methods and motivations for

achieving such transformation diverge. Nietzsche's vision of transcendence is inward, existential, and rooted in the revaluation of values and the affirmation of life. In contrast, the transhumanist pursuit is outward, technological, and driven by the application of science and bioengineering to enhance and extend human capacities.

This divergence in their approaches reveals two distinct ways of thinking about human improvement. First, Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, which represents a moral and existential transformation - a victory over nihilism achieved through the creation of new values and the cultivation of strength, creativity, and purpose. Second, the transhumanist posthuman, which signifies a biological and technological transformation - a victory over disease, aging, and death through the mastery of nature. Nietzsche's model is symbolic and aspirational, emphasizing an inner evolution of the human spirit, whereas the transhumanist vision is concrete and practical, oriented toward external advancement through science and technology. The danger, as Nietzsche warns, lies in mistaking technological progress for genuine self-overcoming.

From an ethical standpoint, the moral optimism of transhumanism, expressed in its faith in technology's capacity to secure progress and eradicate human suffering, stands in contrast to Nietzsche's tragic realism. For Nietzsche, suffering is not an evil to be eliminated but a necessary condition for growth, creativity, and the affirmation of life. His idea of *amor fati* (the love of fate) calls for embracing existence in its entirety, including pain, loss, and decay, as essential to the cultivation of strength and greatness. Any attempt to erase suffering completely, therefore, risks undermining the very source of human depth and vitality. Habermas captures this ethical tension when he warns that genetic and biotechnological self-design could "transform the self-understanding of the species" and weaken the autonomy that grounds moral responsibility.⁴⁵ Nietzsche's vision of self-overcoming, unlike the transhumanist drive to redesign life, urges an acceptance of existence in all its complexity rather than its technological manipulation.

The implications of transhumanist enhancement, from a societal perspective, extend beyond individual autonomy to questions of justice, equality, and the moral fabric of communities. The uncritical application of enhancement technologies could generate new hierarchies of ability and wealth, creating a "genetic divide" in which the privileged few enjoy cognitive or physical superiority over the rest.⁴⁶ Such developments would subvert transhumanism's professed ideal of universal improvement and mirror Nietzsche's warning against a society governed by a distorted *will to power*, where mastery degenerates into domination. Nietzsche's authentic *will to power* involves creative self-realization, not oppressive superiority. Thus, the ethical challenge of enhancement is not merely how to expand human capacities but how to ensure that such expansion promotes solidarity, responsibility, and shared flourishing rather than deepening alienation and inequality.

The drive for perfection through technology brings back Nietzsche's warning about the "last man," the complacent being who values comfort and security over greatness. Transhumanism's dream of conquering death and eliminating pain could, paradoxically, lead to a humanity that is efficient and long-living but spiritually empty. In a world obsessed with control and optimization, Nietzsche reminds us that limitation, struggle, and imperfection are what make life truly human. Turning ourselves into machines in the quest to become invulnerable might help us live longer, but it risks stripping away the very essence of our existence: the freedom to create, to endure suffering, and to affirm life in all its complexity.

From the foregoing analysis, it becomes evident that Nietzsche's philosophy provides

both a foundation for and a warning against the ideals of transhumanism. He anticipates its drive for transformation but cautions against reducing human transcendence to mere technical control. His thought, therefore, serves as a double lens: it reveals the creative potential of human enhancement while also exposing its deepest moral and existential risks. True transcendence, for Nietzsche, does not lie in fleeing human limitations through machines but in ennobling human existence through will, courage, and the meaningful embrace of life itself.

Endnotes

1. Julian Huxley, "Transhumanism," in *New Bottles for New Wine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 17.
2. Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 4.
3. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20, no. 1 (2009): 30-32.
4. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism," 33-35.
5. Manuel Knoll, "Nietzsche and Transhumanism: The Case of the Overhuman (Übermensch)," in *Nietzsche and the Future of Human Enhancement*, ed. S. L. Sorgner and Yunus Tuncel (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 60-62.
6. Mariano Rodríguez González, "The Problematic Coherence of a Nietzschean Transhumanism," *Deliberatio* 1, no. 1 (2021): 48-52; Michael Hauskeller, *Mythologies of Transhumanism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 54-59; Allen Porter, "Bioethics and Transhumanism," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television*, ed. Michael Hauskeller et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 247-252.
7. John Andrews, *The Economist Book of -isms: From Abolitionism to Zoroastrianism*, quoted by Andrew Copson, "What Is Humanism?" in *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Humanism*, ed. Andrew Copson and A. C. Grayling (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 4.
8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), "The Four Great Errors," §8.
9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Essay I, §7.
10. Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2015), 93.
11. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1978), Prologue §4.
12. Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 101.
13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), §202.
14. Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 122.

15. Aikaterini Ramantanoglou and Nikolaos-Ion Terzoglou, "Peter Eisenman – Michel Foucault – Friedrich Nietzsche: Anti-Humanist Architecture," *Journal of Architecture and Construction* 5, no. 1 (2025): 9, <https://doi.org/10.22259/2637-5796.0501001>.
16. Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 5-7; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 41.
17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 41.
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 21.
19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 21.
20. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 42-44.
21. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), §276.
22. Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 122-124.
23. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 36-39.
24. Brett Carollo, "Nietzsche and Transhumanism: A Reassessment," *The Agonist* 16, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.33182/agon.v16i1.2800>, 72
25. Bostrom, N., The transhumanist FAQ: A general introduction, Version 2.1, quoted in Elise Bohan, "Nietzsche and Transhumanism: Much Ado about Nothing?" *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 21, no. 1 (2010), 37.
26. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20, no. 1 (March 2009), <http://jetpress.org/v20/sorgner.htm>, 36-38.
27. Manuel Knoll, "Nietzsche and Transhumanism: The Case of the Overhuman (*Übermensch*)," Turkish-German University Istanbul; Instituto "Lucio Anneo Séneca" of Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0651-1915>, 53
28. Manuel Knoll, "Nietzsche and Transhumanism: The Case of the Overhuman (*Übermensch*)," 55
29. Paul S. Loeb, "Nietzsche's Transhumanism," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 30 (Spring 2005), 2
30. Paul S. Loeb, "Nietzsche's Transhumanism," 21
31. Paul S. Loeb, "Nietzsche's Transhumanism," 26-27
32. Brett Carollo, "Nietzsche and Transhumanism: A Reassessment," *The Agonist* 16, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.33182/agon.v16i1.2800>, 67-68
33. Mariano Rodríguez González, "The Problematic Coherence of a Nietzschean Transhumanism," *Deliberatio* 1, no. 1 (2021), <https://deliberatio.uvt.ro/>, 50
34. Mariano Rodríguez González, "The Problematic Coherence of a Nietzschean

Transhumanism,” 49

35. Michael Hauskeller, *Mythologies of Transhumanism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 89–92.
36. C. Aydin, “The Posthuman as Hollow Idol: A Nietzschean Critique of Human Enhancement,” quoted in Allen “Porter, Bioethics and Transhumanism.” 248
37. Allen Porter, “Bioethics and Transhumanism.” 250-251
38. “What is the Will to Power?” www.thecollector.com/what-is-the-will-to-power/
39. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), §259.
40. Babette Babich, “Nietzsche and Technology,” in *Nietzsche and the Politics of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 152-153.
41. Roba Megersa Buta, “The Will to Power and the Will to Technology,” *Annals of the University of Craiova for Journalism, Communication and Management* 5, no. 1 (2019): 50, <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=885717>.
42. Michael Hauskeller, *Mythologies of Transhumanism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 54-59.
43. Thomas Carlson, *The Indiscrete Image: Infinitude and Creation of the Human* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 201-212.
44. Manuel Knoll, “Nietzsche and Transhumanism: The Case of the Overhuman,” *Studia Philosophica Estonica* 7, no. 2 (2014): 47-72.
45. Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, trans. Hella Beister and William Rehg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 54.
46. Allen Porter, “Bioethics and Transhumanism,” *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 42, no. 3 (2017): 238, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhx001>.