

Zarathustra 2.0 and Beyond

Further Remarks on the Complex Relationship between Nietzsche and Transhumanism

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After the intense debate concerning the relationship between Nietzsche, European Posthumanisms and Transhumanism which has taken place in three issues of the *Journal of Evolution and Technology* (Vol. 20, issue 1; Vol. 21, issues 1 and 2), with this issue of “The Agonist” the exchange has entered the realm of Nietzsche scholarship which I regard as an important step given the relevance of the questions which have been raised by transhumanists. Due to the close structural similarity between Nietzsche’s philosophy and many transhumanists’ reflections, for which I argued at least, an exchange between the two discourses can be of great use for scholars of both topics. As Nietzsche scholarship is related to the tradition of continental philosophy and transhumanists’ reflections are most closely connected to analytical ethics exchanges and the Anglo-American Utilitarian (Mill) and evolutionary theory (Darwin) tradition, experts of both disciplines do not usually meet and argue with one another. I hope the following reflections and arguments will make it even more obvious that there is a structural similarity between the views of Nietzsche and those of transhumanists, even though the sound in which they put forward their understandings of the world differs significantly. The inspiring articles by Babich and Loeb provide an excellent basis for clarifying some specific issues which are closely related to the debate, so that the views of Nietzsche and those of transhumanists become clearer. In addition, I use some insights gained from these exchanges to put forward new perspectives and values by developing further selected arguments which have been put forward by Nietzsche as well as by transhumanists.

I will progress as follows: In the initial sections 1 to 14, I deal with questions and topics Babich dealt with in her piece within this issue of *The Agonist* (2012) and in the later sections 15 and 16 I clarify some challenges Loeb mentioned in his article in this issue of *The Agonist* (2012). The reason why I am considering more points Babich raised is not that her piece is better or worse than Loeb's article, but I am mostly in agreement with the positions Loeb argued for and hence there was not much need to argue against his points of view, even though I do argue against the very heart of his position, which concerns the relationship between the overhuman and the eternal recurrence according to Nietzsche's perspective. Babich, on the other hand, referred to several important challenges concerning the relationship between Nietzsche and transhumanism, and as she criticized me with respect to many of the topics mentioned; I face her challenges and respond to the questions raised. I am very grateful to both Babich and Loeb for this incredibly stimulating philosophical exchange.

1- Methodology

I need to make some remarks concerning Babich's interpretation of my methodology, because some of them are incorrect, e.g.:

For Sorgner, had Nietzsche only known, *per impossible*, of transhumanism, he could only have been sympathetic with the ideal.

This is not what I argued for. I only showed that there are significant similarities between Nietzsche's philosophy and transhumanists' positions. Neither did I claim that Nietzsche's philosophy is identical with transhumanism in all respects, nor that transhumanism was actually influenced by Nietzsche's writings. However, in one of the replies to my initial paper Max More¹ upholds the latter position by stressing that he himself, who is a leading

¹ Max More, The Overhuman in the Transhuman. In: *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 21(1) (January

transhumanist thinker, was influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy. In any case, Babich explains her reading of my methodology further:

Sorgner tells us in his essay what, in his judgment, Nietzsche would have "liked." Hence we are informed that Nietzsche would have been an advocate of transhumanism. This is an argument by assertion.

In one case, I mentioned that given the structural analogies of genetic enhancement by means of the alteration of genes and classical education and the relevance of education for bringing about the overhuman according to Nietzsche provides us with a reason for assuming that he might have also been in favor of certain genetic enhancement technologies. I stressed that these reflections provide us with a reason for asserting that the fact that genetic enhancement procedures play an important role in transhumanist reflections but do not and cannot turn up in Nietzsche's philosophy is not a reason for dissociating Nietzsche from the transhumanist movement. However, this does not imply that I claim to know what Nietzsche would have liked or that he necessarily would have been in favor of transhumanist ideals. Both claims are far too strong. Neither did I wish to argue for them, nor do I think that they can get argued for. It would have to be mere speculation, if one aimed to show the aforementioned position. My goal was a weak one, namely to show that there are structural similarities between transhumanist reflections and Nietzsche's philosophy. I regard this insight as important because given such a similarity it is possible to employ Nietzsche's lines of thought to develop transhumanist reflections further and to also reveal crucial challenges some transhumanist concepts have to face. Both procedures can be important for trying to find a more appropriate way of dealing with emerging technologies.

2 - No one wants to play with Freddy

A further mistake in Babich's article which I need to point out is that she claims that I did not inquire why many thinkers do not wish to get associated with Nietzsche:

And yet, as we have noted, Sorgner chooses not to take his point of departure by inquiring into the reasons Bostrom and Co. might have — here along with a number of others such as Habermas but also and for different reasons also including the preternaturally insightful and musically creative Jaron Lanier² — to seek to keep Nietzsche at a distance.

In a different section she repeats the same point in a slightly different manner:

Yet Sorgner opts to defer, at least for the most part, any direct engagement with the specific reasons given by other transhumanists for seeking to keep their distance from Nietzsche.

I have to correct both of her remarks because I do mention and analyze some of the reasons explicitly in the article *Beyond Humanism*³:

In his influential essay on liberal eugenics, Habermas (2001, 43) talks about some freaky intellectuals who reject what they see as the illusion of equality and try to develop a very German naturalistic ideology. This seriously considers the potential for employing human biotechnology in the service of Nietzschean breeding fantasies. This is the kind of identification that Bostrom rightly fears. Habermas, who rejects all procedures of genetic enhancement, identifies transhumanists (whom he refers to incorrectly as “posthumanists”) with Nietzscheans, associating both with fascist breeding ideologies. Habermas is rhetorically gifted, and he knew exactly what he was doing – that an effective way to bring about negative reactions to human biotechnological procedures in the reader would be to identify those measures with procedures undertaken in Nazi Germany.

Maybe, Babich intended to claim that I have not dealt with the topic sufficiently enough.

This might be the case. Hence, I will make some further remarks on that topic in section 4.

Not only will I discuss why thinkers do not wish to play with Freddy in that section, but I

2 See Jaron Lanier's *You Are Not A Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Knopf, 2010). It is utterly relevant to the present context that in response to an email inquiry I sent regarding the argument I cite here, Lanier's first response was the exclamation, “Yikes, Nietzsche studies!” As an academic, one might wish that further commentary would be needed on this point but yikes is the sort of comment that does its own self-commenting.

3 Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Beyond Humanism*. In: *Journal of Evolution and Technology* - Vol. 21 Issue 2 – October 2010, 1-19.

will also analyze how Nietzsche is interwoven into the recent enhancement debates in Germany.

3 - The Good as Universal Concept or as Advertised Goal

The question of values and norms within the Nietzsche and transhumanism comparison is a tricky one and one I have not yet considered in its appropriate depth. The following remark from Babich's text made it clear to me that some further clarifications concerning this topic are needed.

Beyond what he calls "ontological dynamics," (ibid., 32), Sorgner discovers additional parallels on the level of values, the same level so important for Bostrom as he for his own part argues for a normative appreciation of the transhuman, i.e., and in terms of what it ought be.

Babich did not criticise me in this phrase. However, I must point out that there are not only parallels but there can also be differences between the two philosophies in question, e.g. the methods of how transhumanists and how Nietzsche argues for the relevance of the development beyond human beings differs in some cases. Nietzsche does not put forward universal norms. He is a rigid critic of norms. I explained his critique of norms in detail in my most recent Nietzsche monograph *Menschenwürde nach Nietzsche*.⁴ Nietzsche associates norms with slave moralities, which he criticizes. He, on the other hand, puts forward values, as it is done within a master morality, which implies that he does not claim that his values are universally valid. Nietzsche merely puts forward reasons to advertise a certain position concerning the good, and he employs this method also with respect to the overhuman by putting forward the suggestion that the overhuman is the meaning of the earth.

⁴ Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Menschenwürde nach Nietzsche. Die Geschichte eines Begriffs*, (Darmstadt: WBG 2010).

Some transhumanists use a similar method as Nietzsche, e.g. Bostrom who refers to psychological research to support his claim that a person leads a better life, if he has higher capacities, lives longer and so on.⁵ Thereby, he does not claim that all people lead a better life, if they have higher capacities, but he merely stresses that the psychological research on which he bases his judgment provide us with a reason for holding that some judgments concerning the good life apply to many people. Given that the research shows that a certain value judgment is widely shared within a society, we do have a reason for making such a judgment while one has to be aware that the judgment is not valid for all people at all times.

Other transhumanists and quite a few bioliberal thinkers put forward stronger positions concerning the good and the moral life, namely that we have a moral duty to use enhancement technologies to promote the good life. In contrast to the above position, here the focus lies on the question of the right whereby it gets connected with a universally valid concept of the good. Hence, such a position assumes that there is a universally valid concept of the good, and also that we ought to promote it whereby the “ought” is based upon a utilitarian foundation. This position differs from the above concepts, because the above position includes that there is no universally valid concept of the good. In addition, this Utilitarian position demands that the good ought to be promoted from which follows a universal moral imperative to act in a certain manner. The most prominent exponent of this position is the Oxford philosopher Julian Savulescu who is a bio-liberal pupil of Peter Singer but not a transhumanist. Still, he often puts forward positions, which are close to the ones transhumanists affirm. In two influential articles⁶ he argues in favour of a moral

5 Nick Bostrom, Why I want to be a Posthuman when I grow up. In: Bert Gordijn/R. Chadwick (Ed.), *Medical Enhancement and Posthumanity*, (New York et al.: Springer, 2009), 107-136 (in part. 114-116).

6 Julian Savulescu, Procreative Beneficence: Why we should select the best children. In: *Bioethics* 15 (5-6), 2001, 413–426.

duty to select the child with the best chance of the best life. Savulescu does not advertise the use of enhancement technologies but claims that there is a moral duty to use enhancement technologies to select the child with the best chance of the best life, which is a much stronger claim than the aforementioned one. This view is also supported by some transhumanists.

It needs to be stressed that on a political level both Savulescu and transhumanists (in contrast to Nietzsche) affirm the relevance of the norm of negative freedom, which implies that even though there might be the moral duty to select a certain child, Savulescu would not regard it as appropriate that this moral duty gets politically enforced. Hence, on a political level transhumanists and bio-liberals are liberal thinkers. Still, a wide spectrum of liberal positions can be found among transhumanists in between the libertarian Max More and the liberal social democrat James Hughes.

It was important for me to stress that Nietzsche does not put forward a theory of the good, which he regards as universally valid. He merely puts forward reasons for regarding his position as a plausible one. Bostrom argues analogously with respect to the question of the good whereby he draws upon psychological research to support his point of view. I regard both methods as appropriate ones. This judgment does not apply to Savulescu's position, which claims that there are universally valid judgments concerning the good; this is his reason for upholding some universal moral obligations. Even though these obligations are merely pro tanto obligations, they are seen as universally valid obligations. Due to my doubt concerning the possibility of grasping a universally valid concept of the good, I regard his position as problematic. I also think that Savulescu's

position has some morally problematic consequences (it might have totalitarian implications), if one applies them in a practical context.

4 - Nietzsche, Sloterdijk, Habermas and Genetic Enhancement

In section 2, I mentioned some reasons why many thinkers do not wish to get associated with Nietzsche. In this section I make some further remarks about this topic by considering the role of Nietzsche within the German bioethics debates.

Babich criticises me for not considering sufficiently Sloterdijk in the articles in question. (“as he also excludes Peter Sloterdijk”) She is right that Sloterdijk deserves detailed attention concerning this topic but not with respect to the work she has in mind:

Sorgner could do worse than to turn to Sloterdijk’s *Critique of Cynical Reason*.

I already published two articles in English⁷ in which I considered Sloterdijk’s philosophy, and one of them was an in depth treatment of the *Critique of Cynical Reason*.⁸ However, I regard his infamous speech *Rules for the Human Zoo*⁹ as far more important in this context, because it was responsible for starting a bigger public debate concerning the moral challenges of biotechnologies and enhancement techniques, it dealt with Nietzsche and it was referred to by Habermas in his little monograph on liberal eugenics. In one section of his treatise *The Future of Human Nature* Habermas mentions a bunch of mad intellectuals who develop further a very German ideology by putting forward a naturalist type of posthumanism.¹⁰ He also stresses that luckily this position, which comes along

7 Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, Nietzsche and Germany. In: *Philosophy Now* 29 (October/November 2000): 10-13. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, In Search of Lost Cheekiness: An Introduction to Peter Sloterdijk’s “Critique of Cynical Reason”. In: *Tabula Rasa* 20, 2003.

8 Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1983).

9 Peter Sloterdijk, *Regeln für den Menschenpark. Ein Antwortschreiben zu Heideggers Brief über den Humanismus*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1999).

10 Jürgen Habermas, *Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur. Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik?*

with Nietzschean type of breeding fantasies, has not yet gained broader support by the public according to him. By referring to a naturalist type of posthumanism he means transhumanism in whose context he sees Sloterdijk, because he cites passages from Sloterdijk's rules for the human zoo speech without mentioning Sloterdijk's name. This paragraph is particularly interesting because it reveals several problematic intuitions and false claims. I will point out three challenges related to the passages.

Firstly, it needs to be mentioned that the procedures he deals with are not posthumanist ones but transhumanist ones. Whereas posthumanism is embedded in the tradition of continental philosophy, transhumanism is mainly part of the Anglo-American bioethics scene. This does not mean that the two movements have nothing in common. However, the relationship between them is a complex one, and it will be dealt with in detail in the forthcoming collection *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction*, which will be edited by Robert Ranisch and myself and which will come out in my book series *Beyond Humanism: Trans- and Posthumanism*.¹¹

Secondly, in his speech *Rules for the Human Zoo* Sloterdijk merely stresses the relevance of dealing ethically with questions concerning biotechnologies. He did not make any strong normative claims in this context. In a later speech on human perfection which he gave on December 6th, 2005 at the University of Tübingen, he made clear that concerning normative judgments he is in agreement with Habermas' position by regarding gene technologies as morally appropriate for therapeutic purposes but morally problematic for enhancement ones. Hence, Sloterdijk clearly is not a transhumanist. What was seen as problematic concerning Sloterdijk's text on the human zoo and, which was also

(Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2001), 43.

¹¹ Robert Ranisch/Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction*, (New York et al.: Peter Lang forthcoming).

responsible for it to cause such a massive public debate in Germany, was the fact that he referred to Plato, Nietzsche and Heidegger, who are still seen as defenders of a totalitarian state system from the perspective of many Germans and also a lot of German intellectuals today. In addition, he employed a terminology (human zoo, breeding etc.) which did not help bring about a different impression on the reader either. Hence, it was mostly his rhetoric and style, which was responsible for bringing about the famous Habermas-Sloterdijk-debate rather than the content of the text.

In the context of the Nietzsche and transhumanism debate this fact is interesting. Just by referring to Nietzsche, Sloterdijk was regarded as a transhumanist by Habermas. Habermas also identifies transhumanism with Nietzschean breeding fantasies. The transhumanist Bostrom, on the other hand, does not regard Nietzsche as an ancestor of transhumanism.¹² Hence, it becomes clear why many thinkers do not wish to play with poor Freddy because he is widely regarded as a morally problematic or even dangerous thinker by many educated people today.

Thirdly, Habermas' remark needs to get criticized because he thinks that transhumanism has not yet gained a broader intellectual support. This might be a correct judgment with regard to Germany but it definitely has to get challenged with respect to many other cultures of the world, at least concerning the current state of affairs. Transhumanist publications dominate the Anglo-American academic debate in the field of bioethics and medical ethics, leading transhumanists teach and have permanent posts at some of the best universities of the English speaking world (e.g. University of Oxford), and an intense consideration of transhumanist reflections has taken place in various artistic

¹² Nick Bostrom, A History of Transhumanist Thought. In: *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, 14(1), 2005, 4.

and cultural realms. Here, I am merely referring to some selected examples: Films: *Gattaca*; Music: *Facing Goya* by Michael Nyman; Literature: *The Elementary Particles* and an immense amount of science fiction literature; Fine Arts: Patricia Piccini's *Still Life with Stem Cells* and *Alba the fluorescent rabbit* by Edouardo Kac. This short overview hints at the broad public awareness and engagement with transhumanist positions, which also shows that Habermas's judgment can be seen as implausible.

Given the central relevance and presence of Nietzsche with respect to the German bioethical debates concerning genetic enhancement, or as it has been referred to by Habermas "liberal eugenics", and the dubious reputation Nietzsche still has in many intellectual circles, it becomes clear why many intellectuals do not wish to be associated with him. However, there are similarities between Nietzsche and transhumanism, and I think that one can employ this insight for gaining further knowledge and for making new and more complex reflections on the problematic relationship between human beings and emerging technologies.

5 - Fascism, Totalitarianism or Hughes' Social Democratic Transhumanism?

As I have shown in the last section, Nietzsche still gets associated with totalitarianism by many educated people and intellectuals and hence many thinkers do not wish to get associated with Nietzsche. There are also some scholars who claim that totalitarian motives can be found within transhumanism, and Babich belongs to this group of scholars when she argues as follows:

Sorgner could do worse than to turn to Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*, in particular the bits at the end where Sloterdijk is at pains to show that then-popular futurists like Alwin Toffler and Marshall McLuhan, much

like today's Kurzweil,¹³ were themselves dependent upon an earlier generation of thinkers, not so much cold war thinkers but pre-World War II thinkers, including Friedrich Dessauer, but also Walter Rathaus, and Adrien Turel in a decidedly uncanny context that turns out to be nothing less than the crucible for the particular fascism that grew out of the Weimar Republic as Sloterdijk discusses it.

Babich claims that fascism had grown out of futurism and that there are parallels between earlier futurists and later transhumanist futurists. Hence she implies that there is the risk that a new type of fascism can grow out of contemporary transhumanism, which she stresses explicitly in the following statement:

Here we note the very specific (and very popularly Nietzschean) "faith" in science and especially industrial, corporate, capitalist technology that has, if we read Sloterdijk aright, been with us since the interregnum between the two wars which is again and also to say that such a vision is fascist through and through.

It is not the case that I cannot understand the worry that transhumanism can lead to a totalitarian system, but I do not think that a logical and necessary connection is given between these two types of structures as she wishes to make us believe. In addition, I do not think that fascism is the appropriate word to use here, as fascism implies both authoritarianism and nationalism. Transhumanism clearly is no movement that could be in favor of nationalism. However, her judgment would have to be considered more carefully, if Babich had used the term totalitarianism instead of fascism, because the novel *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley clearly shows that technological innovations can lead to a totalitarian system.¹⁴ The movie *Gattaca* reveals another danger, which Babich also has in

13 Vinge, "The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era," lecture, *VISION-21 Symposium*, NASA Lewis Research Center and the Ohio Aerospace Institute, Mar. 30-31, 1993. *Whole Earth Review*, Winter 1993.

<http://www.aleph.se/Trans/Global/Singularity/sing.html><http://www.aleph.se/Trans/Global/Singularity/sing.html>

14 By the way, Aldous Huxley wrote the novel as a response to the transhumanism put forward by his brother Julian Huxley who coined the concept "transhumanism" which bears many similarities to the more recent use of the concept and which is the reason why he can be seen as founder of transhumanism. However, it needs to be stressed that the word was created by Julian Huxley in his book *New Bottles for New Wine* after Aldous Huxley had written this most famous novel of his. Still, Julian Huxley has put forward ideas which were written in the spirit which he referred to as transhumanist later on before

mind and which often is associated with biotechnological innovations, namely a social order which includes a hierarchical ranking of members of different groups:

Most of us are not sure how that difference would make a difference to those who might be considered differently valued “subhuman” by comparison with the supposed “over-” human (like overclocking, it all depends).

Even though I can understand her worry, I do not think that it is one, which ought to lead to the decision to stop making scientific and biotechnological research. There are two central reasons for me to hold this position:

Firstly, it needs to be pointed out that there are political ways of regulating technological innovations such that they do not lead to social injustice or to a breaking up of the norm of equality. One option was developed in detail by James Hughes in his book *Citizen Cyborg*¹⁵ in which he develops a liberal social democratic version of transhumanism.

How can technologies get dealt with without them bringing about totalitarian structures within a society? One enhancement technique which we have already is vaccinations. Future enhancement technologies could get treated analogously to the way we deal with vaccinations today; e.g. in Germany vaccinations have not been obligatory during the previous decades. However, as most vaccinations are relatively safe and beneficial, it is possible for all citizens to get the ones that are most relevant for free, because they will be paid for by the public health insurance. The ones which are not directly relevant for everyone can be paid for by the public health insurance in certain circumstances. However, there are also other more specialized vaccinations, which have to

Brave New World was written.

¹⁵ James Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg. Why Democratic Societies must respond to the redesigned Human of the Future*, (Boulder: Westview Press 2004).

be paid for privately. Analogously future enhancement technologies can get dealt with so that all citizens can be able to have access to them, if they wish to use them.

Secondly, a different line of thought can become relevant, too, which reveals that further technological innovations do not have to lead to a two class society. The best examples here are mobile phones. Thirty years ago they were available only to high profile managers and their use was very expensive. Nowadays, the majority of Western citizens has a mobile phone and is able to use it due to the low costs of its use. This shows that if an innovation is reliable, useful and functional, then the demand and production will rise such that it will also gradually get cheaper. If mobile phones have developed in this direction, it is likely that the development of successful enhancement technologies will take a similar route.

Hence, as successful enhancement technologies can be distributed equally either by means of the public health system or by them becoming so cheap that they become widely available, the nightmare of a totalitarian technological world does not have to occur. Some critics might still claim that by a widespread use of enhancement technologies, others will implicitly be forced to also use these technologies without them wishing to do so. These critics are right in pointing out this consequence. However, it does not have to be a morally problematic consequence, as we can see in the case of laptops and computers. Twenty years ago it was not obligatory for University students to deliver their papers written on a computer in a certain style. Nowadays, the option of handing in a handwritten paper is no longer available, as it would be declined by most university teachers. Hence, as a student you are forced to use a computer. Does this mean that in this case morally problematic totalitarian tendencies are at work? I do not think so. The computer is a reliable and useful device, which has become so cheap that it is available to most citizens

of Western countries. Other enhancement technologies might develop in a similar direction.

A further counterexample against the use value of technological innovations is the fact that not all technologies become reliable and successful and some might even have grave and dangerous implications. This judgment is correct, of course. However, is this danger, which is connected to all technological innovations, a reason for no longer working on projects which lead to scientific and biotechnological progress? I do not think so. 250 years ago, we did not have vaccinations. I am very happy that these have been developed. Yeah! 150 years ago antibiotics had not been made. I am more than glad living at a time at which we have antibiotics. Yeah. Each technology brings with it new dangers. However, I think that the advances technologies brought with it during the previous 1000 years are praiseworthy. I would not wish to live without them anymore. However, I can imagine a future in which we have even further developed technologies and medical possibilities, which can help human beings in many respects. Hence, I am very much in favor of scientific and biotechnological research, which can be beneficial in many respects. Given the above listed reflections, I do not think that the fear of a future totalitarian system, which was established because of technological innovations, is one which ought to be dominant. I think that it is useful and important to have this worry in mind so that scientists continue to progress with great care, but I definitely do not think that this worry ought to should stop us from making further scientific research.

6 - Becoming who you are vs. Becoming who you wish you were or Perfection as Goal

The next issue Babich raises within her article is a very important one because it concentrates on the content of the ideal of the good, which is connected to transhumanism,

and not only the formal role of the good with which I dealt in section 3:

Beyond Sloterdijk, the message of Kurzweil's vision of the 'technological singularity' as it has been embraced by (at least some elements of) popular culture, when it is not the message of the genome project or stem cells, is indeed anthropotechnics, which is all about not becoming the one you are but, and to be sure becoming the one you wish you were, becoming the one you should have been all along. Call this the Harry Potter effect, or everyone is a boy wizard, quidditch player, best in sports, all secret greatness and unfair discrimination, at least, in the germ, at least after the singularity.

According to Babich, transhumanists are in favor of "becoming the one you wish you were, becoming the one you should have been all along" which is supposed to be different from Nietzsche's demand to "become who you are":

Thus Nietzsche excludes the kind of transhumanism Sorgner and others speak of, because and exactly qua "enhancement," it transpires that what is meant by transhumanism is no kind of self-overcoming.

Overcoming and not enhancing the human (or perhaps better said, the all-too-human) is the meaning of the over-human as the meaning not of the human but of the earth. In part this is the meaning of Pindar's word to the seldom encountered, that would be the few, that would be Pindar's word spoken to the rare: *become the one you are*.

She implies that the transhumanists' goal is linked to the following utopian vision:

Everything will be perfect after the revolution.

She repeats the claim in a different way in the following two statements:

transhuman is the transitional human, on the way to a perfect model that the marketing department, rather like the iphone...

Much rather, have we perfected the body, so say the last men, and, as Nietzsche tells us, they blink.

Hence, she claims that there is one strong, and detailed ideal of the good which is associated with the concept of enhancement and enhancement is only enhancement when it leads toward this perfect ideal, and in a sense, she is right, because it is the case that

Bostrom does uphold such an ideal, as I pointed out before in the *Beyond Humanism*¹⁶ article:

Bostrom stresses the Renaissance ideal as a concept of the good that is worth aspiring to.

Actually, there are reasons for holding that Nietzsche has a similar ideal in mind, as he regularly stresses the relevance of the classical type or ideal. When Nietzsche compares the qualities of geniuses and higher human beings in Zarathustra, it also becomes clear that a fully developed and flourishing Renaissance human being is what he associates with his ideal of the good which is worth aspiring for.¹⁷

There seem to be some central similarities between Nietzsche's position and that of some transhumanists, because both identify the Renaissance ideal or the classical type with the good, which is worth aspiring for. Given that this is an appropriate reconstruction of both concepts of the good, it becomes relevant to make further inquiries concerning the epistemological status of this concept of the good within both of their philosophies. As we noted earlier, both Nietzsche and Bostrom do not claim universal validity for their views of the good, which also implies that these concepts should not contain universal moral duties.

However, this judgment is not valid for all transhumanists or transhumanist friendly thinkers. Savulescu's concept of the good has a different epistemological status. He holds that there is a universally valid account of the good, which he has grasped and which he includes in a central moral principle of his, the principle of procreative

¹⁶ Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Beyond Humanism*. In: *Journal of Evolution and Technology* - Vol. 21 Issue 2 - October 2010, 1-19.

¹⁷ I dealt with exegetical questions concerning the classical ideal in Nietzsche in detail elsewhere. (Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Metaphysics without Truth. On the Importance of Consistency within Nietzsche's Philosophy*, Rev. second ed. (Milwaukee: University of Marquette Press 2007)).

beneficence. However, in contrast to Nietzsche and Bostrom, his view of the good is a much less detailed one, because it merely stresses the relevance of intelligence, memory and health. Still, I think that even a weak universal account of the good has morally problematic implications. A stronger account of the good with a weaker epistemological status, as it is being upheld by Bostrom, does not lead to a universally valid moral duty, and hence I regard it as less problematic than Savulescu's position. If Bostrom, however, wishes to employ his strong and detailed account of the good for creating moral or maybe even political obligations, then the issue would be different and his position would have to be seen as a dangerous one. As long as he merely advocates and advertises his stronger account of the good, as I think he is, the worries concerning his position do not have to be serious ones.

The question concerning the content of the concept of the good which is being used for moral and political judgments is a highly problematic one, and much more could be said about it, but I plan give a more detailed account of that topic in a later publication. As I alluded to in this section, I think that it depends a lot on the epistemological status of one's concept of the good, how problematic it is. If someone holds that he has grasped a universally valid truth, then his position is far more problematic and dangerous as someone else's position, which implies that what he upholds is not a certain truth but rather a plausible position which he himself regards as subject to revision given new and further information.

What is important to realize here is the following. Some transhumanists as well as Nietzsche identify the classical or the Renaissance ideal with the good life. However, they also relativize this insight by stressing that it is not universally valid. This aspect is being considered when Nietzsche stresses the need to become who you are: It is in each person's

interest to consider the needs of his body and to live in accordance with them. In transhumanists' reflections, this aspect is being taken into consideration by stressing the norm of negative freedom on a political level: Many concepts of the good life are valid, and it ought to be possible for human beings to realize them. On the one hand, there is the affirmation of the classical or Renaissance ideal of the good life, but on the other hand, the realization that a plurality of views of the good is valid. Hence the goal of becoming who you are and the goal of becoming who you wish you were can both be found in Nietzsche's philosophy as well as in transhumanist reflections.

7 - Evolution, Ethics, and Existential Risks

I wish to refer to a further remark of Babich, which seems to me as very important:

Sorgner for his own part seems to assume this same technological focus, the transhuman is the human plus whatever technological enhancement. But as a specific, Sorgner attends to the issue of Nietzsche and evolution, an issue that is itself far from straightforward (most readings of Nietzsche and evolution depend upon a fairly limited understanding of Darwin himself and not less of Nietzsche's understanding of Darwin).

Given our biotechnological advances, human beings have entered an era in which they are able to actively influence evolutionary processes. I am not claiming that given our progress chance does not play any role for evolutionary processes anymore. However, our technological possibilities enable us to have some influence on qualities relevant for evolutionary processes. Is enhancing evolution possible as a consequence? Not necessarily, I must say, because we do not know which qualities are actually helpful for us to be the fittest. According to Darwin, the fittest survives, which means that the one who has qualities with which he is best adapted to the environment has the best chances of survival. This does not mean that a human being who fulfills the Renaissance ideal necessarily must have qualities, which are most beneficial in this context. Dinosaurs would not have thought either that they will die out sometime or in the same spirit it has to

be realized that it is unclear which ideal of the good proves to be in the human interest from the evolutionary perspective.

Even if one took an evolutionary perspective, the universal validity of the Renaissance ideal would not follow. Renaissance human beings do not necessarily have the best option of being the winners in the evolutionary game. It depends upon the specific context at a specific time, which qualities prove to be the most helpful ones. It could be that a small group of physiologically weak people who are immune to a certain virus has the appropriate prerequisites for surviving the evolutionary game.

However, given that human beings or life on earth from time to time has to face the risk of getting extinct (be it due to a virus or due to an asteroid), technological innovations might be helpful in facing the risk successfully or at least in facing the risk better than without our technological innovations.

There is also the risk that technological progress is responsible for bringing about the existential risk in question. We might create weapons which lead to mass destruction or even global extinction of life, or side effects of our scientific research bring about deadly viruses that kill all human lives.

On the one hand, technological innovations can lead to further significant and even existential problems but, on the other hand, they might also be helpful in facing new challenges. The question is whether this insight ought to be a reason for us to refrain from being innovative and to remain being content with what we have? I do not think that this is the best decision, which we can make. I am very happy that I have the option of using vaccinations. Vaccinations clearly are an enhancement technology. 250 years ago we did

not have this option. Of course, vaccinations can go wrong. However, I think it is better to have vaccinations than not to have them. The same applies to antibiotics, which we did not have 150 years ago. I think it is great to have them. Instead of reacting towards such innovations with a “Yuck”, as suggested by Leon Kass¹⁸, I think that a “Yeah” is by far the more appropriate reaction in these cases. However, the expression of a spontaneous inner reaction cannot count as an intellectually honest argument for or against the use of enhancement technologies, if it is unsupported by further reasons.

These reflections concerning the evolutionary perspective do not imply that I am in favor of applying them for paternalistically making decision for individuals by integrating a stronger view of the good on the political level. I do think, however, that these reflections suggest that scientific and technological innovations bring about wonderful achievements, if one progresses with the appropriate care.

8 - Classical Education and Genetic Enhancement by Alteration & Choosing a Partner for Procreative Purposes and Genetic Enhancement by Selection as Structural Analogies

The topic “Education” is a particularly difficult one, and one I am unable to reply to in a satisfactory manner by means of just a couple remarks within an article. The following paragraphs at least give me the chance to clarify some fundamental misunderstandings.

Babich points out the following:

As Sorgner contends, education and genetic enhancement are “structurally analogous procedures.”¹⁹

But it is worth asking here, just what it is that Sorgner means by “education”? Does Sorgner understand this in the traditional sense of

¹⁸ L. R. Kass, The Wisdom of Repugnance. In: *The New Republic* (Washington, DC: CanWest) (216), 1997, 17–26.

¹⁹ Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, Beyond Humanism: Reflections on Trans- and Posthumanism. In: *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, Vol. 21, Issue 2 (October 2010):1-19, sec. 1.1.1.

Bildung or as what counts for the French as *formation* and where we may speak of either in terms of what Nietzsche also called getting oneself a culture, that is to say, personal and intellectual cultivation?

She hints at certain possibilities of how I might have understood the concept “education” in this context:

What is certain is that many of us even within the academy do suppose that education is no more than the acquisition of such degrees, especially at the graduate but also at the undergraduate level,

In the following section, Babich seems to imply that education is far more complex than how I understood it within the above mentioned structural analogy, namely the structural analogy between genetic enhancement by alteration and classical education for which I argue:

The idea that an education, the getting of or the having of one, is a simple affair, and thus that the parallel idea of an upgrade to the more-than-human, that is now: the trans-human would simply be like taking a course, say, or reading a book, supposes that one pretend (as transhumanists do like to pretend) that one can/should set aside questions of cultural inequalities, differences in wealth, “class” differences and so on.

The concept “education”, as I employ it in the above mentioned analogy, has not much to do with the acquisition of degrees, taking a course, or reading a book. What is important is that both in the case of genetic enhancement by alteration as well as in the case of classical education the following structures are given. Parents are making decisions whereby they influence the lives of their offspring. The influence can be such that it can be reversible but also that it can be irreversible.²⁰ Hence, it is a very particular understanding of education, which I am using in this context. A valid criticism of the analogy I am proposing has to employ the same concepts I am using and not some arbitrary ones.

In this context, there is another point that needs to be stressed. As Babich rightly

²⁰ Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, Beyond Humanism: Reflections on Trans- and Posthumanism. In: *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, Vol. 21, Issue 2 (October 2010):1-19, sec. 1.1.1.

points out, I claim that there is a structural analogy between classical education and genetic enhancement. However, I always qualify genetic enhancement further, because the structural analogy is solely given in the case of genetic enhancement by means of the alteration of the genetic makeup. This analogy does not apply to the selection process, which can occur after in vitro fertilization and pre-implantation diagnosis (PGD). It is possible and common to refer to this process also as genetic enhancement procedure. However, in this case genetic enhancement by means of selection takes place. In contrast to genetic enhancement by means of the *alteration of the genetic makeup*, which is structurally analogous to classical education processes, a different type of analogy applies with respect to genetic enhancement processes by means of *selecting an already given genetic makeup* (after IVF and PGD). In the case of genetic enhancement by means of *selecting an already given genetic makeup* a structural analogy to selecting a partner with whom one wishes to have offspring is given.

By choosing a partner with whom one wishes to have offspring, one thereby implicitly also determines the genetic makeup of one's kids, as 50 per cent of their genes come from one's partner, and the other 50 per cent from oneself. By selecting a fertilized egg, one also determines 100 per cent of the genetic makeup by means of selection.

One objection, which might be raised here, is that selecting a fertilized egg cell is a conscious procedure but normally one does not choose a partner according to their genetic makeup such that one has specific genes for one's child. However, it can be objected that our evolutionary heritage might be more effective during the selection procedure of a partner than we consciously wish to acknowledge. In addition, the qualities according to which we choose a fertilized egg after a PGD might not have been chosen as consciously as we wish to believe, but might be influenced more on the basis of our unconscious

organic setup than we wish to acknowledge. It might even be the case, that the standards for choosing a partner and for choosing a fertilized egg might both be strongly influenced by our organic makeup and evolutionary heritage such that both are extremely similar.

A difference between these two selection procedures is surely that in the one case, one selects a specific entity, a fertilized egg, but in the other case a partner and therefore only a certain range of genetic possibilities. However, given the latest epigenetic research, we know that genes can get switched on and off, which makes an enormous difference on the phenomenological level. Hence, it is also the case that by choosing a fertilized egg, we only choose a certain range of phenomenological possibilities of the later adult, as is the case by choosing a partner for procreative purposes.

The aforementioned comparison provides some initial evidence for holding that there is a structural analogy between choosing a partner for procreative purposes and for choosing a fertilized egg cell after PGD. I mentioned this analogy here to stress that one has to distinguish carefully between various methods of genetic enhancement procedures, if one wishes to make a moral judgment about these procedures. In the *Beyond Humanism*²¹ article I provided some evidence for holding that there is a structural analogy between genetic enhancement by means of the alteration of the genetic makeup and classical education processes. In the above paragraphs, I put forward some initial evidence for holding that genetic enhancement by means of selecting an already given genetic makeup is structurally analogous to selecting a partner with whom one wishes to have offspring. These analogies are helpful because they enable us to have an initial tool for making a moral judgment concerning these new biotechnologies. Actually, this is the

21 Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Beyond Humanism: Reflections on Trans- and Posthumanism*. In: *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, Vol. 21, Issue 2 (October 2010):1-19, sec. 1.1.1.

method I am employing whenever I am facing new technologies and I am puzzled concerning their moral evaluation. By drawing parallels and finding analogies to well-known procedures for which we have a clear moral framework, helps us find a way of approaching or dealing with new challenges. By means of the above analogies, it is possible to make some founded moral judgments concerning the related enhancement technologies.

9 - Transhumanism as Humanism, Hyperhumanism or Posthumanism?

In the following paragraphs, Babich raises a fascinating and important question:

In this (*an sich* inherently optimistic when it is not inherently calculating or manipulative) regard, the transhumanist movement turns out of course to be another humanism, using the term as Sartre once spoke of *Existentialism as a Humanism*.²² Hence and at least in principle, human enhancement may be regarded, if only for the sake of argument, as corresponding to “enhancement for all,” like “micro-chips for all” or “security searches for all.

Ultimately, as Leibniz might help remind us, such a broad extension would lead to a society not of “enhanced” but and much rather of leveled or flattened out humanity.”

Firstly, she claims that transhumanism is just another type of humanism. It is a difficult and important question whether transhumanism ought to be seen in the tradition of humanism, whether it could be described as a hyperhumanism or whether it is a particular variant of posthumanism. In my book series *Beyond Humanism: Trans- and Posthumanism* (Peter Lang Publishing) authors address questions related to the clarification of the various types of humanism and how one can go beyond humanism.

Secondly, it is noteworthy that Babich claims that transhumanism leads to a

²² By contrast Heidegger’s *Humanismusbrief* is written against such a presupposition. See Sartre’s *L’existentialisme est un humanisme* and compare both with Sloterdijk’s controversial Elmau lecture: *Regeln für den Menschenpark*. I address some of these issues in Babich, *Sloterdijk’s Cynicism*.

“flattened out humanity”, the critique that transhumanism leads to a *Gattaca* type of utopia comes up more regularly in the Academic literature. I assume that she has in mind the following issue.

9 - 1 Promoting Identical Consumer Tastes

The following statement of Babich might clarify further what she means when she worries that transhumanism leads to a “flattened out humanity”:

Sorgner argues that Nietzsche would back this enhanced “accessory” life, as the transhumanist life for all and sundry. But, and this is why Nietzsche gives us food for thought, at the same time, I think it is plain that Nietzsche sidesteps any such advocacy.

I did not claim that Nietzsche would hold such an “accessory” life, if he lived now. I did not claim either that Babich’s presentation of an enhanced “accessory” life bears significant similarities to what Nietzsche upholds. Neither is it my claim that the main concern of transhumanists is to live in accord with Babich’s vision of an ““accessory” life”. Transhumanists aim for an enhancement of cognitive and physiological capacities, a widening of the human health span and a promotion of human emotional faculties so that the likelihood of the coming about of the posthuman increases. The transhumanist goal does not necessarily include having the latest iphone applications. What Babich refers to as “accessory life” is not a goal transhumanists primarily aim for, and neither is it a value which Nietzsche upholds. A separate but related issue was referred to by Babich in the following statement:

So far from tools for conviviality or the transmission of a collective culture of human flourishing, we find our schools promulgate identical consumer tastes for identical consumer goods now globally projected in a world of limited resources.

Here, it becomes clear that she identifies the transhumanist goal with the promotion of

“identical consumer tastes”. This might be the goal of certain technological companies, but I do not see that transhumanists are in the least interested in it.

9.2 Humanist Dualities in Transhumanist Positions

As Babich holds that transhumanists promote identical consumer tastes, she claims that transhumanism is a variant of humanism, if I understand her correctly. However, transhumanists do not promote identical consumer tastes, which were one of her reasons for making this judgment. Still, there might be some reasons for affirming that transhumanism belongs to the humanist tradition or can even be seen as a type of hyperhumanism.

One technology, which is being seen as a promising one for promoting the prolongation of our lives and also for other enhancement purposes by many transhumanists, is that of mind uploading. The hypothetical process of mind uploading occurs when a conscious mind gets scanned, copied and then transferred from the brain onto a computational device. Some scholars hold that in this way human beings can continue to exist in the digital realm, other claim that the mind after having been uploaded to a computational device can be transferred back to a new organic brain. What I am interested in in this context, are the anthropological implications of this claim. It seems as if scholars who affirm this version of mind uploading have the tendency to affirm a dualist understanding of human beings with a mind on the one hand and a brain on the other hand from which the mind can get separated. If this is the case, then transhumanism can be seen as a kind of humanism, because humanism, as I understand the concept, relies upon a world constituted out of dualist concepts: mind-brain, matter-spirit, good-evil. It can even be described as a type of hyperhumanism, whereby hyperhumanism is to be understood as a radical and even more extreme version of humanism.

I, as a metahumanist, also regard myself as a weak transhumanist. However, I think that humanism has to be in conflict with transhumanism, and it would be in the interest of transhumanists, if they integrated a post- or metahumanist anthropology into their understanding of the world. In contrast to humanism, post- and metahumanism reject dualities and hence also a dualist understanding of human beings. As most transhumanists affirm a naturalist, this-worldly or relational understanding of the world, they cannot be humanists. Due to their this-worldly understanding of the world, they also have to conceptualize human beings in this manner, which means that it is more in tune with their other views to assume that human beings have an embodied mind, as it is being described by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch.²³ Hence, if transhumanists held a posthumanist anthropology, they would be more consistent within their worldview. Consequently, I can claim that transhumanism ought not to be understood as a type of humanism, as Babich claims.

A further reason has to be mentioned for regarding transhumanism as a variety of humanism. Most transhumanists agree that transhumanism belongs to the Enlightenment tradition, because of the central relevance of reason and the employment of rational methods. Even though this self-understanding is being widely shared by transhumanists, I doubt that it corresponds to many of their basic premises. The Enlightenment tradition is based upon a dualist understanding of human beings with the rational immaterial soul, on the one hand, and a material body on the other one. Kant as one of the leading Enlightenment humanists affirms exactly this radically dualist anthropology. Most transhumanists, on the other hand, hold a naturalist understanding of human beings, which clearly undermines the dominant Enlightenment anthropology. Hence, it can be stressed

23 F. J. Varela/E. Thompson/E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1991).

that concerning certain fundamental premises transhumanism is in disagreement with the Enlightenment humanist tradition, even though both outlooks have a high estimation of reason. Still, you do not have to be an Enlightenment humanist to value reason and rational discourses. Due to these insights, the similarities between posthumanism and transhumanism seem to me as stronger than the ones between transhumanism and humanism.

10 Utilitarianism

A brief remark needs to be made about the following comment of Babich:

What is at issue for what we might regard as Nietzsche's particular brand of transhumanism, if we may so speak of the self-overcoming that is the transition to the overhuman, the post-human, is that it is no kind of utilitarianism but that it is also no kind of humanism, other than that served by what Nietzsche called his "future humaneness," (GS §337), or else by what I have elsewhere described and analyzed as the "bravest democratic fugue"²⁴ ever written.

Nietzsche is against utilitarianism. Transhumanism is in favor of utilitarianism. Hence, Nietzsche and transhumanism uphold radically different ethical theories. Thus, it could get argued. However, the issue is more complex than the argument assumes. Even though utilitarianism can be seen as the dominant ethical theory associated with transhumanism, this does not have to be the case, which I already stressed in section 4 of my *Beyond Humanism*²⁵ article.

I think that a virtue ethical approach suits transhumanism as well as utilitarianism.

Some of the most interesting arguments against the use of enhancement technologies are

²⁴ Babich, *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Poetry and Philosophy, Music and Eros in Nietzsche, Hölderlin, Heidegger* (New York; State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 166 ff as well as Babich, "Adorno on Science and Nihilism, Animals, and Jews," *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy/Revue canadienne de philosophie continentale*, Vol. 14, No. 1, (2011): 110-145, pp. 124ff.

²⁵ Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Beyond Humanism: Reflections on Trans- and Posthumanism*. In: *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, Vol. 21, Issue 2 (October 2010):1-19.

being put forward by Michael Sandel.²⁶ He claims that parents who use enhancement techniques on their children do not possess parental virtues. I do not think that this has to be the case. As I regard classical education to be structurally analogous to genetic enhancement technologies by means of the alteration of genes, it follows that it can be morally adequate for parents to apply these technologies on their children in the same way as there are educational techniques that are morally appropriate. What is important for parents is to act morally appropriately as parents for them to possess parental virtues. Acting thus implies, knowing when and how educational and genetic enhancement technologies ought to be used. It is not the case that the use of all enhancement technologies reveals the possession of parental virtues. What is important for parents to understand is, when the use of enhancement technologies is appropriate, and when this is not the case. However, further clarifications are needed to explain this issue in detail.

11 Do I need to be rich for becoming a Post- or an Overhuman?

The question concerning the financial implications of values is usually a very important one. Many bioethical challenges can be reduced to financial questions, I think. I am grateful to Babich that she is referring to the financial dimensions of transhumanist ideas:

For Nietzsche, and this is perhaps his greatest distance from the transhumanist movement, this particular rarity will not turn out to be an upgrade money can buy. What will be the object of such design, on Nietzsche's account, will be the values esteemed as best in popular regard, and Nietzsche regarded such values, empirically enough, as *middle-rank* values, that is what he called mediocrity.

I do not think that Babich's argument is a plausible one. It is correct that money will be needed to pay for enhancement procedures,²⁷ but I do not see why money should not be

²⁶ Michael Sandel, The Case against Perfection. In: *The Atlantic Monthly*, 2004, 293.

²⁷ "Indeed, while one may argue that if the supposed ideal behind the transhumanist movement is to create a better world for all, anything that involves technology also involves less randomness, or chance, or luck, but old-fashioned money." (Babich 2012)

helpful in the context of educational processes, which help bring about Nietzsche's higher beings or maybe even overhumans. Educational processes can be improved by employing better educators and by paying for better educational methods, and money can also be needed for these processes.

Hence, if we follow Sorgner's parallel between education and transhumanism solely for the sake of argument, in the transhumanist world envisioned as the world to come (post BP oil-spill to go with the ongoing [but not reported], new spills in the Gulf of Mexico, post earthquake in Japan, with the same caveats regarding the lack of news reports on the same ongoing consequences of radiation fallout), only those with ample resources (financial and otherwise) will have access to transhuman enhancements, just as only those with access to advanced medical care can afford the implants that can keep a failing heart going — and this is true today as well and on any level of technology, be it a heart transplant, a pacemaker or even a shunt.

I am wondering what her remarks are supposed to imply. Would it be better not to realize any technological innovations, according to her, so that it will be impossible that only a small group of people can benefit from the technological innovations? Would it not be better to promote innovations first and to make sure then that the most successful ones become so cheap that many people can afford them or that the most efficient and helpful techniques become publicly accessible by having them being paid for by the public health insurance? Without innovations, all citizens equally do not benefit. What I suggest is that it is much better to promote technological innovations, even though initially only a small group might benefit from the outcomes of the innovations. At the initial stages of the innovations, it is still an open question whether the newly developed techniques will be successful and reliable ones. Hence, besides money, courage might also be needed for using the latest technologies. Once it is clear that a technology is reliable and helpful like mobile phones or vaccinations, then they become publicly available. This logic is a different one from the logic Babich accuses transhumanists of having, which is supposed to be the following one:

Here it is popular to advert to the most empirically disproven vision of economics, and the one currently dominating most markets, that is, the well-publicized, that is to say constantly repeated idea that enhancing the wealth of the wealthy, that enhancing the material well-being of the wealthy is somehow in the interest of everyone.

Most transhumanists would not agree with these claims. Transhumanists do not aim for the enhancement of the material well-being of the wealthy. Most transhumanists agree with Hughes's social democratic version of transhumanism, and hence they are in favor of promoting enhancement technologies, but they are also in favor of political regulations such that the most efficient procedures become publicly available. I think that it makes good sense to progress in this manner.

12 False Preferences? Eat Lemons instead of Apples!

Babich's next worry is a strange one. We are concerned with apples, but she claims that we ought to be concerned with lemons. Is it not clear that both apples and lemons can be important?

And yet and at the current time, the vaunted enhancements of transhumanism are still so many motes in the eye of a technological demon yet to be born. And by fixing our sights on these possibilities, potential benefits, promised promise, we overlook the more urgent problems all around us and we pass over the experience that is or should be common to us, the experience of technologies gone wrong, unanticipated side-effects of the kind one can only learn in practice.

Technological challenges can go wrong and because of this there are other challenges which are more important, which ought to be considered instead, she seems to argue. It is clear that technological innovations can have problematic consequences. This is exactly the reason why it is important to seriously reflect upon them. In addition, technologies often also work properly and help us in various respects, like solar or wind energy generators. They provide us with energy such that we do not have to rely so heavily on more problematic sources of energy. Would it be better not to be concerned with

technologies anymore and to solely focus on other issues?

Although at the moment of this writing, we can do none of this, no part of it, at all, at all, we are astonishingly preoccupied with the idea. We do not worry about the destruction of wild-life all over the globe in our now long and ongoing holocaust of beings other than ourselves, we do not worry about the deforestation of the land on every continent, especially southern ones, we do not worry about what we do to the water table we ourselves depend upon, or our air, etc., etc.

Having clean water is wonderful and important. New technologies can help us, too, in order to purify a river, and have drinking water. New technologies might be helpful for reducing the suffering of animal, if one managed to make meat out of stem cells. New technologies can help us to reduce the consumption of energy, by creating more efficient ways of using energies. Should we throw away our computers, cell phones and microwaves, and live like a peasant a thousand years ago? As I said before, it is important to be aware of environmental issues and the moral challenges related to animals. Still having better medical technologies is excellent, too. We can be concerned both with apples and lemons. We do not have to choose between them. Are environmental concerns more important than technological ones? Both areas are so closely interrelated that it is hardly possible to solely focus on one of them. In addition, many transhumanists are not solely concerned with technological challenges. There is an important IEET program, which fights for rights of non-human persons, and hence aims to promote the moral status of animals, which has been initiated by Peter Singer.

As many transhumanists, like posthumanists, have a rather naturalist understanding of the world, they do not subscribe to a dualist understanding of human beings, which implies that human beings are constituted out of a material body and an immaterial mind. This understanding of human beings is still implicitly dominant in many legal systems. It comes out clearly in the German legal system according to which only human beings are

bearers of human dignity. Animals, even though they are not regarded as things, ought to be treated like things according to the German law. This absurd and untimely understanding of animals is the result of our Christian and Kantian history. Babich also stresses the importance of our concern with animal ethics. However, she does not recognize and acknowledge that the moral concern for animals is something that is being shared by many transhumanists:

We breed and raise animals in order to sell them more efficiently but also in order to experiment on them trying out medical, therapeutic uses for animal parts (this will also be a kind of transhumanism).

13 Ascetic Ideal

The next reason for dissociating transhumanism from Nietzsche's philosophy is Babich's identification of transhumanism as an instantiation of the ascetic ideal:

Transhumanism turns out to be the latest and maybe not even the best (ah, we should probably wait for the next model) instantiation of the ascetic ideal. One wants life, but not life as it is, with all its fuss and mess, with all its banality and its limitations but life as in a video-game or a movie: no suffering, no illness, no death, and although one wants sex, one might well be inclined to exclude birth, generating children on demand, and maybe fast-forwarding through the first few months or years, depending on taste.

Do transhumanists aim for something that cannot be reached, which is one of the central characteristics of the ascetic ideal? According to Nietzsche, all human beings are will to power, and it is in their interest to permanently overcome themselves by setting themselves realizable goals, which get renewed after the old ones have been reached. Thereby it is important for him that the goals are immanent and realistic ones. Transhumanists work analogously. It is not the case that the majority of them wish to reach an eternal life in the digital realm because they know that immortality is not a goal

that can be reached realistically. A central goal of many transhumanists is that the healthspan of human beings gets expanded.

Most transhumanists are naturalists who accept that human beings are a type of animal who are part of the evolutionary process. In this respect transhumanists, just like Nietzsche, accept life as it is. However, by wishing “to exclude birth, generating children on demand, and maybe fast-forwarding through the first few months or years” they do not aim for something that cannot in principle be reached. On the basis of a naturalist world view all of these goals are realistic ones which can be reached within a realistic time span. In addition, by having and by trying to realize these goals, transhumanists create new organic forms by taking into consideration naturalistic processes, which seems to be a procedure with significant similarities to a Nietzschean way of thinking.

14 Nietzsche and Transhumanism – Two Different Sounds, but Similar Concepts?

Finally, Babich mentions an aspect of transhumanism, which is clearly different from Nietzsche’s approach – the element of style. In which style should reflections about the world be written? Nietzsche stresses the importance of style whereby he means a literary and metaphorical style. It can be seen how he works, if one considers the writings within his notebooks and compares them to the works he himself published. In the notebooks rather analytical statements, clear phrases and explicit judgments can be found. In the works he published himself, the same content comes hidden in metaphorical language, beautifully written and integrated in an artistically styled general outline. Most transhumanists have a scientific or technological background, and have been brought up in the tradition of analytic philosophy and clear scientific and naturalist thinking. Consequently, their writings often are clear, rigid, mathematical, logical, and without

reference to literary or poetical masterworks.

For me this bespeaks certain critical problems for conjoining Nietzsche's thought with the transhumanist ethos, here and just musically speaking.

I think this point Babich mentions might be one of the most important differences between Nietzsche's and the transhumanists' approach to understanding the world – the styles in which they put forward their positions radically differ from each other. Transhumanists often employ a dry, scientific way of arguing and analyzing matters. Nietzsche (often, but not always) writes in an overbearing flamboyant style in the works he published himself. Does this mean that the content of their thoughts has to differ fundamentally? I do not think so. Maybe, it would be in the interest of many transhumanists to put forward their ideas in a more lively and Nietzschean style. But, maybe, it would also have been in the interest of Nietzsche's philosophy, if he had employed a more sober style when discussing certain topics, e.g. the eternal recurrence of everything. In any case, it is clear to me that it is timely, possible and fascinating to consider and bring together both approaches of thinking about the world. The differences in style might be a reason why the similarity in their understanding of the world sometimes is not recognized and acknowledged. Maybe, scholars who can relate to one type of style often have problems also making sense of a different type of style. I find the intellectual exchange with both traditions extremely stimulating and I think that a more intensive exchange between the two traditions can lead to many useful and important further insights.

15 Metaphysics or Ontology

Loeb did an excellent job in reconstructing my argument concerning the relationship between the eternal recurrence and the overhuman. I am mostly in agreement with what he writes in his reply article. Still, there are two issues, which I wish to address in my reply.

The initial point can be seen as a minor one, but I regard it as a noteworthy one. The second topic, however, touches the heart of his interpretation concerning the relationship between the overhuman and the eternal recurrence, and I think that I have some reasons for claiming why I regard his interpretation as implausible. I cannot disprove it, because it is solidly based upon Nietzsche's writings. However, I also think that he cannot disprove my reading concerning this relationship, which has the advantage, that it is founded on more plausible premises. Firstly, I will address the initial issue, which is related to the following statement of his:

Is eternal recurrence a piece of metaphysics? Yes, of course it is, but this is no longer the devastating objection that it used to be under the mid-20th-century influence of Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein. Metaphysics is a thriving and respected philosophical discipline today, and careful commentators like John Richardson and Peter Poellner (cited by Sorgner in his own recent monograph on this topic) have persuasively shown that Nietzsche was of course interested in constructing his own brand of *immanent* metaphysics.

I do not think “metaphysics” is the word, which ought to be used with respect to the concept of the eternal recurrence. I myself identified eternal recurrence as a metaphysical concept when I wrote my first Nietzsche monograph *Metaphysics without Truth: On the Importance of consistency within Nietzsche's Philosophy*.²⁸ However, I realized that this use of the concept “metaphysics” can be misleading and that a different use of the concept might be more appropriate. Nietzsche often employed the word “metaphysics” to refer to two world theories („Metaphysik als im Zusammenhang mit Geister- und Gespensterglauben“ (KSA, vol. 10, 6[1], p. 231)) whereas the aforementioned English language interpreters use it to refer to any philosophy which deals with foundational structures of the world, which can include both one world and two world theories. Both uses of the word “metaphysics” are possible ones.

²⁸ Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Metaphysics without Truth. On the Importance of Consistency within Nietzsche's Philosophy*, Rev. second ed. (Milwaukee: University of Marquette Press 2007).

However, in the hermeneutic continental tradition, Nietzsche's use of the concept metaphysics was influential. Hence, Heidegger criticized metaphysical thinking but put forward an ontology instead.²⁹ In the same spirit, Vattimo put forward a weak ontology whereby he tells a story of the weakening of being in history.³⁰ Hence, in this tradition, the word "metaphysics" developed the connotation of the affirmation of a two-world theory. To refer to basic structures of a one-world theory, hermeneutic continental thinkers preferred the word "ontology". I think that the distinction is an important and established one within this tradition so that a different use can lead to significant misunderstandings. Given this use of the concept, it would be self-contradictory to regard the eternal recurrence as a metaphysical theory, because the eternal recurrence does not affirm a two world but is solely based within a one-world view. Consequently, I regard it as more appropriate to claim that the eternal recurrence is an ontological theory but not a metaphysical one.

16 The Eternal Recurrence and the Overhuman

Finally, I am reaching the one issue concerning Loeb's interpretation of the relationship between the overhuman (to whom he refers as superhuman) and the eternal recurrence,³¹ which I regard as implausible. I also think that I am putting forward a more plausible position than him. In his article, Loeb stresses:

I also agree with More that Nietzsche thought that his doctrine of eternal recurrence was inseparable from his concept of the superhuman.

Loeb and I agree that this aspect of Nietzsche's thought lies at the heart of Nietzsche's

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 2 vol. (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske 1961).

³⁰ Gianni Vattimo, *Glauben – Philosophieren*, transl. from the Italian by Christiane Schultz. (Stuttgart: Reclam 2003).

³¹ I will not deal with the question whether the translation "superhuman" or "overhuman" is more appropriate but I will stick to the term "overhuman" because "superhuman" sounds more like "superman" and hence seems to allude to inappropriate connotations.

philosophy. I doubt, however, that the two concepts in question are logically inseparable. Loeb puts forward an ingenious suggestion with respect to the question concerning the exact relationship between the overhuman and the eternal recurrence. Besides one premise of his position, which I regard as highly dubitable, his suggestion is one, which seems to correspond to Nietzsche's way of thinking, but this judgment also applies to my own reconstruction of Nietzsche's position. I also think that my interpretation is a plausible one whereas I doubt that this is correct for Loeb's suggestion, even though I regard it as a logical possibility and one which corresponds to Nietzsche's way of thinking. Loeb claims the following:

Let me now articulate a more interesting, and to my knowledge unrecognized, feature of Nietzsche's thinking—namely, that eternal recurrence is actually *required* for there to be any transhumanist progress in the first place.

I do not think that this is a plausible claim, but let me reconstruct briefly his line of argument before I will point out in which respect this claim is problematic. According to Loeb, the necessary connection between the eternal recurrence and the overhuman is an insight from which transhumanists could benefit significantly:

I will offer my reasons for thinking that the transhumanist movement has something important to learn from Nietzsche's pairing of the *Übermensch* and eternal recurrence.

According to Loeb, Nietzsche has found a way of showing how it is possible for human beings to free themselves from the necessity of natural selection so that they are able to move towards a type of human, through intentional and artificial selection, and so that it becomes possible for them to gain more control over natural processes. To have more power over natural processes is also in the interest of many transhumanists. According to Loeb's interpretation of Nietzsche, this move is supposed to be possible due to

Zarathustra's understanding of how to realize backward-willing, which is connected with the capacity of a prospective memory. This capacity is supposed to enable Zarathustra turning into a transhuman and pointing towards the existence of an overhuman species:

This backward-willing extends into Zarathustra's presentiment in his speech on redemption that someone has *already* taught him backward-willing and also into his dream in the "Soothsayer" chapter that he is liberated from his entombment in the past by his future redeemed self. As a consequence, Zarathustra is able to create his completely novel, no-longer-human, and child-spirited soul who laughs like no one has ever yet laughed on earth and who is able to exert a creative influence on his unchangeable past that allows him to say to it, "But thus I will it!"³² In showing that Zarathustra himself becomes transhuman as a result of his newfound wisdom, Nietzsche thus points the way to the future superhuman species that will be stronger and healthier precisely because it will live and thrive in the reality of circular recurring time.

The critical question at issue is how the procedure of backward willing ought to be understood whereby the following premise is of particular relevance for Loeb:

This is because humans, as he defines them (GM II), are mnemonic animals, meaning that they are able to remember (that is, suspend their forgetting of) the past.

From the insight that human beings are mnemonic animals and time being circular he infers that human memory can also be seen as prospective:

But in circular and recurring time, the past is identical to the future, and so human memory is now also prospective.³³

In principle this is a plausible point of view. What is problematic is Loeb's understanding of the concept "memory" in this context. What is within our memory? Is it solely what we have experienced, all experiences from all times or something in between? Loeb infers from his premises that human beings are mnemonic animals and that the circularity of

³² In an unpublished note from 1884 (KSA 11:25[7]), Nietzsche has Zarathustra spell out the compatibility of intra-cyclical novelty and trans-cyclical repetition (Loeb 2010: 17, 142; Loeb 2012).

³³ As I argue in Loeb 2010: 14-16, scholars have missed this point because they have imagined that a memory of the last cycle would add something different to the next cycle. But Nietzsche's point is that the memory is acquired in every cycle, including the last cycle, and that there has never been an original, or first, cycle in which the memory was not yet acquired.

time is given, that in principle it must be possible for human beings to also remember something which will occur tomorrow, because from a different perspective events which will occur tomorrow already occurred in the past — a long time ago in the past I must stress, given that the eternal recurrence is a correct description of the world.

Is Loeb's interpretation of Nietzsche plausible in this respect? I do not think so, because if he assumes that human beings are able to remember what will occur tomorrow, then it seems to imply that we either have to have access to a quasi-global mind, which stores all memories of all people, or that that the power-quanta responsible for our memories contain all the information they have experienced throughout all periods of time during the eternal recurrence and that it is possible to have access to all the information stored there. These two options are the most obvious options of how prospective memory can be possible. The first option of a universal mind, which stores all experiences and memories of all perspectives at all times, is not a position which Nietzsche would have affirmed. He clearly holds that there is no such universal organism by means of which such a universal memory could exist. I do not think either that Loeb has this option in mind.

The second option most probably comes much closer to the basic assumptions Loeb holds concerning the possibility of a prospective memory. Whatever an organism experiences gets stored within the quanta the organism consists off. These memories (at least some of them) get passed on to the next organism, which will consist off partly the same quanta. In this case, a future organism could only remember some selected past events which are being stored in the power-quanta out of which it consists. Given that it is possible to have a prospective memory of tomorrow's events, it seems to be necessary that these quanta store all the information they receive during all phases of the eternal

recurrence. As a human being is not constituted out of all the quanta of all organisms of tomorrow, the memory of a human being concerning events that will occur tomorrow would have to be a limited one. A human being might be able to remember some events that will occur tomorrow but certainly not all events. Furthermore, it can be argued that if an organism can remember tomorrow's events then it should in principle also be possible to remember experiences of one's own power-quanta ten thousand years ago or two billion years ago. Hence, the information to which any organism would in principle be able to have access would have to be immense. Yet, it needs to be stressed again that the period of time between a human being at the moment and the experiences of an organism tomorrow (i.e. a very long but limited time ago in the past) is incredibly long. It does not seem plausible to my mind that human beings are able to remember much about tomorrow, because another mental capacity, which human beings have, is the wonderful capacity to forget things. This is a central capacity for human survival. It seems less than likely to my mind that we, as mnemonic animals, can actually remember tomorrow's events.

My main reason against Loeb's Nietzsche interpretation according to which human memory can also be prospective is that this position has highly implausible implications, namely the judgment that it can be possible to memorize all events which the power quanta out of which someone is constituted has experienced, even if these events took place an incredibly long time ago in the past. Loeb's interpretation of Nietzsche's position takes into account central premises which Nietzsche holds, because I agree with him in so far that Nietzsche stresses that human beings have a memory, which can remember things beyond the experiences of an individual human being, i.e. a human being is able to remember experiences the power-quanta or energy out of which it is constituted and has had in the past. As the quanta have already had experiences a long time ago in the past, i.e.

tomorrow, a human being in principle is also able to remember the experiences the quanta had then. As the quanta, out of which a human being is constituted, are limited, the experiences are also bound to be limited ones, which is the reason why human beings clearly cannot remember all about tomorrow. If this interpretation were the correct account of the relationship between the eternal recurrence and the overhuman, then it should in principle also be able for me to have access to all these information. It seems clear to me that I am unable to have access to such memories, which is one reason why I do not regard his interpretation as a plausible one.

Given the above reflections, it seems reasonable to hold that Loeb's interpretation of Nietzsche's position concerning the relationship between the overhuman and the eternal recurrence which stresses that "human memory is now also prospective" is not the most plausible position to hold. I am not saying that it is impossible to hold this point of view or that it is not in accordance with Nietzsche's premises. It would be false, if I made these claims. However, the claim itself seems highly unlikely and implausible. This is my reason for affirming a different interpretation which implies the logical separability of the eternal recurrence and the overhuman. If this is the case, then it also follows that it is not logically necessary for transhumanists to take the eternal recurrence into consideration concerning the process of the coming about of the posthuman. However, I agree with Loeb that transhumanism might benefit from taking Nietzsche's account of the eternal recurrence seriously. Yet, my reasons for this claim differ from the ones Loeb puts forward (see *Journal of Evolution and Technology* Vol. 20, issue 1).

Loeb's argument concerning the relationship between the overhuman and the eternal recurrence, however, is based upon the aforementioned premise, because his further line of thought runs as follows:

Indeed, in the passages mentioned above and others, he shows Zarathustra leaving mnemonic messages to his younger self and thus using his memory as a means whereby his present and future will can creatively influence and shape his unchangeable past so as to be able say to it, "But thus I will it! But thus I shall will it!". And since Zarathustra is the teacher of disciples who will themselves be able to use their own memory in this same way, his interaction with them allows him to be influenced by a future they remember that is beyond the span of his own lifetime. These disciples, Zarathustra says, will be the ancestors of the superhuman species, and so ultimately there is a paradoxical sense in which Zarathustra's teaching of the superhuman species is retroactively inspired by the actual future emergence of just this species.

It is an intriguing line of thought but, due to the highly implausible implications concerning the powers of our memory, not one, which I regard as charitable to Nietzsche's philosophy. Loeb also summarizes well my own account concerning the coming about of the overhuman and the eternal recurrence, which are related concepts, but in contrast to his interpretation, which are also logically separable without any grave loss. Even though he does an excellent job in presenting my views, there are some specific points I wish to clarify further.

Firstly, Loeb claims the following while presenting my account of Nietzsche's theory of evolution towards the overhuman:

So I think that he is committed to admitting the role of chance and accident in this final step as well.

He is correct in stressing that in this way chance still plays a role during the process of evolution. However, chance no longer is the sole determining factor as it used to be the case in a state in which solely procedures of natural selection were responsible for the occurrence of any changes. For chance being able to play a role, it is necessary that human beings intentionally work at themselves to distinguish themselves from others. Hence, the role of chance in my interpretation is reduced with respect to the traditional process of natural selection according to which chance is solely responsible for evolutionary alterations. Consequently, my interpretation can be seen as a gradual move

away from natural selection towards human selection whereby Loeb is right in stressing that the relevance of chance is not excluded in my reading. However, the relevance of chance gets reduced which is the important point, I think.

Secondly, Loeb holds the following position:

On Sorgner's interpretation, humans are given meaning by their goal of creating superhuman individuals who will be able to attain redemption in this fashion and say to their past, "But thus I will it!". Notice, however, that this interpretation of Nietzsche's concept does not in any way require the assumption of circular and recurring time. Indeed, this is precisely the same kind of interpretation that is offered by scholars like Alexander Nehamas who think that Nietzsche did not actually believe in the truth of cosmological eternal recurrence.

When Loeb claims that Nehamas' understanding of backward willing "does not in any way require the assumption of circular and recurring time" I must say that Loeb is wrong. In contrast, to convincingly be able to say "But thus I will it!" only works given that one also holds the eternal recurrence as a cosmological theory which is also the reason why I regard Nehamas' position as false who stresses the separability of these two positions. It depends upon the eternal recurrence as cosmological theory to be able to reach redemption, because in this way it is possible to justify all moments prior and after the one moment to which one is able to say "But thus I will it!." Only if one also holds the cosmological interpretation of the eternal recurrence, one actually believes that this moment and thereby also all the moments prior and after this moment will recur again and again.

If my account of the connection between the overhuman and the eternal recurrence is correct, then transhumanism does not have to take the eternal recurrence into consideration for reducing the importance of chance with respect to the coming about of the posthuman. However, for different reasons, a consideration of the eternal recurrence

might still be in the interest of transhumanists.

17 Conclusion

I am very grateful to both Babich and Loeb for writing such inspiring articles, which enable all the readers to continue thinking about the various incredibly important questions which are being dealt with in the debates concerning Nietzsche and transhumanism. For me, it has been a stimulating exchange. I hope that we will be able to continue dealing with the various specific aspects of this exchange in future debates, because there are many topics which have only been alluded to or which have been addressed merely in short passages, even though they deserved a more detailed and scholarly treatment. In particular the attempt to bridge the gap between the Anglo-American and the Continental philosophical tradition with respect to technological, biological and medical challenges is one which I regard as highly promising and one to which I plan to dedicate myself further. My own approach attempts to combine a weak version of Continental posthumanism with a weak type of Anglo-American transhumanism. As it is in between post- and transhumanism, but also beyond a Christian and Kantian type of humanism, it can be referred to as metahumanism (*meta* meaning both beyond as well as in between).