



Yunus Tuncel (ed.), *Nietzsche and Transhumanism. Precursor or Enemy?*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Series: Nietzsche Now, 2017, 283 pp.

The essays compiled in the first part of this anthology reproduce the debate that arose in the pages of the *Journal of Evolution & Technology* following the publication, in 2009, of Stefan Lorenz Sorgner's article, "Nietzsche, the Overhuman and Transhumanism". Prominent representatives of this movement, such as Max More, Michael Hauskeller and Bill Hibbard, took part, and the following year Sorgner himself responded to them in the same journal. The second part of the volume is devoted to presenting the contributions, be they critical or favourable, which leading Nietzschean researchers of the English-speaking world, such as Keith Ansell Pearson, Paul S. Loeb or Babette Babich, published in 2011 in "The Agonist", the journal of the Nietzsche Circle, with reference to the Sorgnerian thesis. This second part closes with the responses given by the author to all of them, refining them by displaying the type of relationship that posits between Nietzschean thought and current transhumanism. Finally, a third section brings together subsequent contributions to the same debate, which are published in this volume for the first time, signed by high-profile scholars such as Michael Steinmann, Russell Blackford, Rebecca Bamford, Yunus Tuncel and Ashley Woodward. And then, again, Sorgner himself tries to answer all of them in some detailed considerations that bring the book to a close.

The first thing that the reader will no doubt wonder is what the import of relating Nietzschean thought to trans- and posthumanism could be. In Sorgner's opinion, it would give many transhumanists the opportunity to add philosophical depth to their reflections, freeing themselves from an undoubted utilitarianist polarization to which nearly all of them would be subject as members of the Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere. On the other hand, it is true that establishing himself in the transhumanist field will allow a person who, like Sorgner, comes to the world of philosophy, and in particular bioethics, with a "soft" Nietzscheanism behind him, inspired by the version of the classic German thinker that we owe to Vattimo and his *pensiero debole*, to thematize the most impelling topics of the present panorama. So the transhumanist will become deeper and more sensitive to the complexity of the situations we face, while the philosopher influenced by Nietzsche will have a unique opportunity to apply himself to thinking about the present day, however "untimely" it may be.

Of course, the initial point of reference for the whole debate could only be the famous controversy between Habermas and Sloterdijk over liberal eugenics. But Sorgner reminds us that in the end Sloterdijk turned out to be as much a bioconservative as Habermas. In opposition to both, and in favour of liberal eugenics or genetic engineering from a perspective that claims to be Nietzschean, Sorgner himself puts forward an argument, somewhat doubtful in my opinion, against Habermas's manoeuvre to discredit transhumanism by malevolently relating it to that negative

image of Nietzsche's inheritance that is still held in some circles, especially in Germany. In order to affirm the positive relationship between Nietzschean thought and the central theme of the transhumanist movement, Sorgner will appeal to what he calls a "structural analogy" between education in a "classical" sense, on the one hand, and liberal eugenics or genetic engineering on the other. That is to say, as it happens that for Nietzsche, the way to the superman or overhuman would be, apparently, above all else the way of education or culture, then it must be concluded that the German philosopher would not have made any objection to the proposal and project of technological improvement of our species, in the event that they had been at our disposal in his time. But Sorgner's argument, at the same time, would supposedly have the virtue of suddenly disabling Habermas' objections, which, as we know, are in line with distinguishing culture and education from technological improvement. If I said that I find all this somewhat doubtful is because the only clue that Sorgner will give us as to the particulars of the structural analogy between the two is that in both cases the decision of the parents will condition the cognitive and emotional future of their children, even if we look at it in an optimistic way as a reversible "improvement".

On the other hand, Sorgner argues that it would be better not to agree with Nietzsche, but to defend the option of maintaining one's firmness in both alethic and ethical nihilism. Because from the point of view of a society purged of authoritarian structures, the conviction that any philosophical perspective can be false, together with the conviction that no non-formal idea of good is plausible anymore, would not only be the meaningful convictions at the present time, but would finally liberate the "psycho-physiological entities" that we are from any threat of violence. Without a doubt, this demand for generalized nihilism confronts us with considerable hermeneutical tensions in the study of Nietzschean texts. But it is true that in this nihilistic context, it is conceivable that the bioethical challenges that give meaning to transhumanism can be approached in a way that for Sorgner is above all simple and paradoxically natural, so to speak.

There are exciting moments in Sorgner's considerations responding to his critics, especially Babich and Tuncel in my view, partly due to the brilliance of their contributions. The sarcastic tone of the former's paper does not distract us from the correctness and accuracy of some of her objections to the Sorgnerian idea of a Nietzsche well disposed towards transhumanism. For example, that this movement resembles the philosophy of the last man in Nietzsche's own terms, he of the lamentable welfare that the people seek above all other considerations, that last man who would, not by chance, turn out to be the one who lives longest. Or above all, that with trans- and posthumanism what we have is the "penultimate" version of the ascetic ideal that animates the person who above all wants to be in a different place from the one we are in. This is not to minimize in any way the importance of the inevitable conclusion that, with all this futurism of techno-science, the insurmountable gulf between the rich and the poor comes back to haunt us. Tuncel, on the other hand, explores the relevance of pain and suffering, that is to say, their tragic affirmation, in Nietzsche's thought. The overhuman would have the sense of accepting life as it is, in its joy and its pain, and even in its unlimited repetition, but certainly not the sense of maximizing utility and declaring total war on suffering as we would expect from any dull textbook progressive and as we would take for granted from any transhumanist ideal in the common understanding we have of it.

The truth is that, with the exception of some brilliant dialectical skirmishes of an active and positive character, Sorgner usually rejects his critics by limiting the scope of his own theses in order to diminish the formers' polemical potential. This is an art that he undoubtedly dominates, but with which he runs the risk of making us see his soft Nietzschean approach to transhumanism as somewhat trivial.

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