AL-SHAJARAH

ISTAC Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization

AL-SHAJARAH

EDITORIAL BOARD

Al-Shajarah is a refereed international journal that publishes original scholarly articles in the area of Islamic thought, Islamic civilization, Islamic science, and Malay world issues. The journal is especially interested in studies that elaborate scientific and epistemological problems encountered by Muslims in the present age, scholarly works that provide fresh and insightful Islamic responses to the intellectual and cultural challenges of the modern world. *Al-Shajarah* will also consider articles written on various religions, schools of thought, ideologies and subjects that can contribute towards the formulation of an Islamic philosophy of science. Critical studies of translation of major works of major writers of the past and present. Original works on the subjects of Islamic architecture and art are welcomed. Book reviews and notes are also accepted.

TECHNO-JAHILIYYAH: EXAMINING TRANSHUMANISM THROUGH THE ISLAMIC LENS

Asif Adnan[1]

Abstract

This paper explores the philosophical underpinnings of Transhumanism through the lens of the Islamic concept of Jahiliyyah. By examining the metanarratives of modernity that shape the transhumanist worldview, particularly those of autonomy, progress, and techno-salvationism, the paper argues that Transhumanism represents a form of secular enchantment. The analysis posits that Transhumanism emerges as a reaction to the crisis of meaning and purpose in modernity. Transhumanism's secular enchantment arises from its attempt to address the nihilistic implications of modernity. Applying the Qutbian framework of Jahiliyyah, the paper posits that Transhumanism is a manifestation of techno-jahiliyyah—a state of existential ignorance marked by an unwavering faith in science and technology as the exclusive means of transcendence and salvation. In response, the paper presents an Islamic counternarrative that emphasizes divine guidance, the integration of faith and reason, and the role of humans as Khalifah on earth.

Keywords: Transhumanism, *Jahiliyyah*, Secular Enchantment, Modernity, Islamic worldview

[1] PhD Student, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC). International Islamic University Malaysia: *asif.econdu@gmail.com*

Introduction

Transhumanism is a social, cultural, and philosophical movement that believes the human species can and should transform itself using technology and science.[2] Core transhumanist themes and goals include—but are not limited to —the acceleration of human evolution through technological self-transformation, overcoming limitations of human biology and knowledge, radically enhancing human capabilities, and vastly extending human lifespans, preferably up to the point of *immortality*.[3] Advocating the use of human technology and science to replace humanity itself, Transhumanism presents one of the most significant challenges to humanity posed by modernity.

The ultimate goal of Transhumanism is to transform the human condition, creating a new, superior genus called the *Posthuman*, which will be liberated from the limitations of human biology and possess "*godlike*" abilities.[4] *Transhumanism* refers to the belief in this vision and the process of realizing it, while *posthuman* is the final goal transhumanists seek to achieve.[5] The term *Transhuman* means "*transitional human*"[6], the intermediate phase between the biological human and the anticipated technological *Posthuman*.[7]

The paper will begin by examining the grand narratives that shape Transhumanism's philosophical underpinnings and its worldview. Themes of autonomy, progress, and 'technological

---

[2] Bostrom, Nick. Introduction---The Transhumanist FAQ: A general introduction. *Transhumanism and the Body: The World Religions Speak*, 1-17. (2014).

[3] More, Max, and Vita-More, Natasha, eds. *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*. John Wiley & Sons. (2013); Bostrom, Nick. "Letter from Utopia." *Studies in Ethics, Law, and Technology* 2, no. 1. (2008).

[4] Bostrom, Nick. Human genetic enhancements: A transhumanist perspective. *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 4(37), 493-506. (2003).

[5] Ranisch, Robert, and Sorgner, Stefan Lorenz. Introducing Post-and Transhumanism. In Ranisch, Robert & Sorgner, Stefan Lorenz (Eds.), *Post-and Transhumanism: An Introduction* (pp. 7-27). Peter Lang. (2014).

[6] Esfandiary, F. M., and FM-2030. *Are You a Transhuman? Monitoring and Stimulating Your Personal Rate of Growth in a Rapidly Changing World*. Warner. (1989).

[7] Elliott, Carl. "HUMANITY 2.0." *Wilson Quarterly*, 27(4), 13-20. (2003).

salvationism' figure prominently and repeatedly in Transhumanist discourse and thus will be the focus of this examination. After which, focusing on the tendency of modernity to create its own forms of secular enchantments, the paper will argue that Transhumanism represents a form of *secular enchantment* of the world.

Shifting gears, the paper will then apply the concept of *Jahiliyyah*, as articulated by thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Qutb, to Transhumanism. Using the Qutbian framework, the paper will posit that Transhumanism is a form of *techno-jahiliyyah*. It is a state of existential ignorance and detachment from divine guidance, marked by an unwavering obsession with science and technology as the exclusive source of transcendence and salvation.

This Islamic perspective, rooted in the principles of *Tawhid* (unity of God) and the balance between the material and spiritual realms, offers a compelling alternative to the techno-*jahiliyyah* of Transhumanism.

By engaging in this critical analysis, the paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding Transhumanism and its implications for humanity's future. It highlights the significance of the Islamic perspective in situating and reframing secular narratives and advocating for a more holistic and ethically grounded approach to technological advancement.

Background on Transhumanism

The history of Transhumanism is an interwoven thread comprised of various literary, philosophical, technological and religious elements. Many transhumanists try to create an idealized historical narrative of the movement and its concepts by referencing a multitude of thinkers across history. Such narratives often tend to project contemporary ideas onto the past and, as such, risk creating skewed and potentially misleading perspectives on history[8]. Therefore, it is necessary to critically examine the standard narratives of the history of Transhumanism.

---

[8] MacFarlane, J. M. *Transhumanism as a New Social Movement: The Techno-Centred Imagination*. Springer Nature. (2020).

According to Transhumanists, their philosophical genealogy begins with Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Pico della Mirandola, Marquis de Condorcet, Benjamin Franklin, and Denis Diderot.[9] However, these assertions have a tendency to be detached from the relevant context and can be seen as self-serving.[10] While these figures undoubtedly contributed to developing ideas that would later inform transhumanist thought, it is often a stretch to claim that they envisioned anything akin to modern Transhumanism. Apart from some broad similarities, it is highly debatable whether the ideas of such thinkers can be accurately characterized as being *transhumanistic* or even *proto-transhumanist*. Nonetheless, the philosophical basis on which Transhumanism builds its vision is undoubtedly that of the Enlightenment.[11]

The idea of technologically enhancing or fundamentally altering human nature has deep roots in Western cultural imagination. The myth of Prometheus, who gave fire to humans and was punished by the gods for this transgression, can be seen as an early exploration of the consequences of human technological empowerment. Similarly, Mary Shelley's 1818 novel 'Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus' grappled with the ethical implications of creating or enhancing life through scientific means. These cultural touchstones foreshadow many of the themes that would later emerge in transhumanist thought, particularly the promise and peril of technological human enhancement.

The Proto-Transhumanists

Before delving into the proto-transhumanist thinkers, it's worth examining the etymological roots of the term 'transhumanism' itself. Etymologically, the very first use of the term transhumanism is traced back to Dante Alighieri (d. 1321), the famous Italian poet and philosopher. In his Divine Comedy, Dante uses the word

---

[9] Bostrom, Nick. "A History of Transhumanist Thought." *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1, 1-25. (2005).

[10] Levin, Susan B. Posthuman bliss?: The failed promise of transhumanism. Oxford University Press. (2020).

[11] Hughes, James. "Contradictions from the Enlightenment Roots of Transhumanism." *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35, no. 6, 622-40. (2010).

'*transumanare*' to mean surpassing the human condition. Dante's use of the word was spiritual and explicitly religious in nature. In 1939, T.S. Eliot employed the term '*transhumanized*' in his play "The Cocktail Party", denoting illumination.[12] While these early uses of the term were largely spiritual or literary, the ideas that would form the foundation of transhumanism began to take shape in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Proto-transhumanist thought can be reasonably traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, specifically to the ideas of the Russian Orthodox ascetic Nikolai Fedorov (d. 1903) and the subsequent Russian Cosmists. [13] Fedorov advocated for the resurrection of the dead through scientific means, and argued that humans could direct their evolution to overcome death. His ideas, deeply rooted in religious and spiritual thinking, influenced Russian Cosmists such as Vladimir Vernadsky (d. 1945). A geochemist and mineralogist by training, Vernadsky formulated the idea that the earth's surface might be seen as a *biosphere* that gradually becomes more and saturated with life and influenced by human intelligence. Subsequently, another stratum of life evolves from the biosphere, governed and permeated by the human mind.[14]

In the 1920s, two distinct currents of proto-transhumanist thought emerged. One current was represented by the French palaeontologist and Jesuit priest Teilhard de Chardin (d. 1953). After attending one of Vernadsky's lectures, De Chardin adopted his ideas and coined the term '*noosphere*' to describe the subsequent stratum that evolved from the biosphere.[15] He also proposed the concept of a

---

[12] More, Max. "The Philosophy of Transhumanism." In *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More, 3-17. Wiley-Blackwell. (2013).

[13] Manzocco, Riccardo. *Transhumanism: Engineering the Human Condition*. Suiza: Springer. (2019); Clay, Karen. "Transhumanism and the Orthodox Christian Tradition." In *Beyond Humanism: Trans-and Posthumanism Jenseits des Humanismus: Trans-und Posthumanismus/Building Better Humans*, 157-180. (2011).

[14] Young, Gareth M. *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers*. Oxford University Press. (2012).

[15] Fuchs-Kittowski, Klaus, and Peter Krüger. "The Noosphere Vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Vladimir I. Vernadsky in the Perspective of Information

global network linking human minds, leading to an intelligence explosion. [16] Concurrently, British intellectuals such as Julian Huxley, J.B.S. Haldane, and J.D. Bernal articulated a secular vision of human evolution and hypothesized about the emergence of a new form man in the near future.[17]

Huxley, a close friend of Teilhard de Chardin, is credited with the first use of the term '*transhumanism*' in 1927. However, as Peter Harrison and Joseph Wolyniak (2015) have shown, this is factually incorrect. W. D. Lighthall (d. 1954), a Canadian Christian author and philosopher, used the term '*Paul's transhumanism*', citing biblical reference, in an article published in 1940. The article centred on the theme of "cosmic evolution", and sought to delineate a progressive metaphysical philosophy that connects the evolution of the cosmos, living organisms, and human culture.[18] [19] Previous use of the French term '*transhumanisme*' is found in a lecture by French engineer Jean Coutrot (d. 1941) in 1939.[20] Interestingly, both Lighthall and Coutrot seem to have been influenced by the thought of Teilhard de Chardin. This also holds for Huxley, a close friend of Teilhard.[21]

It is crucial to consider the restrictions Teilhard de Chardin faced while discussing his possible influence on his contemporaries. The Jesuit order prohibited Teilhard from publishing many of his most significant works. As a result, his works on religion, science, and evolution and how they interconnect in creating his vision for the

---

and of World-Wide Communication." *World Futures: Journal of General Evolution* 50, no. 1-4, 757-784. (1997).

[16] Steinhart, Eric. "Teilhard de Chardin and Transhumanism." *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20, no. 1, 1-22. (2008).

[17] Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "Science and the Betterment of Humanity: Three British Prophets of Transhumanism." In *Building Better Humans? Refocusing the Debate on Transhumanism*, edited by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and K. L. Mossman, 55-82. Peter Lang. (2012).

[18] Harrison, Peter, and John Wolyniak. "The History of 'Transhumanism'." *Notes & Queries* 62, no. 3. (2015).

[19] Lighthall, W. D. *The Law of Cosmic Evolutionary Adaptation: An Interpretation of Recent Thought*. Royal Society of Canada. (1940).

[20] Dard, Olivier, and Antoine Moatti. "The History of Transhumanism (Cont.)." *Notes and Queries* 64, no. 1, 167-170. (2017).

[21] Sorkhabi, Ramin. *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Sir Julian Huxley: A Tale of Two Friends*. American Teilhard Association. (2019).

future of mankind were released posthumously. It is possible that Teilhard articulated transhumanist themes and used the term in lectures, discussions, and personal correspondences well before they appeared in print following his death. Nonetheless, in the 1950s, Huxley's secular humanist version of Transhumanism began to dominate the discourse, expunging the religious and spiritual elements present in the work of Fedorov, Vernadsky, and Teilhard de Chardin, essentially painting over the religious roots of proto-transhumanist thought.[22]

It's important to note that transhumanism is not a departure from modernity, but rather an intensification of its core principles. Transhumanism takes the Enlightenment ideals of progress, rationality, and human improvement *to their logical extreme*, applying them not just to society, but to the human body and mind itself.

The Transhumanist Movement

The contemporary transhumanist movement came to the fore during the 1960's. The movement was sparked by the publication of two books by the American academic Robert Ettinger (d. 2011). In his books "The Prospect of Immortality" and "Man into Superman", Ettinger promoted the idea of immortality through *cryonics*.[23] Cryonics refers to freezing or "*cryopreserving*" human remains in the hope of future resurrection through technological means.

While initially a fringe concept, cryonics has gained some traction in recent years, with several wealthy individuals reportedly agreeing to have their bodies preserved after death in specialized facilities. Several prominent individuals have opted for cryonics, giving the movement wider visibility. Ted Williams, the Hall of Fame baseball player, was cryopreserved at Alcor Life Extension Foundation following his death in 2002. Robert Ettinger, the founder of the cryonics movement, was also preserved after his death in 2011. Additionally, futurist and Google executive Ray Kurzweil has

---

[22] Manzocco, *Transhumanism*

[23] Ettinger, Robert CW, and Jean Rostand. The prospect of immortality. Sidgwick and Jackson. (1965); Ettinger, Robert. "Man into Superman, New York: St." Martin's. (1972).

expressed interest in undergoing the process, although he has not yet been preserved. These examples highlight the growing interest in cryonics among influential figures.[24]

Around the same time, academic and intellectual Fereidoun M. Esfandiary (d. 2000) put forward futurist ideas and attempted to create a 'third-way' option distinct from conventional left and right-wing politics.[25]

In the 1980s, self-proclaimed transhumanist activists coalesced around the ideas of futurist figures such as Esfandiary and Ettinger and began to hold meetings periodically. The University of California, Los Angeles, became a hub for these pioneering transhumanist activists and thinkers.[26] Another key figure in the transhumanist milieu during this period was Natasha Vita-More, an avant-garde artist and designer.[27]

The concepts of intelligent machines and nanotechnology, developed by computer scientist Hans Moravec and engineer Eric Drexler, respectively, profoundly influenced the nascent transhumanist movement. Their books detailing these concepts became reference points for transhumanist activists and progressed their technoscientific vision significantly.[28]

The 1990s saw the founding of the Extropy Institute by philosopher Max More, which aimed to develop Transhumanism as an alternative to the impasse between the modern nihilist condition and traditional religion. With the emergence of the internet, transhumanists utilized digital tools such as forums and mailing lists

---

[24] "Defying Death and Time: How the Rich are Freezing Themselves in Hopes of Waking Up Hundreds of Years Later," BusinessToday, July 11, 2024, https://www.businesstoday.in (accessed October 20, 2024).

[25] See in particular, Esfandiary, Fereidoun M. "Optimism one: the emerging radicalism." (1970); and Esfandiary, Fereidoun M., and FM-2030. *Are you a transhuman? Monitoring and stimulating your personal rate of growth in a rapidly changing world*. Warner. (1989).

[26] Manzocco, *Transhumanism*

[27] Adorno, F. P., and F. P. Adorno. *The Transhumanist Movement*, 13-40. Springer International Publishing. (2021).

[28] Drexler, Eric. *Engines of Creation: The Coming Era of Nanotechnology*. Anchor. (1987); Moravec, Hans. *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*. Harvard University Press. (1988); Manzocco, *Transhumanism.*

to coalesce and finally emerge as a collective social movement.[29] In 1998, philosophers Nick Bostrom and David Pearce founded the World Transhumanist Association (WTA), which aimed to legitimize Transhumanism as an academic field. Futurist and inventor Ray Kurzweil's vision has profoundly influenced the transhumanist movement since the late 90s, through his idea of the technological Singularity.[30]   Other notable figures in this transhumanist movement include biogerontologist Aubrey de Grey, whose work focuses on scientifically achieving immortality; sociologist and bioethicist James Hughes; and philosopher Anders Sandberg.[31]

Since the late 2000s, Transhumanism has gained increasing influence in Silicon Valley. Some of the world's wealthiest and most powerful men, such as Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, Larry Page, Larry Ellison, Peter Thiel, and Elon Musk, have either supported or invested heavily in research areas closely linked with Transhumanism.[32] The support of tech billionaires has helped to transform Transhumanism from a fringe movement of eccentrics to a recurring theme in popular culture and mainstream debates.

As a social, cultural, and philosophical phenomenon, Transhumanism is becoming increasingly influential due to recent advances in science and technology. Today, transhumanist themes are found in films, media, video games, performance arts, and literature. Widely successful books such as *Homo Deus* by the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari have brought Transhumanism into mainstream focus.[33]

There is considerable scientific research focused on many

---

[29] Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "Engaging Transhumanism." In *H+/-: Transhumanism and Its Critics*, edited by G. R. Hansell and William Grassie, 19-54. Metanexus Institute. (2011).

[30] MacFarlane, J. M. *Transhumanism as a New Social Movement: The Techno-Centred Imagination*. Springer Nature. (2020).

[31] Manzocco, *Transhumanism: Engineering the Human Condition;* Krüger, Olaf. "The Singularity Is Near! Visions of Artificial Intelligence in Posthumanism and Transhumanism." (2021).

[32] Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "In Pursuit of Perfection: The Misguided Transhumanist Vision." *Theology and Science* 16, no. 2, 200-222. (2018); Metzinger, Thomas. "Silicon Valley Is Selling an Ancient Dream of Immortality." *Financial Times*. (2017).

[33] Harari, Y.N. *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. Random House. (2016).

transhumanist concepts. Gene editing technologies like CRISPR make it theoretically possible to alter human DNA and induce generational change.[34] Even more concerning is the US military's growing interest, investment, and research into so-called "*human enhancement technologies*," which incorporate many transhumanist ideas.[35] The transhumanist movement today possesses a potent mix of ideology, economic power, social capital, and technological momentum.

Core Ideas and Aims

As a movement, Transhumanism is a collective of loosely connected ideas focused on using science and technology to radically enhance human longevity, capacity and well-being. This constellation of ideas is united under the overarching vision of merging humans with technology and taking control of the next step of human evolution.[36] The transhumanist movement seeks a '*technological makeover*' of human nature.[37] Transhumanism proposes and promotes the possibility of human-directed evolution, a shift from Darwinian evolution to '*designer evolution*'.[38] This vision of human-directed evolution, while leveraging modern technology, echoes ancient aspirations seen in myths like that of Prometheus, who sought to elevate humanity through the gift of fire and knowledge.

---

[34] Ranisch, Robert. "When CRISPR Meets Fantasy: Transhumanism and the Military in the Age of Gene Editing." In *Transhumanism: The Proper Guide to a Posthuman Condition or a Dangerous Idea?*, 111-120. (2021).

[35] Coenen, Chris. "Transcending Natural Limitations: The Military–Industrial Complex and the Transhumanist Temptation." In *Transhumanism: The Proper Guide to a Posthuman Condition or a Dangerous Idea?*, 97-110. (2021); Harrison Dinniss, Heather A., and J. K. Kleffner. "Soldier 2.0: Military Human Enhancement and International Law." In *Dehumanization of Warfare: Legal Implications of New Weapon Technologies*, 163-205. (2018).

[36] More, On Becoming Posthuman, (p. 38-41); Bostrom, Introduction---*The Transhumanist FAQ*; Bostrom, Nick. "Transhumanist Values." *Journal of Philosophical Research* 30 (Supplement), 3-14. (2005).

[37] Walker, Mark. "Ship of Fools: Why Transhumanism Is the Best Bet to Prevent the Extinction of Civilization." In *Transhumanism and Its Critics*, edited by G. R. Hansell and William Grassie, 94-111. Metanexus Institute. (2011).

[38] Young, Steve. "Review of *Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto*." *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 15, 92. (2006).

The movement aims to achieve *morphological freedom*, giving every individual the right to change or augment their body as they see fit.[39] Some Transhumanists propose the idea of mind uploading, which involves uploading a scan of the human brain to a computer or cloud, which can then be downloaded into a host, resulting in *digital immortality*. Others propagate 'cyborgization', using brain-computer interfaces to enhance human abilities and turn people into biotechnological beings. There is also the idea of '*designer babies*', genetically engineering children to add or remove specific traits.[40] Another oft-evoked concept is that of the *Singularity*, the much-anticipated creation of superhuman artificial intelligence, which in time would become conscious and autonomous, thus marking an irreversible turning point in evolution.[41] Transhumanists also hold that the logical next step in evolution is for humans to create or transform themselves into the "posthuman" species.[42] Transhumanists believe that the use and convergence of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, genomics, and other fields will turn these visions into reality.[43]

Transhumanism presents a particular vision for the future, which is becoming increasingly influential. Understandably, these notions have sparked numerous debates and drawn criticism from both secular and religious commentators. Regardless of one's endorsement or opposition to Transhumanism It is imperative to critically examine the assumptions and premises that underlie the transhumanist vision and their implications for mankind in general.

---

[39] More, Max. "Technological Self-Transformation: Expanding Personal Extropy." *Extropy* 4, no. 2, 15-24. (1993); Sandberg, Anders. "Morphological Freedom -- Why We Not Just Want It, But Need It." In *Transhumanist Reader*, 56-64. (2001).

[40] Bostrom, Human Genetic Enhancement, (p. 493-506); Bostrom, Introduction---The Transhumanist FAQ

[41] Kurzweil, Ray. *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*. Viking. (2005).

[42] More, On Becoming Posthuman, (p. 38-41).

[43] Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "Engaging Transhumanism." In *H+/-: Transhumanism and Its Critics*, 19-54. Metanexus Institute. (2011).

Metanarratives of Transhumanism

Transhumanism is a totalizing vision. Transhumanists consider their positions regarding history, human nature, and the future of mankind as context-independent truths.[44] These underlying assumptions and beliefs shape and legitimize the transhumanist vision of the future. Thus, to critically examine the transhumanist worldview, it is essential to delve into the metanarratives and philosophical foundations that form its basis.

In 1979, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard defined postmodernism as "*incredulity towards metanarratives*". In doing so, he not only provided one of the most widely used definitions of postmodernism but also introduced the concept and framework of *metanarratives*. According to Lyotard, meta-narratives are grand visions or stories about the world that function as legitimizing tools for various social practices, political systems, and forms of knowledge.[45] Metanarratives shape our view regarding what was, what is, and what is to come. They influence, inform, and, in many cases, provide the scaffolding for our ontological, epistemological, anthropological and ethical commitments. Metanarratives are integral to the paradigms that guide and shape our understanding and explanation of the world.[46] The idea of absolute autonomy, the concept of perpetual progress and belief in the ability of science to answer all questions and provide all solutions- are all prominent metanarratives of modernity, according to Lyotard.

Applying the postmodern approach, as outlined by Lyotard, to Transhumanism is particularly beneficial, as the movement's core beliefs and aspirations are deeply rooted in the metanarratives of modernity. This section explores how the metanarratives of autonomy, progress, and techno-salvationism come together to shape the transhumanist worldview.

---

[44] Levin, *Posthuman bliss?*

[45] Lyotard, Jean-François. "The postmodern condition." The postmodern turn: new perspectives on modern theory. (1994).

[46] Rorty, Richard. "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity." In *Habermas and Modernity*, 161-175. (1985).

The Metanarrative of Autonomy in Transhumanism

The metanarrative of autonomy plays a significant role in shaping the transhumanist vision. The individual, his freedom and sovereignty are central to the vision of Transhumanism. Transhumanists hold that every individual has the autonomy to define their own nature, identity, opportunities, and life path. (CITATION) Human beings possess absolute autonomy over their existence and possess the capacity to mould their own destiny. The individual is sovereign, and his sovereignty is most precious.

This position is rooted in the idea of the autonomous self and self-ownership stemming from Enlightenment thinking.[47] Building on this anthropocentric concept of sovereignty, Transhumanists introduce the notion of *morphological freedom*. They argue that humans have the right to change their bodies according to their desires and values.[48]

The Promethean View of Man in Transhumanism

Transhumanism adopts a *Promethean* view of man which emerged during the Renaissance. According to thinkers such as Nasr (1987), this perspective places man at the centre of the universe, making him the measure of all things and the locus of all meaning.[49] It casts man in a hubristic, almost mythical struggle to overcome limits and boundaries like the Greek titan Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans. Since the Renaissance, the myth of Prometheus has constituted a narrative, an idealized version and vision of emancipation, grandeur, and power, the idea according to which human beings do not tolerate anyone above themselves, and that human self-awareness is the supreme divinity. French

---

[47] Sandberg, Anders. "Morphological Freedom -- Why We Not Just Want It, But Need It." In *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More, 56-64. Wiley-Blackwell. (2013).

[48] More, Max. "The Philosophy of Transhumanism." In *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More, 3-17. Wiley-Blackwell. (2013).

[49] Naṣr, Ḥusain. Traditional Islam in the modern world. KPI, (1987).

philosopher and theologian Remi Brague denote this view as '*exclusive humanism*'.[50]

The Promethean view sees man as the master of his fate. By turning away from heaven, the Promethean man sets his focus firmly on to the world. He is bound to earth, but he is also its master. He becomes "free" from heaven, free from any and all authority. Man, above all, autonomy par excellence, becomes his prime ideal.

Dominion Over Nature

This perspective is closely intertwined with the desire for dominion and mastery over nature through science and technology, a central goal of modern science. This position was famously articulated by Francis Bacon (d. 1626), who is considered one of the fathers of modern science.[51] [52] Bacon argued that the goal of science was to "*extend the power and dominion of the human race over the universe*".[53]

The Promethean man considers nature to be his dominion, and science and technology are his most important tools of control. With the scientific revolution, man seeks total dominion over the earth on his own terms, without reference to the will of Heaven.[54] Nature and the universe become objects that are to be conquered and exploited. Man no longer sees himself as a part of nature; rather, he sees himself as an agent who can impose his will on nature from the outside. Instead of a vision of harmonious coexistence or benevolent stewardship, the Promethean man seeks mastery over the universe.[55]

This shift regarding how man views his role in the universe, in

[50] Gaitán, Luis. "Heaven on Earth: The Mind Uploading Project as Secular Eschatology." *Theology and Science* 17, no. 3, 403-416. (2019).

[51] Gouldner, Alvin W. "Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of a Value-Free Sociology." *Social Problems* 9, no. 3, 199-213. (1962).

[52] Jonas, Hans. *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. University of Chicago Press. (1984).

[53] Bacon, Francis. *The New Organon*, edited by Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne. Cambridge University Press. (2000). (Original work published 1620).

[54] Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Religion and the Order of Nature*. Oxford University Press. (1996).

[55] Keeler, A. P. *Rethinking Islam & the West: A New Narrative for the Age of Crises*. Equilibra Press. (2019).

turn, influences how he interacts with the world around him. It also shapes how man views knowledge as a tool to exert power.[56] This Promethean turn begins during the Renaissance and continues to develop further through the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution. Transhumanism takes the Promethean view and the concept of dominion over nature to its logical conclusion by applying it to human nature, human body and the human condition.[57] The Promethean view culminates in morphological freedom.

Transhumanism, thus, is a particular manifestation of the distinctively modern project of overcoming the constraints of the human body and mind through technoscience,[58] which in turn can be seen as an extension of the Enlightenment belief in perpetual progress and human perfectibility.[59]

The Metanarrative of Progress in Transhumanism

The metanarrative of progress that comes out of Enlightenment rationalism is extremely prominent in modernity. It holds that history follows a particular trajectory, which is continuous and brings gradual improvement. The improvement in question is material as well as moral, spiritual and social. This particular narrative originated in Europe around the eighteenth century and subsequently became a fundamental aspect of modern Western culture.[60]

In a way, the overarching metanarrative of progress serves as the foundation of the modern Western worldview. It provides a conception of history where the West figures as the pinnacle of human civilization, the highest point in a long history of cumulative improvements.[61] Many observers and critics have noted the mythical nature of this view of history and the metanarrative of progress.[62]

---

[56] Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *The Need for a Sacred Science*. Routledge. (2005).

[57] Deneen, Patrick J. *Why Liberalism Failed*. Yale University Press. (2019).

[58] Fuller, Steve. *Humanity 2.0: What It Means to Be Human Past, Present and Future*. Springer. (2011).

[59] Sorgner, Stefan Lorenz. *On Transhumanism*. Penn State Press. (2020).

[60] Burgess, Yvonne. *The Myth of Progress*. Wild Goose Publications. (1996).

[61] Shepard, William. "The Myth of Progress in the Writings of Sayyid Qutb." *Religion* 27, no. 3, 255-266. (1997).

[62] Pollard, Sidney. *The Idea of Progress: History and Society*. (1968); Wessels, Tom. *The Myth of Progress: Toward a Sustainable Future*. University Press of

Belief in this narrative or myth of progress is typical of many modern political ideologies bent on creating utopias.[63]

Science and technology form an integral part of the metanarrative of progress, as it is precisely through the aid of science and technology that the process of development and growth will continue steadily and perpetually into the future. Technoscience thus is the primary agent of progress.[64] Enlightenment thinkers believed that through science and reason, man and society could progress and gradually become perfect.[65] Transhumanism accepts this position and characteristically takes it to its limits, applying it to the human body. Transhumanism calls for using science and technology "*to overcome... our basic biological limits*"[66] and to progress toward becoming Posthuman.[67]

Upgrading Humans: The Imperative of Progress

Transhumanism views the human form as 'half-baked' and 'defective', a 'work in progress' worthy of derision, something that should be altered and enhanced, preferably to the point of immortality.[68] Mankind, in its current form, is not fit for the future. Moreover, our current prosocial and political approaches are inadequate and fundamentally lack the capacity to address the challenges that await mankind.[69] This is because there is a

---

New England. (2013); Burdett, Michael S. *Eschatology and the Technological Future*. Routledge. (2014).

[63] Shepard, William. "The Myth of Progress in the Writings of Sayyid Qutb." *Religion* 27, no. 3, 255-266. (1997); Gray, John. *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (2007).

[64] Marx, Leo. "The Idea of 'Technology' and Postmodern Pessimism." In *Technology, Pessimism, and Postmodernism*, 11-28. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. (1994).

[65] Passmore, John. *The Perfectibility of Man*. Duckworth. (1970).

[66] Bostrom, Human Genetic Enhancements, (p. 493-506).

[67] More, The Philosophy of Transhumanism.

[68] Bostrom, Transhumanist Values, (p. 3-14); Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "Utopianism and Eschatology: Judaism Engages Transhumanism." In *Religion and Transhumanism: The Unknown Future of Human Enhancement*, edited by C. Mercer and T. J. Trothen, 161-180. Praeger. (2015).

[69] Persson, Ingmar, and Julian Savulescu. *Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement*. Oxford University Press. (2012).

'mismatch' between the primitive conditions in which our moral and social impulses developed and the situation and problems we face today.[70]

Our biological and cognitive limitations not only prevent humanity's inevitable path of progress but also cause the immense suffering we see in the world today.[71] Therefore, humans need to be technologically upgraded to deal with future challenges. And the only path to human flourishing is technoscientific control over human nature and condition, or so goes the Transhumanist narrative.[72] In this regard the transhumanist worldview exhibits a distinctive social Darwinist bent, sharing key features and direct connections with the eugenics movement of the 19th and 20th centuries.[73] Both share the same aim, to manipulate evolution and improve humans, and agree on the method, science, and technology. In addition, they also have similarly mechanistic views regarding human beings and society.[74]

Transhumanists often couch their visions in the language of evolution, using terms such as '*evolutionary next step*' and '*evolutionary vision*' to articulate their arguments. For example, in 1970, FM Esfandiary, one of the most prominent early transhumanists, argued that the defeat of death represents the next evolutionary step.[75] This language is not merely predictive but also prescriptive, suggesting that starting from where Darwinian evolution has brought us, we must use science and technology to direct our future development.

In Transhumanism, evolution – or, more appropriately, Darwinism – is linked with the metanarrative of progress and

---

[70] Persson, Ingmar, and Julian Savulescu. "Getting Moral Enhancement Right: The Desirability of Moral Bioenhancement." *Bioethics* 27, no. 3, 124-131. (2013).

[71] Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near*.

[72] Bostrom, Transhumanist Values, (p. 3-14).

[73] Bashford, Alison. "Epilogue: Where Did Eugenics Go?" In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, 539-558. Oxford University Press. (2010).

[74] Koch, T. "Enhancing Who? Enhancing What? Ethics, Bioethics, and Transhumanism." *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35, no. 6, 685-699. (2010); Sorgner, Stefan Lorenz. "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism." *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20, no. 1, 29-42. (2009).

[75] Esfandiary, F. M. *Optimism One: The Emerging Radicalism*. W. W. Norton & Company. (1970).

provides the teleology driving the worldview. Transhumanism can be seen as a technoscientific utopia built upon the belief in progress and the imperative to transcend human limitations through technological means.

The Metanarrative of Techno-Salvationism in Transhumanism

The third driving metanarrative in Transhumanism is that of techno-salvationism – the belief that technology holds the solution to every problem and human limitation. That every social, economic, and environmental issue can be addressed by applying advanced technologies. This mindset extends the general mentality of techno-solutionism and progressivism that characterizes modernity.[76] This way of thinking is typical of intellectuals, philosophers, idealists, and even the general populace. The public today views science and technology as having a greater potential impact than other factors in solving future problems.[77]

Characteristically, Transhumanists take this notion and pushes it further. The transhumanist vision imbues technology with salvific meaning. That is to say that transhumanists do not view technoscience merely as a tool but as the vehicle of salvation. The transhumanist movement is genuinely convinced that science and technology can deliver us from all problems, past and present, be they poverty, war, disease, or climate catastrophe. This conviction is not unique to transhumanism, but rather an amplification of modernist beliefs in scientific and technological progress. Where modernity promised societal improvement through scientific advancement, transhumanism extends this promise to the transformation of human nature itself. It represents not a break from modernist ideals, but their ultimate realization and extension.

Transhumanists posit that in the future, science and technology will provide solutions to these puzzles and allow humans to transcend

---

[76] Noble, David F. *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*. Penguin Books. (1999); Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*. PublicAffairs. (2013).

[77] Parker, Kim, Morin, Rich, & Horowitz, Juliana Menasce. *Looking to the Future, Public Sees an America in Decline on Many Fronts*. Pew Research Center, 21. (2019).

these obstacles and limitations. The use and convergence of biotechnology, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, genomics and other fields will solve the problem of scarcity and create a state of radical abundance.[78]

Moreover, the transhumanist vision sees old age, disease, and mortality not as inevitable and ontological processes inseparable from the human condition, but as technical problems that can be solved through technoscience given enough time.[79] According to this vision, at some point in the future, science and technology will allow humans to first radically prolong human lives and then defeat death or even achieve digital immortality. This techno-salvationist narrative's ultimate peak is the technological Singularity, where the Posthuman emerges, and transcendence is achieved.[80]

Due to these tendencies the transhumanist belief in the power of science has rightly been compared to religious belief and faith in the miraculous.[81] While transhumanist ideas may indeed lead to some significant technological advancements and potential benefits, it is crucial to critically examine their underlying assumptions and potential consequences. This analysis doesn't aim to dismiss the possibility of progress, but rather to highlight how, beneath its rationalistic surface, transhumanism functions as a utopian vision dressed in the garb of technoscience. The age of political ideologies has ended. It is no longer imagined that political ideologies can create ideal societies and solve all problems. However, the belief in progress and yearning for utopia has not vanished; they have simply migrated from political ideology and action to science and technology. There is, however, one crucial difference. Previous utopians envisioned the full attainment of their ideal, but

---

[78] Diamandis, Peter H., & Kotler, Steven. *Abundance: The Future is Better than You Think*. Free Press. (2012).

[79] de Grey, Aubrey. *Ending Aging: The Rejuvenation Breakthroughs That Could Reverse Human Aging in Our Lifetime*. St. Martin's Press. (2007).

[80] More, On Becoming Posthuman, (38-41); Bostrom, *The Transhumanist FAQ;* Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near.*

[81] Hauskeller, Michael. *Better Humans? Understanding the Enhancement Project*. Routledge. (2013); Agar, Nicholas. *Humanity's End: Why We Should Reject Radical Enhancement*. MIT Press. (2010).

transhumanists foresee no end point in their techno-progressive vision. Instead, they anticipate and want ceaseless augmentation.[82]

The Transhumanist Worldview

Transhumanism's vision of humanity's future is rooted in a particular set of worldview assumptions regarding man and his place in the universe. According to Belgian philosopher Gilbert Hottois, Transhumanism contains distinct ontological, epistemological, ethical, and anthropological positions.[83] Others have described Transhumanism as an onto-theology geared towards attaining a transcendent or higher level of existence by altering the course of evolution through technology.[84]

As we have seen, the transhumanist worldview is shaped by metanarratives of autonomy, progress and belief in the omnipotence of technoscience. These grand narratives delineate the philosophical landscape on which Transhumanism's ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and teleological commitments take root.

Transhumanism subscribes to a materialistic and reductive ontology.[85] For Transhumanism, existence is limited to the terrestrial and the temporal. This life must be extended as much as possible because this is the only life there is. As a worldview, it is *dunya-centric*. It sacralizes the physical, temporal world or the *dunya* as the highest, if not the only, reality, rejecting the unseen world (*al-ghayb*) and the afterlife.

Epistemologically, Transhumanism dogmatically subscribes to scientism and reductive rationalism, accepting sense perception and human rationality as the only valid sources of knowledge.[86] Science and technology thus become the oracle to all questions, the solution to all problems, and the arbiter of all things.

---

[82] Bostrom, *The Transhumanist FAQ*

[83] Hottois, G. "Is transhumanism a humanism?" Revista de Derecho y Genoma Humano= Law and the Human Genome Review 42, 15–24. (2015).

[84] Bishop, Jeffrey P. "Transhumanism, Metaphysics, and the Posthuman God." *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 35(6), 700-720. (2010).

[85] Hook, Christopher C. "The Techno Sapiens Are Coming." *Christianity Today*, 48(1), 36-41. (2004).

[86] Hauskeller, Michael. *Mythologies of Transhumanism*. Palgrave Macmillan. (2016); Levin, *Posthuman bliss?*

Within this framework, human beings are reduced to mere biological machines devoid of any spiritual essence.[87] In his current form, man is considered unsuitable for the future and must be enhanced into the Posthuman through technology. Transhumanism exhibits a quantified, 'dataist' conception of the self.[88] It denies the existence of the human soul and reduces the human being to the mind, the mind to the brain, and the brain to data. Consciousness and cognition are reduced and explained away as merely emergent informational phenomena.[89] Because of this view, transhumanists believe it is possible to recreate consciousness in a cloud. Transcendence must be achieved *here and now*.

This view raises a profound question: if consciousness can be recreated digitally, and human beings are reduced to data, would the resulting entity still be considered human? It can be argued that the full realization of transhumanist ideas could potentially lead to the end of humanity as we understand it, replacing humans with posthuman entities that are fundamentally different from biological humans.

These goals are based on a radical denial of the afterlife or *Ākhirah*. The Transhumanist vision, motivation and rationalizations are fruits of its radical *dunya-centrism*, which itself is shaped by metanarratives of modernity.

Transhumanism as Secular Enchantment

It's important to clarify that our use of '*enchantment*' extends beyond traditional religious connotations. Contemporary scholarship, as exemplified by Jenkins (2000), During (2004), Saler (2006), and Landy (2009), has broadened the concept to include secular forms of wonder, awe, and meaning-making. This expanded understanding allows us to analyze phenomena like transhumanism as forms of secular enchantment, despite their non-religious nature. While this

---

[87] Bouzenita, Anke Iman. "The Most Dangerous Idea? Islamic Deliberations on Transhumanism." *Darulfunun Ilahiyat*, 29(2), 201-228. (2018).

[88] Al-Kassimi, Khalid. "A Postmodern (Singularity) Future with a Post-Human Godless Algorithm: Trans-Humanism, Artificial Intelligence, and Dataism." *Religions*, 14(8), 1049. (2023).

[89] Levin, *Posthuman bliss?*

interpretation differs from enchantment's use in religious studies, it offers valuable insights into how movements like transhumanism function in contemporary society.

In 1917, Max Weber famously asserted that the modern era is defined by the processes of rationalization and intellectualization and, most importantly, by the loss of enchantment in the world.[90] Disenchantment in the Weberian sense is the gradual retreat or vanishing of the sense of mystery and the marvellous from nature and human life. Modernity has made everything knowable, measurable, quantifiable and manipulable through rational governance and science. As a result, the universe becomes anthropocentric and impersonal.[91] This view has been taken up and repeated many times throughout the twentieth century.

However, with the rise of postmodernism in the 1970s and 1980s – and increasingly in the present century – this perspective has come under growing scrutiny. While not rejecting Weber's thesis outright, many have offered revisions to established perspectives regarding the simple dichotomy of enchantment versus disenchantment in modernity.[92] As a result, a more nuanced view of modernity has taken hold. Instead of viewing modernity solely as a force of disenchantment, many now see it as an uneasy mix of opposing themes and forces. It is crucial to note that these new forms of enchantment differ from pre-modern religiosity, aligning more with contemporary Western cultural contexts.

This constellation of views holds that in modern societies,

---

[90] Weber, Max. "Science as a Vocation." In H. H. Gerth & C. W. Mills (Eds. & Trans.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (pp. 129-156). Oxford University Press. (1946);

[91] Shils, Edward. "Max Weber and the World since 1920." In W. J. Mommsen & J. Osterhammel (Eds.), *Max Weber and His Contemporaries* (pp. 547-573). Allen & Unwin. (1987); Schroeder, Ralph. "Disenchantment and Its Discontents: Weberian Perspectives on Science and Technology." *The Sociological Review*, 43(2), 227-250. (1995); Jenkins, Richard. "Disenchantment, Enchantment, and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium." *Max Weber Studies*, 11-32. (2000).

[92] Jenkins, *Disenchantment*; During, Simon. *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic*. Harvard University Press. (2004). Saler, Michael. "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review." *The American Historical Review*, 111(3), 692-716. (2006); Landy, Joshua. *The Varieties of Modern Enchantment*. (2009).

whenever religion or '*magic*' retreats from a domain, alternative secular methods of re-enchantment arise to take their place.[93] Thus, modernity gives rise to strong opposing movements of re-enchantment and re-sacralization,[94] which aim to fill the spiritual void caused by secular modernity. Hence, the gradual disenchantment in the world is consistently accompanied by gradual re-enchantment. These "new enchantments," or "re-enchantments," are secular, i.e., expressed through distinctively modern concepts and narratives. They are in harmony with, and sometimes reliant on, aspects of modernity typically seen as rationalizing forces.[95] These new enchantments might be better described as forms of 'solid techno-materialism' or 'techno-materialization of human presence', reflecting their grounding in technological and material realities while still serving enchanting functions.

Processes long seen as rational and logical can themselves become vehicles of re-enchantment or can become re-enchanted from within.[96] Contemporary science, once believed to be the leading cause of removing enchantment, is now acknowledged as a potent creator of wonders.[97] For instance, studies in quantum physics, with their counterintuitive findings about the nature of reality, exemplify how modern science can create new forms of wonder and enchantment.[98]

---

[93] Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton University Press. (2001).

[94] Saler, Michael. "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review." *The American Historical Review*, 111(3), 692-716. (2006).

[95] Landy, Joshua, & Saler, Michael (Eds.). *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*. Stanford University Press. (2009).

[96] Jenkins, Disenchantment, Enchantment, and Re-Enchantment.

[97] Nightingale, Andrea. "Broken Knowledge." In *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*, 15-37.

[98] Quantum physics challenges classical ideas about reality, revealing strange behaviors at the subatomic level. Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle shows that it's impossible to know both the position and momentum of a particle with precision. Niels Bohr's Complementarity Principle further reveals that particles can act as both waves and particles, depending on how they are observed. Erwin Schrödinger's famous cat experiment illustrates quantum superposition, where particles exist in multiple states until observed. Quantum entanglement, famously called "spooky action at a distance" by Albert Einstein, suggests that particles can

This section will argue that Transhumanism represents a form of secular enchantment of the world.

The Enchantments of Technoscience

Having established the concept of re-enchantment in modernity, we can now examine how Transhumanism qualifies as a form of this phenomenon. A growing body of scholarship suggests that Transhumanism can be understood as a form of secular enchantment or *technological re-enchantment* of the world within the context of secular modernity.

Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno famously argued that the Enlightenment was as dependent on the *mythical* as the traditions it had opposed. While the Enlightenment claimed to be rational and rely on reason, the events of the twentieth century, in particular the world wars and the highly bureaucratic and hyper-rational projects of Nazism and Communism, proved that its reliance on science, technology and rationality morphed into irrationality; their dialectical opposite.[99] This analysis can be reasonably extended to liberalism and capitalism as well.

Following this line of reasoning Transhumanism can be seen as another instance of the rational forces of science and technology in modernity transforming into their dialectical opposites and devolving into the fantastical and the utopic. Science, the force of disenchantment in transhumanism *transforms into the force of re-enchantment*.

Philosopher Charles Taylor argues that disenchantment in modernity results from being buffered or shielded from the "*mysterious external world*."[100] However, it can be argued that by seeking to link man with AI, machines, and the digital realm, Transhumanism aims to remove this buffer. [101] While this

---

affect one another instantly, even across great distances. For accessible explanations of these fundamental concepts of quantum mechanics see, Gribbin, John. In search of Schrodinger's cat: Quantum physics and reality. Bantam, 2011.

[99] Adorno, Theodor W., & Horkheimer, Max. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Vol. 15). Verso. (1997).

[100] Taylor, Charles. "A secular age." Harvard UP. (2007).

[101] Antosca, Alex R. "Technological Re-Enchantment: Transhumanism,

interpretation extends Taylor's concept beyond its original religious context, it provides a useful framework to understand how transhumanism might alter our relationship with reality and create new forms of meaning and wonder. If the Transhumanist vision is realized, the individual's relationship with reality would be fundamentally altered, potentially leading to a new form of technological enchantment, albeit one that is digital and material rather than traditionally spiritual. As a consequence of the Transhumanist vision, the social imaginary undergoes a re-enchantment, albeit technological and secular in nature. Thus, Transhumanism results in technological re-enchantment of the world.

Transhumanism can also be seen as a form of magical thinking. According to philosopher Don Ihde, people's lifeworld and experiences shape their fantasies, which, in modernity, take on technological and scientific forms.[102] And Transhumanism views technoscience as 'magic' that can deliver its fantasies. Transhumanists approach technology and science in a manner akin to how ancient peoples approached magic potions, amulets, and alchemy. Others, like philosopher Eric Steinhart, have described Transhumanism as a type of techno-theurgy. Theurgy, of course, was a late magical practice prevalent during the Roman Empire. The goal of theurgy was to transform human bodies in a way that would allow them to attain divine qualities. Much of the same pattern of thinking appears in Transhumanism. Transhumanism, thus can be seen as a modern iteration of age-old fantasies and desires, with technoscience providing the magical solution.[103]

The presence of the 'fantastical' in Transhumanism and its utopian impulses have been well noted by critics, such as philosopher Michael Hauskeller and futurist Roberto Paura. Hauskeller (2012) views the goal of creating the Posthuman as a "wish-fulfilment fantasy," while Paura (2016) considers Transhumanism to be a new utopia based on techno-optimism, emerging from a distinct social

---

Techno-Religion, and Post-Secular Transcendence." (2019).

[102] Ihde, Don. *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*. Indiana University Press. (1990); Ihde, Don. "Of Which Human Are We Post." In *H+/-: Transhumanism and Its Critics*, 136-146. Philadelphia: Metanexus Institute. (2011).

[103] Steinhart, Eric. "Theurgy and transhumanism." Revista Archai: e02905. (2020).

imaginary. [104] Levin (2020), goes further and describes transhumanists' notion of humanity's self-transformation into divinity via science and technology as 'pure fantasy'. [105] While these critiques highlight the fantastical elements of transhumanism, they also underscore its function as a meaning-making system in a secular context.

These arguments support the view that Transhumanism can be understood as a form of secular meaning-making or technological re-enchantment of the world, in line with the broader concept of enchantment discussed earlier. Transhumanism has created a futuristic vision of infinite promise, wonder and marvel based on technoscientific imagination. It has simultaneously infused the world with a sense of order and purpose and has provided a teleology of human existence. In Transhumanism the primary aim of humanity becomes ensuring the continuity of intelligence by developing the Posthuman, transferring the mind into digital form, and spreading superintelligence throughout the universe. In this vision, the fundamental objective of human existence has become inseparable from technoscientific imagination.

It's important to note that while this analysis frames transhumanism as a form of secular enchantment, it does not negate the potential technological advancements or societal changes that transhumanist ideas might bring about. The purpose of this framing is not to argue for or against transhumanism, but to understand its function in contemporary society as a meaning-making system and a response to the disenchantment of modernity.

Transhumanism as Ersatz Religion

In this section, we examine transhumanism through the lens of functional definitions of religion, an approach well-established in academic literature pertaining to transhumanism. This perspective, drawing on the work of scholars such as Emile Durkheim, Robert

---

[104] Hauskeller, Michael. "Reinventing Cockaigne: Utopian themes in transhumanist thought." The Hastings Center Report 42, no. 2: 39. (2012); Paura, Roberto. "Singularity believers and the new utopia of transhumanism." Im@ go. A Journal of the Social Imaginary 7: 23-35. (2016).

[105] Levin, *Posthuman bliss?*

Bellah, Talcott Parsons and others, has been applied to transhumanism by notable researchers including Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (2012), Robert Geraci (2014), and Michael Burdett (2015). [106] These definitions focus on the social and psychological functions that belief systems serve, rather than specific theological content. From this perspective, as previous scholars have demonstrated, we can analyze how transhumanism fulfils similar roles to traditional religions in providing meaning, purpose, and a vision of transcendence, albeit through secular means. This approach allows us to situate our analysis within a rich body of existing scholarship on the quasi-religious aspects of transhumanism.

As a worldview, Transhumanism exhibits many religious dimensions. This fact has been identified and acknowledged by previous scholarship. According to Taylor (2007), one of the primary functions of religions is to provide answers to existential questions and address the spiritual yearnings of humans. In Transhumanism, we see the creation of surrogate secular narratives that fulfil these same functions.[107] In the previous sub-section, we discussed how the transhumanist reliance on science and technology functions in ways analogous to religious faith, providing a sense of certainty and hope for the future. Furthermore, critics such as Burdett (2014) have argued that the manner in which Transhumanism believes in the myth of progress is religious in nature and can be seen as a debased version of Christian eschatology. [108] While acknowledging that transhumanism is not a traditional religion, these comparisons highlight how it functions as a meaning-making system in a secular context, fulfilling roles traditionally associated with religious belief systems.

Transhumanism expresses deep religious themes in

---

[106] For a functionalist perspective on religion, see Émile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995); Robert N. Bellah, Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011) and "Civil Religion in America," Daedalus 96, no. 1 (1967): 1–21; Talcott Parsons, The Social System (New York: Free Press, 1951) and Essays in Sociological Theory (New York: Free Press, 1949).

[107] Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "Transhumanism as a secularist faith." *Zygon®, 47*(4), 710-734. (2012).

[108] Burdett, *The Religion of Technology*.

technoscientific verbiage. As we have already discussed, it provides an overarching framework with its own ontology, epistemology, anthropology and teleology. A fantastical, quasi-eschatological vision of the future and promises transcendence and even divinity are provided in Transhumanism. In Transhumanism the longing for transcendence takes on religious dimensions, although the method of attaining transcendence differs.[109] All of which bears a striking resemblance to religious narratives.[110]

It has incorporated utopian, eschatological, and apocalyptic themes like those found in Judaism and later in Christianity.[111] In particular, the concept of technological Singularity is strikingly similar to the Christian idea of rapture. The sense of expectation regarding the Singularity resembles the approach of millenarian and apocalyptic movements. In addition, Transhumanism has its own charismatic leaders and Gurus. Interestingly, transhumanism shares notable similarities with modern technoscientific religions like Scientology and UFO cults like Raelianism.[112] Like Transhumanism, these movements also market exclusive paths of Enlightenment and have technoscientific narratives of purpose, apocalypse, and transcendence. Therefore, in several significant ways, Transhumanism functions as a surrogate religion.[113]

The Roots of Transhumanism's Secular Enchantment

Having established Transhumanism's quasi-religious characteristics and its similarities to technoscientific cults, it is essential to examine

---

[109] Hopkins, Patrick D. "Transcending the animal: How transhumanism and religion are and are not alike." *Journal of Evolution and Technology, 14*(2), 13-28. (2005).

[110] Schussler, Agnes E. "Transhumanism as a new techno-religion and personal development: In the framework of a future technological spirituality." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies, 18*(53), 92-106. (2019).

[111] Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "Utopianism and eschatology: Judaism engages transhumanism." In Religion and Transhumanism, 161-180. Praeger. (2015).

[112] Bainbridge, William S., and Rodney Stark. "Scientology: To be perfectly clear." *Sociological Analysis, 41*(2), 128-136. (1980); Bigliardi, Stefano. "New religious movements and science: Rael's progressive patronizing parasitism." *Zygon®, 50*(1), 64-83. (2015).

[113] Geraci, Robert M. *Apocalyptic AI: Visions of heaven in robotics, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality*. Oxford University Press. (2012).

how the movement's underlying philosophical commitments lead it to a secular enchantment of the world.

In 1882, Friedrich Nietzsche articulated the crisis of Nihilism in the West. He argued that as the influence of Christianity fades and the promise of heaven and the afterlife disappears, the West will be plunged into Nihilism. [114] All higher values will become meaningless, all morals will be empty rhetoric, and all objective parameters will vanish, everything becoming interpretation. The rise of Transhumanism can be seen as a manifestation of this crisis as well as an attempt to counteract its existential implications.

This connection between transhumanism and the crisis of nihilism is not merely an academic interpretation, but is explicitly acknowledged within the transhumanist movement itself. Notably, in the early 1990s, Max More, one of the first and most prominent philosophical proponents of modern transhumanism, set out to develop the movement as an alternative to the dichotomy between religious worldviews and modern nihilism. In his 1990 article 'Transhumanism: Towards a Futurist Philosophy,' published in Extropy, More explicitly states:

> *"...the alternative to religion is not a despairing nihilism, nor sterile scientism, but a transhumanism"[115]*

More's version of transhumanism emphasizes the values of indefinite expansion and self-transformation through technology, positioning it as a secular meaning-fostering system that can function as an alternative to religion and fill the immense gap created by modern nihilism. This deliberate positioning of transhumanism as a response to the nihilistic crisis further supports our argument about the movement's roots in and reaction to the existential challenges posed by modernity.

The main driving forces behind Transhumanism are its *dunya-centrism* and denial of the afterlife. The material world is at the ontological centre of the transhumanist worldview, which

---

[114] Nietzsche, Friedrich. The gay science: With a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs. Vintage. (2010).

[115] More, Max. "Transhumanism: Towards a futurist philosophy." Extropy 6, no. 6 (1990): 11.

inevitably leads to its sacralization. If the world is all there is, it becomes almost imperative to create a promise and vision of transcendence centred on that world to escape the immense pull of Nihilism. As existence is limited to this world and this world only, transcendence has to come here and through material means.

Epistemologically, Transhumanism is strongly influenced by scientism. As we have already discussed, transhumanists believe in science's exclusive access to and authority over the truth.[116] Thus, when seeking to attain transcendence and to create the Posthuman Transhumanism turns to science and technology. The secular humanist worldview defined humanity on the basis of its ability to use reason while being free from faith. From this position, Transhumanism moves reduces human cognition to information patterns and operations, which can be made into mere data.[117]

These ontological and epistemological commitments inevitably lead to one of two positions: nihilism or secular enchantment. Transhumanists, unwilling to accept the implications of the crisis foreseen by Nietzsche, choose the latter path, seeking to build their own god or even to become one themselves. Thus, Transhumanism can be seen as an attempt to create new meanings, promises, and values in a world saturated with the aftershocks of Nihilism. Transhumanism tries to solve the puzzle of Nihilism by returning to its Enlightenment roots and taking its metanarratives of autonomy, progress, and techno-solutionism to their absolute limits.

This impulse is found in many transhumanists works, both implicitly and explicitly. Prominent transhumanist philosopher Max More specifically states that it was the crisis of Nihilism that, in part, motivated him to develop his vision of Transhumanism. More argues that the end of religion has plunged humanity into a desperate nihilism and that Transhumanism represents an alternative to both religious and nihilistic visions of reality. He emphasizes the need to replace religion with a meaning-fostering system and offers his brand of Transhumanism as the solution.[118]

---

[116] Habermas, Jürgen. *The future of human nature*. Polity Press. (2003).

[117] Levin, *Posthuman bliss?*

[118] More, Max. "Technological self-transformation: Expanding personal extropy." *Extropy, 4*(2), 15-24. (1993).

Transhumanism thus emerges as a new and nominally secular meaning-fostering system, delivering a patchwork worldview.[119] By presenting an all-encompassing narrative of transcendence exclusively built upon seemingly rational and scientific premises Transhumanism attempts to fulfil an innate human need for meaning and purpose, in a manner suitable for people with an atheistic bent.[120] [121] The *dunya-centrism*, scientism, and hyper-rationalism of the transhumanist worldview, coupled with its rejection of divine revelation and metaphysical knowledge, leads it inevitably to construct a narrative of secular enchantment.

At the beginning of the last century, modern man was captivated by secular ideologies such as Communism, Liberalism, Humanism, and Nazism, as well as aspects of modern civilization. Transhumanism emerges at a stage in modernity where political utopias have given way to technoscientific ones, offering a compelling narrative of transcendence and meaning through technological mastery and the pursuit of the Posthuman. By providing a worldview that promises salvation through science and technology, Transhumanism functions as a powerful form of secular enchantment, captivating the minds and imaginations of those seeking meaning and purpose in an increasingly disenchanted world.

Jahiliyyah and Techno-*Jahiliyyah*

The preceding analysis of Transhumanism as a form of secular enchantment reveals its emergence as a response to the crisis of modernity and its role in filling the resultant spiritual void through secular modes and strategies of enchantment. This sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the phenomenon of Transhumanism from an Islamic perspective.

This section will delve deeper and apply the Islamic philosophical lens of *Jahiliyyah* to Transhumanism. This framing, developed by 20th -century thinkers Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) and

---

[119] MacFarlane, Alan. *Transhumanism as a New Social Movement: The Techno-Centred Imagination*. Springer Nature. (2020).

[120] Walach, Harald. *Secular spirituality*. Springer International Publishing AG. (2014).

[121] Levin, *Posthuman bliss?*

Muhammad Qutb (d. 1994), provides a unique vantage point to explain the emergence of such a movement in modernity, and articulate a counternarrative from an Islamic worldview. This analysis will reveal how the specific features and aspirations of the transhumanist movement embody the characteristics of *Jahiliyyah*, and how the phenomenon itself can be seen as "*techno-jahiliyyah*."

Jahiliyyah as a Critique of Modernity

The Arabic term *jahiliyyah*, meaning ignorance with a connotation of barbarism, is traditionally used to denote the period and state of affairs in pre-Islamic Arabia. However, Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Qutb revived and expanded this concept to develop a scathing critique of modernity.[122] The Qutb brothers developed this concept over several decades, spanning several works. However, the most succinct articulation of their concept of *Jahiliyyah* is found in Sayyid Qutb's *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Milestones), first published in 1964, and in Muhammad Qutb's *Jahiliyyah al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (The 20th Century *Jahiliyyah*), published in 1965.

In these works, they argue that *Jahiliyyah* is not merely a specific historical period but a recurring condition in human history and societies characterized by existential and spiritual ignorance. It is a condition characterized by the rejection of divine guidance that impacts several aspects of life.[123] It damages man's relationship with God, thus affecting his relationships with other creations, including other humans, nature, and the universe.

According to the Qutbian perspective, any civilization cut off from divine guidance qualifies as existing in a state of *Jahiliyyah*. Certain common features are found in all manifestations of *Jahiliyyah*.[124] Among these features is the rejection of *Iman*, or faith in Allah. This rejection leads to deviation from the straight path (*as-sirat al mustaqeem*) and worship of Allah. According to the Qutb

---

[122] Khatab, Sayed. "Hakimiyyah and jahiliyyah in the thought of Sayyid Qutb." *Middle Eastern Studies, 38*(3), 145-170. (2002).

[123] Qutb, Sayyid. *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*. Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq. (1964); Khatab, Sayed. *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb: The Theory of Jahiliyyah*. Routledge. (2006); Choueiri, Youssef M. *Islamic fundamentalism*. Pinter Publishers. (1990).

[124] Khatab, Hakimiyyah and jahiliyyah in the thought of Sayyid Qutb.

brothers, worship is not limited to periodic rites and rituals, but it means to accept, follow, and implement the laws revealed by Allah in every aspect of life.[125] This concept of *Jahiliyyah*, rooted in a specific understanding of religion as divine guidance for all aspects of life, provides a framework for critiquing modern secular societies.

Another defining feature of all forms of *Jahiliyyah* is to follow the whims, desires, ideas, speculations, and conjectures of mortal men, instead of following divine guidance. This rejection of the divine leads jahili societies to the devotion and following of *Tawagheet* (plural of *taghut*), false gods or objects of worship besides Allah.[126]

The Qutb brothers contend that modernity, with its emphasis on secularism, individualism, and the primacy of human reason, represents a new form of *Jahiliyyah*.[127] This new *jahiliyya* is devoid of justice, solidarity, unity, or harmony and is rampant with immorality. It creates regimes of knowledge that legitimize the sacralization of the world or the worship of false temporal gods. Governed by oppressive dictators that prioritize man-made laws and cut off from divine guidance, modern societies have plunged into a spiral of moral relativism, which has led to the progressive breaking down of values and social structures.[128] The only way to overcome this new *Jahiliyyah* is through a return to the divine guidance provided by Islam. This requires rejecting the secularist worldview and reasserting the primacy of divine revelation in all aspects of life.[129]

By framing *Jahiliyyah* as a recurring condition in human history, the Qutb brothers have provided a potent and insightful Islamic lens for analyzing and critiquing modernity. This framing serves as a valuable starting point for an Islamic analysis of

---

[125] Qutb, *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*.

[126] Quṭb, Sayyid. *Jāhilīya al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn*. Dār al-Shurūq. (1993). (Original work published 1965).

[127] Shepard, William E. "Sayyid Qutb's doctrine of jāhiliyya." *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 35*(4), 521-545. (2003).

[128] Quṭb, *Jāhilīya al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn*.

[129] Qutb, *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*; Haddad, Yvonne Y. "The Qur'anic justification for an Islamic revolution: The view of Sayyid Quṭb." *The Middle East Journal, 37*(1), 14-29. (1983); Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb*.

contemporary issues and challenges, including the rise of Transhumanism.

Transhumanism as Techno-Jahiliyyah

Let us now examine whether Transhumanism can be seen as *Jahiliyyah* or a particular technoscientific manifestation of *Jahiliyyah* as outlined in the Qutbian framework. Two possible lines of argument may be utilized to address this. The first is to investigate how the Qutb brothers characterize modernity as *Jahiliyyah* and determine whether these characteristics are present in Transhumanism. The second approach is to demonstrate that, when viewed through the Qutbian lens, the secular enchantment and quasi-religious dimensions of Transhumanism render it a false religion.

As we have already seen, modernity is characterized as *Jahiliyyah* in the Qutbian framework. Sayyid and Muhammad Qutb hold that modernity's rejection of divine revelation, its materialistic ontology, and the creation of secular utopias built upon the myth of progress leads to a profound existential crisis.[130] According to them, certain distinctive characteristics are emblematic of this new *Jahiliyyah*. One such quality is the extreme veneration for technology and science because of the growth and material development they bring. According to Muhammad Qutb, this fascination with technoscience leads modern societies into a form of intoxication. In this intoxication, they position humanity as a rival or challenger to the authority of Allah.[131] This is the Promethean impulse of modernity articulated through an Islamic lens. In Transhumanism, we see an intense form of Promethean hubris. The transhumanist vision not only wants to challenge God but also wants to create man into God by technologically upgrading human nature.[132]

Another distinctive characteristic of modernity is the creation

---

[130] Quṭb, *Jāhilīya al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn*.

[131] Quṭb, *Jāhilīya al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn*; Bursey, S. *Finding Muhammad Qutb: Praising Ghosts Online, a Different Qutbian Legacy and Islamic Revivalism in the Gulf.* (2017).

[132] Hughes, James. Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future. Westview Press. (2004).

of ideologies, which function as regimes of knowledge, legitimizing the creation of false religions and deities. Modern societies, and more appropriately, modern states, limit religion and embrace ideologies such as liberalism, secularism, humanism, and nationalism, which take people away from the obedience of Allah, enchant the material world, and are built upon nothing but human speculation. [133] Transhumanism perpetuates this *jahili* impulse of rejecting God's sovereignty and relying on man-made systems of meaning and purpose. [134] It is a worldview or an "-*ism*" built upon metanarratives of modernity with the purpose of providing transcendence through exclusively secular, i.e., technoscientific means. Furthermore, transhumanism's elevation of human desires and aspirations to a quasi-divine status epitomizes the *jahili* trait of arrogant anthropocentrism, which is characteristic of modernity or the new *Jahiliyyah*.

Transhumanism embodies various distinctive characteristics of new *jahiliyyah* or modernity—forms of extreme scientism, arrogant anthropocentrism, and technological hubris—and weaves them into a technoscientific narrative of transcendence. Transhumanism, as an intensification of modernity's core principles, embodies these characteristics of *Jahiliyyah* in a technologically-focused form.

Moving on to the second line of argument, it can be reasonably posited that, viewed through the Qutbian perspective, the technological re-enchantment of the world created by Transhumanism and its quasi-religious nature renders it a uniquely modern false religion. As discussed in the previous section on secular enchantment, the movement exhibits many religious dimensions and functions as an ersatz religion. The promises of Transhumanism closely mirror religious themes and motifs.

Such aspects of Transhumanism make it a particularly striking manifestation of modernity's tendency to create false idols and ideologies that lead people astray from the straight path (*as-sirat al mustaqeem*). Transhumanism marks a migration of the holies, characteristic of modernity, where devotion and the sense of sacred are transferred from religious to secular objects and projects.

---

[133] Quṭb, *Jāhilīya al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn*.
[134] Qutb, *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*.

Through a Qutbian lens, Transhumanism can thus be seen as a technological manifestation of the new *Jahiliyyah*, or *Techno-Jahiliyyah*. It is emblematic of the modern *Jahiliyyah* in two significant ways. First, it signifies a profound existential ignorance caused by the rejection of *Iman* and revelation. The conditions conducive to the emergence of Transhumanism were set by the absence of meaning and purpose or the disenchantment created by modernity. Second, Transhumanism sought to fill this void created by modernity by re-enchanting the material world through exclusively secular and rational means and narratives, particularly through faith in the ability of science and technology.

Thus, through the Qutbian framework of *Jahiliyyah*, Transhumanism emerges as *techno-jahiliyyah*, a technoscientific manifestation of modernity's core impulses and *jahili* tendencies. The Qutbian critique provides a powerful tool for challenging the movement's assumptions and asserting the primacy of Islamic values and principles in guiding human affairs.

Conclusion

This research has shown that the transhumanist worldview is a reaction to modernity's crisis of meaning and purpose. Deeply rooted in the metanarratives of modernity, it functions as a form of secular enchantment manifesting through the technoscientific imaginary. Applying the Islamic concept of *Jahiliyyah* to transhumanism reveals it as a form of *techno-jahiliyyah*—a state of profound existential ignorance marked by an unwavering faith in science and technology as the exclusive means of transcendence and salvation.

This analysis argues that transhumanism, far from being a purely rational and scientific movement, represents a form of techno-*jahiliyyah* that embodies the core tendencies of modernity that Islamic thought has long critiqued. By applying the Qutbian framework of *Jahiliyyah*, the paper has revealed how transhumanism functions as a secular meaning-making system in response to the crisis of nihilism in the modern world.

The Islamic critique of transhumanism offered in this paper provides valuable insights for both Islamic scholarship and the broader discourse on human enhancement technologies. For Islamic

thought, it demonstrates the continued relevance and applicability of concepts like *Jahiliyyah* to contemporary philosophical and technological movements. For the broader discourse on transhumanism, this Islamic perspective introduces a novel critique that goes beyond typical secular objections, highlighting the spiritual and existential dimensions often overlooked in debates focused solely on ethics or practicality.

There are several limitations to the study. The analysis focuses on the Qutbian concept of *Jahiliyyah*, which, although offering valuable insights, represents just one strand of Islamic thought. Future research could explore other Islamic perspectives on technology, human enhancement, and the transhumanist movement. Moreover, while this paper has provided a critique of transhumanism from an Islamic perspective, the development of a comprehensive Islamic counternarrative is beyond its scope. This represents an important area for future research, which could explore how Islamic principles might offer alternative approaches to the challenges and opportunities presented by emerging technologies.

The paper lays the groundwork for further exploration of the topic from a variety of Islamic perspectives. As such, the paper represents a significant step towards a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the implications of transhumanism and the role of technology in humanity's future.

AL-SHAJARAH

Special Issue 2024

Contents

WoS-Indexed under *Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Current Contents/Arts and Humanities* and **Scopus**

9 771394 687009