

ARTICLES

Homo Deus as Utopian Myth: Yuval Noah Harari's Transhumanism Contested

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This essay critically examines the transhumanist vision of Yuval Noah Harari, focusing on its underlying mythological and utopian elements. Harari's portrayal of humanity's future is analyzed through the lens of myth, as it replaces one set of beliefs with another, and it is viewed as utopian, since it aims to radically transform human nature and manifest the *eschaton* within the worldly realm. The essay highlights key aspects of Harari's transhumanist thought and its philosophical foundations, emphasizing his proposed enhancements in cognitive, physical, and emotional realms, along with the pursuit of immortality and moral perfection.

Introduction

Yuval Noah Harari's work, particularly *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, has captivated global audiences with its provocative visions of the future. Harari forecasts the evolution of humanity into godlike beings through the fusion of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and data-driven control systems. His sweeping narratives have stirred both awe and criticism, prompting serious debates in academic, political, and popular circles. Yet, provocative and popular books abound. Why, then, is Harari specifically worth engaging? Is his thinking compelling enough to warrant sustained critique, or is his vision so inherently crude and uncritical that sustained analysis seems fruitless?

First, it is important to acknowledge Harari's unique ability to popularize complex historical, scientific, and philosophical ideas. His blending of history, futurism, and myth evidently resonates with a broad readership. This influence alone makes his work relevant for engagement. Ideas that shape public consciousness cannot be dismissed without examination. Harari's concept of godlike humanity, while seemingly vague, touches on enduring questions about human nature, progress, and ethics that have long been central to philosophical discourse. He writes, "We are now learning to engineer bodies, brains, and minds. The main products of the twenty-first century will not be shoes, textiles, and vehicles, but bodies, brains, and minds" (Harari 2017, 34). Such grand proclamations demand scrutiny because they challenge fundamental assumptions about the future of humanity, self-determination, and power.

Second, despite the apparent crudeness or vagueness of Harari's vision, it is precisely this mythic quality that necessitates further critique. Harari reworks traditional narratives of human progress into a transhumanist framework where technology replaces divine providence and algorithms replace human agency. Critics such as John Gray have argued that Harari's transhumanist future is a new myth, replacing the old religious visions of transcendence with a faith in technological salvation (Gray 2016). This shift from humanism to techno-humanism is not merely a historical observation but an ideological battleground where the stakes are high: the future of freedom, morality, and what it means to be human—in short, everything that is *transcendent*. It is crucial that we engage with Harari's mythic thinking because, while his vision may appear self-evidently flawed to some, it is dangerously seductive to others, presenting an uncritical view of technological progress as inevitable and benign.

Finally, Harari's ideas have sparked significant engagement across various fields, from philosophy and theology to bioethics and political theory. Popular philosophers like Slavoj Žižek have criticized techno-utopianism for its failure to address the deeper questions of human suffering and meaning (Žižek 2018). Theologians have expressed concern over his dismissal of traditional religious thought in favor of a secular, data-driven future (Borowski 2020). Meanwhile, bioethicists raise alarms over his acceptance of genetic engineering and other technologies that could deepen inequality and erode human dignity, a theme that precedes Harari but is a crucial element of his proposal (Fukuyama 2002; Evans 2016; Waters 2006). Engaging Harari is not just an intellectual exercise—it is a necessary response to the cultural and ideological force his work exerts on contemporary debates about the future of humanity. To ignore Harari's ideas would be to underestimate their impact, leaving the door open for his uncritical vision to shape public discourse unchallenged.

The present article analyzes Harari's projection of humanity's future, arguing that his vision is fundamentally mythic and utopian. It contends that Harari, in rejecting traditional religious worldviews as superstition, replaces them with a new myth—transhumanism—which seeks to radically alter human nature and establish an *eschaton* within the world, in the sense criticized by Eric Voegelin, whereby transcendent salvation is reinterpreted as a secular, immanent goal (Voegelin 1952). In his delusion, Harari reintroduces a new kind of superstition.

We will address the implications and underlying philosophy of Harari's vision. First a summary of Harari's transhumanist vision is presented, then a demonstration of how Harari's transhumanism functions as myth is laid out, and it is then situated within the broader traits of utopian thinking, drawing on the work of Thomas Molnar. Lastly, we critique Harari's dream of humanity's future, focusing on transhumanism's goal to enhance humanity

cognitively, physically, and morally even to the point of immortality. Harari's vision of humankind transcending its past challenges and moving toward a new, self-directed future is scrutinized for its philosophical and practical implications.

Humanism and Transhumanism

In brief, what does transhumanism set out to achieve? Many of its chief proponents state that transhumanism is a cultural and intellectual movement to radically enhance humanity (Baggot 2023). This enhancement can take many forms, such as cognitive, physical, or mood enhancement, giving human beings more pleasant experiences. Transhumanists speak about lifespan enhancement, which aims to make human beings live longer and eventually become immortal (Kurzweil and Grossman 2011). Some proponents also speak about moral enhancement, which aims to make people work together better and be less egotistical, self-centered, and selfish (Lyreskog and McKeown 2022).

In his best-selling history and science-fiction book, *Homo Deus*, Harari presents a brief account of history in view of humanity's imminent and distant future. Harari's basic argument goes like this: Given that the three main challenges to human flourishing have been overcome—namely, hunger, sickness, and death—humanity can focus on how to steer successfully in the right direction for the future. Beginning from this assumption, Harari presents his outlook for the future, opening the “new horizons” that humankind ought to pursue after its slumber and the “nightmare” of the wars of the twentieth century (Harari 2017, 2–3). Still bogged down by the trials of quotidian life, personified humankind is called to look upon a bright future, a long-term project. Harari proposes a long-term plan for humanity to *transcend itself*.

Looking back to past eons of history and human history, Harari identifies one fact in particular that stands out, namely, that unhappiness is most fundamentally linked to “unpleasant sensations” caused by the human body, and the main culprit for this is evolution. Because evolution is a bad master, humanity must take the rudder of progress into its own hand and, with the help of the machine, steer the ship of humanity toward a brighter future, thus transcending the human condition. Humanity's main tool on this quest will be the manipulation of “human biochemistry.” The safe harbor of humankind's future is its “divinization” (to use an old word), the transformation of humanity's deficient nature into something godlike.

This state implies immortality (the absence of death),¹ godlike existence, everlasting pleasure,² perfect self-realization, and the transcendence of the human condition in general (Harari 2017, 24, 41–43, 45, 49).

Harari points out that the chief obstacle to humanity's liberation is its limited imagination of *what could be*. Being trapped in our cultural imaginary, modern human beings cannot imagine what the future *may* look like and therefore cannot start on the right path toward that imagined goal. Harari presents himself as a prophet who expands human imagination, as one who fills the gaps left by its limitations. Although assuming this visionary role, Harari confesses that not even he can imagine what this future may bring: "Once technology enables us to re-engineer human minds, *Homo sapiens* will disappear, human history will come to an end and a completely new kind of process will begin, which people like you and me cannot comprehend" (Harari 2017, 53).

Despite his inability to clarify the ideal future we are striving toward, Harari suggests that the path to biological perfection and the *apotheosis* of man should not be hindered by moral considerations, ethical values, or critical examination. Progress, he argues, is akin to a laboratory experiment where mistakes are inevitable. History, he reminds us, is full of "big mistakes" (Harari 2017, 64). This raises a critical question: Where should the line be drawn? For example, should mistakes like genocide (his example) be considered acceptable in the pursuit of progress?

Rather than avoiding mistakes, Harari implies that humankind must imagine freely and be prepared to make errors in order to achieve its vision for the future—a vision that, paradoxically, he admits is beyond his comprehension. Human striving for perfection, according to Harari, must not be stalled by obstacles like morality or realism. All our energy must be invested in this pursuit, even if it ultimately leads to our destruction (Harari 2017, 64).

Harari situates himself in a line of progressive historical development that reaches from the ancient, dark, inhuman past, through enlightened humanism, and into "liberal humanism" for its culmination. But since the goals of "liberal humanism" will lead to humanity's destruction, it is the task of the prophet (i.e., Harari) to set out the next step in this continual development: *transhumanism*.

In order to flesh out transhumanism, Harari endeavors to reduce all positive developments in recent—and not so recent—history to the appearance of "humanism" as a religion. All of what is good about modernity is rooted

1 "Having secured unprecedented levels of prosperity, health and harmony, and given our past record and our current values, humanity's next targets are likely to be immortality, happiness and divinity" (Harari 2017, 24).

2 "It will be necessary to change our biochemistry and re-engineer our bodies and minds ... re-engineer *Homo sapiens*, so that it can enjoy everlasting pleasure" (Harari 2017, 49).

in this religion. Humanism is what surpassed superstitions, simple beliefs, and narrow-minded religiosity by becoming a religion that worships only one idol: humanity itself.³ In Harari's grand scheme of things, humanism has a function, namely, giving humanity *meaning*—in a way somewhat similar to Auguste Comte's "religion of humanity" (see Bourdeau 2023). This meaning is primarily derived from the conviction that an individual is irrepeatable (individualism) and that will and sensitivity are the "highest authority of all" (voluntarism).⁴ Harari distinguishes among three branches of humanism. The "orthodox" branch holds that every human being is characterized by *uniqueness* and is thus unrepeatable and valuable in himself or herself. This, he claims, was identified with "liberal humanism" (i.e., liberalism). The second branch is "socialist humanism." National socialists and communists are of this sort. And the third branch Harari calls "evolutionary humanism." Its followers, utterly convinced of Darwin's theory of evolution, insist that conflicts are to be applauded, not lamented. They are the "raw material of natural selection" that pushes evolution forward (Harari 2017, 289, 293, 295).

The center of recent history is the struggle of these humanisms against one another. With a plethora of examples from music, politics, and economics, Harari aims to prove this point and to bolster his own position with credibility. In fact, this thesis serves as the main outline of his book.⁵ He seems to side most with the "evolutionary humanists," or at least a branch of them. (Harari does see the need to separate himself from some extreme currents of evolutionary humanists, such as the racially driven National Socialists, and feels the need to clarify that "not all evolutionary humanisms" have led to "racism" and "concentration camps") (Harari 2017, 300).

Harari predicts that in the dawn of the future technological developments will supersede classical liberal humanism and will pave the way—in tune with his evolutionary logic—to a new humankind consisting of a "useless mass" and a few "upgraded superhumans" who will guide our "godlike descendants" into the far future. The two new strands of "ideologies or religions" will be "techno-humanism" and "data religion," the former being the "more conservative" one, still seeing in the human being the apex of the cosmic order. The new "homo deus" will be in a constant struggle against increasingly sophisticated "non-conscious algorithms." Much like the evolutionary humanism of the Nazis, this new techno-humanism will aim

3 "The humanist religion worships humanity, and expects humanity to play the part that God played in Christianity and Islam, and that the laws of nature played in Buddhism and Daoism" (Harari 2017, 259).

4 "For centuries humanism has been convincing us that we are the ultimate source of meaning, and that our free will is therefore the highest authority of all" (Harari 2017, 261).

5 "To understand all this we need to go back and investigate who *Homo sapiens* really is, how humanism became the dominant world religion and why attempting to fulfill the humanist dream is likely to cause its disintegration. This is the basic plan for the book" (Harari 2017, 76).

at “selective breeding,” but far more peacefully, with the help of “genetic engineering, nanotechnology and brain-computer interfaces” (Harari 2017, 408–11).

Harari's vision of the future closely aligns with key ideas from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. Harari's concept of “upgraded superhumans” imitate the *Übermensch*, both of which represent a transcendent being beyond the limitations of ordinary humanity that aims to overcome traditional moral values (Nietzsche 1961). Harari's call for a progress unhindered by ethical constraints echoes Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, where the author advocates for a revaluation of values and the rejection of conventional moral systems in favor of individual self-overcoming and creativity (Nietzsche [1966] 1989). This is also true for Harari's techno-humanism projection with its reliance on genetic engineering and other technologies. This in turn mirrors Nietzsche's critique of the “herd mentality” and his desire for a superior form of humanity, although Harari envisions this evolution through technological means.

Pitted against techno-humanism is data religion or dataism. “According to Dataism,” writes Harari, “Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, a stock-exchange bubble and the flu virus are just three patterns of dataflow that can be analyzed using the same basic concepts and tools. This idea is extremely attractive. It gives all scientists a common language, builds bridges over academic rifts and easily exports insights across disciplinary borders. Musicologists, economists and cell biologists can finally understand each other” (Harari 2017, 429). The human being becomes an object of data processing, a chip embedded in a system that “nobody really understands.” Thus, dataism adopts a “strictly functional approach to humanity” (Harari 2017, 449, 452).⁶

Harari's book does not end with a clear-cut answer to the issues raised. Instead of offering a careful defense of some of the historical developments that he chooses to include, which would make his argument more susceptible to scrutiny, he ends with a vaguely positive and somewhat abrupt note of reader empowerment: “The rise of AI and biotechnology will certainly transform the world, but it does not mandate a single deterministic outcome. All the scenarios outlined in this book should be understood as possibilities rather than prophecies. If you don't like some of these possibilities you are welcome to think and behave in new ways that will prevent these particular possibilities from materializing” (Harari 2017, 461). Immediately after this comes the Marxist credo that society will bring about the same effect over and over again if it is not radically changed: “However it is not easy to think and behave in new ways, because our thoughts and actions are usually constrained

⁶ Ray Kurzweil could be named as a proponent of dataism. See Kurzweil 1999, 2005, 2012.

by present-day ideologies and social systems. This book traces the origins of our present-day conditioning in order to loosen its grip and enable us to act differently and to think in far more imaginative ways about our future” (Harari 2017, 461).

In order to make sense of Harari's transhumanist vision, we will now show how his idea of humankind and his projections of the future are at the same time mythical and utopian.⁷

Harari's Transhumanism as Myth

“Myth,” or *mythos*, means, in its original sense, a story or legend revealing the truth of existence. In the form of creation myth, the story unveils the origin of the world and of human history.⁸ By telling stories in the form of myths, human beings reveal a foundational and originary way of being, of acting, and of making sense of the world. By keeping myth alive, human beings actually participate in the sacred reality of the myth, in a reality as it is ordained by the gods. Thus, human beings bring themselves back to the mythical moment of origin; they participate in the “eternal return.”⁹

With his particular historical narrative, Harari seeks to establish the very foundational assumptions that ought to guide his readers through history such that they may come to understand why humanity is as it is and why it ought to be a certain way in the future. One of the key characteristics of his historical interpretation is that he does not aim to demonstrate the veracity of his historical claims. Instead, by painting a narrative with broad brush strokes—smudging many fine lines in the process—he gives an outlook into the future. He shows the origin of certain human affairs, elements of human experiences, and historical facts in order to build a credible foundation for the genesis of developments he predicts. By showing their history, he hopes to show the inevitable results in the (not-so-distant) future.

Since most of his narrative-spinning implies demythologizing, it seems counterintuitive to call Harari's narrative mythical. But this name fits. Harari is conveying a mythical narrative that serves his plot of human history, which culminates in transhumanism. He even appeals to mythological figures such as the Greek gods in order to make his point. His historiography consequently bespeaks the human condition, *human nature*. It has an ontological ring to it. His analysis does not give the reader what the title of his book promises (“a brief history of tomorrow”) but rather a narrative

⁷ In what follows, we draw on Thomas Molnar's identification of utopia and myth as laid out in numerous studies. In his main and pivotal work, *Utopia, the Perennial Heresy* (1967), he delineates the genealogy, inherent dangers, and practical impact of the “utopian mindset,” as he called it.

⁸ “Durkheim also points out that myth, along with other religious beliefs, provides the basis of all cultural means of categorizing the world: and this forms the basis of philosophy and science” (Cohen 1969, 343).

⁹ “In the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no orientation is established, the hierophany [appearance of the Sacred] reveals an absolute fixed point, a center” (Eliade 1961, 21).

of human history as it ought to be read in order to make sense of certain developments in the digital and biochemical fields that he selects to speak of. Working under the guise of a fully “rational,” “scientific,” and “sober” mindset, Harari presents himself as an unbiased commentator, lecturing the reader on the inevitable rise of human-machine cyborgs, dataism, techno-religion, and a new form of divinization in techno-humanism. Yet what he actually does—under the appearance of sober scientific analysis—is replace an old myth with a new one. As Thomas Molnar poignantly points out, “The myth does not vanish; it undergoes a succession of metamorphoses until the ‘true story’ turns into the ‘false story.’ True and false do not refer here to *story*, but to the structure of the real which may become obscured in exactly the same way as the content and meaning of a story may become veiled” (Molnar 1973, 71, emphasis original).

In other words, the myth Harari wants to dispel does not, in truth, vanish; it reenters consciousness under the guise of scientific, rational factuality. By this exchange, reality is altered and the reader’s perspective of reality is changed. By reinterpreting the world, Harari indeed *makes the world* as he wants it to be. With a sophisticated and cunning mix of historical facts, and profiting from an often gullible and historically ignorant audience, Harari manages to weave a complex web of assumptions that validate his own thesis about the only possible outcomes for the future. In a sense, he achieves a shrewd sleight of hand. By using historical facts on the one hand and projections about the future on the other, he is able to slip in a particular understanding of human nature. He himself clearly states the aim of this endeavor, speaking as a historian: “Historians study history not in order to repeat it, but in order to be liberated from it.” This liberation can never be complete, he argues, but “some liberty” is preferable to “none” (Harari 2017, 68, 74).¹⁰

Another way to look at this dynamic is to apply the principles of Jean Baudrillard’s “hyperreality” to it. As formulated by Baudrillard, hyperreality is a condition in which signs and images no longer refer to an external reality but instead form a self-referential system, creating a world where the distinction between the real and the simulated collapses, leaving only a seamless circulation of models without origin or reference (Baudrillard 1994, 1–7). What Harari proposes seems to correspond to what Baudrillard terms “the third state of simulation”: the masking of the absence of a profound reality (Baudrillard 1994, 6), where the sign *pretends* to be a faithful copy, but it is a copy with no original. Images claim to be something real, but in truth what they represent is an already vanished reality. No true representation is taking place. Baudrillard calls this the “order of sorcery,” a regime of

¹⁰ “Of course, this is not the total freedom—we cannot avoid being shaped by the past. But some freedom is better than none” (Harari 2017, 74).

semantic algebra where all human meaning is conjured artificially to appear as a reference to hermetic truth (Baudrillard 1994, 6). Harari's vision fits this description. And what can illustrate this "order of sorcery" better than myth?

Harari often uses words in ways that promote a magical order and the replacement of reality with simulacra. What does "knowledge" really mean if the wisdom of human beings is put on the same level as data-processing algorithms? What does "happiness" mean when it is seen as the mere product of a chemical-biological balance of hormones? What does "love" mean when a "perfect" match can be determined by the calculations of a Google algorithm? What does "spirit" signify when the human mind and soul are debased and equated to—as sophisticated as it may be—a gigantic computer? The answer is jolly little. Harari utilizes words such as "love," "wisdom," and "happiness" as rhetorical tools that serve his agenda; he empties them of their meaning and infuses them with new content. All this magic is performed on a stage before a million-strong audience. Yet they cannot see the trick; they do not perceive how he replaces what he calls superstition with a new sophisticated techno-myth.

For example, Harari proposes that scientists return to spiritual meditation in order to broaden their study of the mind. In *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, after dismissing most religions in his typical fashion, Harari proposes that scientists practice Vipassana meditation—which "is said to have been discovered in ancient India by the Buddha" and was taught by his own mentor, S. N. Goenka¹¹—as a complementary method to "uncover the basic patterns of the mind." In this way, meditation complements scientific research (Harari 2018, 253–54).

Harari's recommendation of meditation as a complementary tool reveals his thought as deeply religious, and in this conviction, he is very similar to the theologians over the centuries—whom he despises—in pursuing truth by science *and* faith. Harari proposes reaching truth by scientific methods *and* by prayer— "digging from both ends," as he calls it (Harari 2018, 251). This is little more than a techno-reworking of the Christian theological conviction that faith and reason have the same truth.¹² A truth can be reached by reasonable (scientific) endeavor and by prayer; whereas the former is philosophical in nature, the latter is theological. It is not at all clear how the meditation Harari recommends as a method to discover the mind is any different from the religious superstitions he so vociferously denounces.

¹¹ Satya Narayana Goenka (1924–2013) was an Indian teacher of Vipassana meditation, which he claimed was scientific in character. See Goenka 2002.

¹² It should be noted that Harari's meditation differs significantly from a Christian prayer, since it seeks truth *within* the human mind (immanent to it), whereas Christian prayer addresses the Creator *outside* of the human mind (transcendent).

Harari's Transhumanism as Utopia

We have already mentioned Harari's implicit idea of human nature. His idea corresponds loosely to a "utopian mindset," as elaborated by Thomas Molnar (1967, 225–34).¹³ In the utopian mindset, the utopian puts himself in a curious position. He appeals to a paradigm that may or may not materialize, while simultaneously setting up a model to which he approximates (Molnar 1973, 73). The utopian therefore has no responsibility for shortcomings in the process of realization since all imperfection can be blamed on still being in the "not yet," while all perfection of his vision can be anticipated in the perfect future state. In other words, whenever something does not go according to plan and human weakness or frailty seeps in, the utopian appeals to the future state, in which all human frailty will be removed, while explaining away the current shortcoming as a result of a lack of will: "we are just not trying hard enough." Next, we will note several features of the utopian mindset that appear in Harari's work.

The Utopian Goal

The goal of the utopian is an elevated, enlightened striving away from all human heteronomy toward a complete "self-government" (Molnar 1967, 21). Harari demands that humanity free itself from the "shackles" of its limited imagination to see what humanity can become. His aim is to free human beings from all moral constraints, ethical limits, and moral reservations. We must widen our imagination to what could be possible if we leave the limitations behind and, through a movement of the will, create what we aim to achieve. In Molnar's terms, Harari presents a sort of shortcut that liberates humanity from its natural condition (evil). In a Nietzschean fashion, Harari wants to create a new human being, the *Übermensch* of the future (Molnar 1967, 24, 151).

Human Limitation Must Be Overcome

In their current, limited hylomorphic condition, as beings consisting of body and soul, human beings are inherently limited.¹⁴ In order to escape our natural urges for things like careers, money, and sex, we need to manipulate biochemistry. This will allow us to "raise global levels of happiness." In fact, Harari directly links this improvement to myth, proposing that the mythical Greek gods were indeed projections of the perfect human being. The "divinity" of the *homo deus* therefore is akin to that of the Greek gods

¹³ Harari's mindset also fits Karl Mannheim's description: "A state of mind is utopian when it is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs ... [it is a state of mind] oriented towards objects which do not exist in the actual situation" (Mannheim [1936] 2015, 173).

¹⁴ "The only thing that makes people miserable is unpleasant sensations in their own bodies.... This is all the fault of evolution" (Harari 2017, 41, 43).

(Harari 2017, 45, 54). With his aversion to anything corporeal, Harari joins the widespread transhumanistic trend of seeing the physical body as that which limits all positive transcendence of the human being.

Human Beings Are Alienated from Themselves

The human person, in his natural state, is alienated from himself. Alienated from his own body, whose desires ultimately leave him unhappy, dissatisfied, and vulnerable to sickness and death, he seeks to escape this condition. The solution, according to Harari, is to shift responsibility to an external authority capable of perfectly regulating the balance between pleasure and pain. The computer, in this scenario, substitutes for the lack of self-knowledge and self-regulation. Harari offers the example of Google, which, having access to all personal data from one's birth, could calculate a person's perfect mate more accurately than the person himself. However, the price for such efficiency is the loss of personal identity and individualism. As Harari notes, "Google will be able to represent even my own political opinions better than I can" (Harari 2017, 394).¹⁵

Harari invokes the notion of Rousseau's idea of the general will, where individual preferences are subsumed under the collective good. Similarly, in Harari's transhumanist society, personal autonomy gives way to the authority of algorithms that determine what is best for each individual. Just as Rousseau's general will represents a higher understanding of the common good, Harari's algorithms stand in as arbiters of a perfected life. Meanwhile, in this transhumanist society, human beings, who became consuming subjects in a liberal consumerist order, now face a new market of goods and services to consume—their own bodies. The human individual effectively consumes himself, viewing his body as material to be exchanged, augmented, and improved.

Human Beings Are Alienated from Society

The human person as a member of society is also alienated from society. In other words, the individuality of a particular human being is posited as disposable. The alienation will grow exponentially until the individual is completely replaceable (and will eventually be replaced). The new structure of the biochemically enhanced society does not just have to be achieved collectively, but humankind—mirrored by, but opposite to, the machines—is a "mass" that becomes "useless" (Harari 2017, 64, 408). While Harari emphasizes that liberal humanism, or simply liberalism, has brought about many advancements by elevating the individual, he suggests that its pursuit of ultimate human fulfillment paradoxically points to its own overcoming.

¹⁵ "We will just have to give up the idea that humans are individuals, and that each human has a free will determining what's good, what's beautiful and what is the meaning of life. Humans will no longer be autonomous entities directed by the stories their narrating self invents. Instead, they will be integral parts of a huge global network" (Harari 2017, 394).

He argues that realizing the humanist dream must undermine its very foundations, thereby ushering in a post-humanist paradigm. This echoes, albeit implicitly, a dialectical movement reminiscent of Hegel's concept of sublation, wherein an idea is both preserved and transformed in its supposed overcoming. Indeed, Harari explicitly states that his book seeks to illustrate this dynamic.¹⁶ Even more Hegelian is his proposal that, since we are cursed with the ignorance of which social "experiment" will ultimately work out for the better, the collateral damage of the destruction of human lives and other goods is not to be seen as a deterrent: "Adopting these particular projects might be a big mistake. But history is full of big mistakes. Given our past record and our current values we are likely to reach out for bliss, divinity and immortality—even if it kills us" (Harari 2017, 64).

Society Will Transform Humanity

Society will bring about the change from humanism to transhumanism. As a scientific community, human beings will band together to fulfill their destiny as a species, namely, the transcending of the species. The ideal state of humanity will include the absence of tension between what human beings desire and what they can achieve. The ordinary human of today will be replaced with the godlike superhuman of tomorrow. Molnar had already anticipated this transhumanist motif: "Man's ordinary qualities are blown up to cosmic proportions, and the swollen result is then called divine" (Molnar 1967, 82). The end of politics, as presented with the transhuman ideal, is no longer to strive for the common good, a good that does not diminish when shared, but rather to use all means at its disposal—while seizing ever more means—to bring about the perfect society. The responsibility of the individual is replaced with the collective aspiration of the whole society to reach its utopian goal. The individual becomes merely a particle in a coalesced whole that strives for unified perfection. The human person as citizen becomes disposable.

Knowledge Is Humanity's Highest Goal

Knowledge is the highest goal of humanity, and it must be put into practice. In Harari's words, "Knowledge that does not change behavior is useless" (Harari 2017, 67). Knowledge (an ambiguous notion in Harari's usage) is the third great resource, along with raw materials and energy. It is something that liberalism has disregarded (Harari 2017, 247). As Molnar observed, the knowledge of modern science has greatly shortened the "path to perfection," making the goal, transcending humanism, much more clearly visible (Molnar 1967, 46). Data and knowledge, which are increasing exponentially, will be

¹⁶ "This book began by forecasting that in the twenty-first century, humans will try to attain immortality, bliss and divinity. This forecast isn't very original or far-sighted. It simply reflects the traditional ideals of liberal humanism.... Yet the third and final part of the book will argue that attempting to realize the humanist dream will undermine its very foundations by unleashing new post-humanist technologies" (Harari 2017, 323).

applicable in increasingly precise ways. This progress will make this third basic resource fundamental in the change to the transhumanist future. Society therefore must be ordered “scientifically,” according to precepts Harari develops. The scientific and instrumental knowledge Harari employs is the same attitude toward knowledge that Hegel proposes in his *Phänomenologie*, where the love for knowledge has to make way for a “true,” applicable, and instrumental knowledge: “The true form in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of it. To contribute to bringing philosophy closer to the form of science—the goal of being able to cast off the name love of knowledge (*Liebe zum Wissen*) and become actual knowledge (*wirkliches Wissen*)—is the task I have set for myself” (Hegel [1807] 1952, 12; cf. Voegelin [1968] 2012, 24, his translation). It should be noted, however, that what Hegel means by “science” (be it *sophia* or *gnosis*) is not what Harari means. Harari reduces science or scientific knowledge to mere data processing and the advancement of technology.

Unrestrained Freedom

Harari believes in unrestrained human freedom. Self-realization is the central *Leitmotif* of his transhumanism. Humanity is called to perfect itself, and the road to perfection, while paved with casualties and incalculable collateral damage, is the only path out of the lamentable present state. The machine serves as the blueprint for perfection, evident in Harari’s assumption that modern scientific development will amount to a “data religion” or “techno-humanism.”

Having illustrated how Harari’s transhumanism reflects a certain kind of utopianism, we now turn to a critique of his transhumanism and its immanent aims.

Myth and Experience

Harari’s vision of the future structurally follows the pattern of a myth. But instead of looking into the past for a golden age, it tries to “bend time forwards,” locating the golden age in the future. As Molnar put it, the “archaic cycle”—now future-centric—is reintroduced (Molnar 1973, 74). The ontological fullness of time is not reached by a return to a primordial order, the order of the gods, but is projected into the future as a divinization of humanity. This mythical utopia does not share in a transcendent world or life, but is rather described in purely human terms. The transhumanist replacement of humanity becomes the only measure for the future state; the *parousia*¹⁷ consists of human beings transcending themselves by their own

¹⁷ On the term *parousia*, Voegelin writes, “For this purpose we shall take over from Heidegger’s interpretation of being the term ‘parousia,’ and speak of parousiasm as the mentality that expects deliverance from the evils of the time through the advent, the coming in all its fullness, of being construed as immanent. We can then speak of the men who express their parousiasm in speculative systems as parousiastic thinkers, of

power. Within this framework, the only measure of humanity's transcendent state is human imagination. Humans have to imagine their best selves and then proceed to convince themselves that they will reach their best selves by their own power. In truth, the mere imagination of a perfected self does not result in the perfected self. The mere imagining does not make it exist. One also must put it into practice.

A further issue with this act of imaginative creation is that humanity becomes the sole author of reality. By making humanity the measure of all things, Harari also betrays the limit of imagination. All human experience is flattened to fit the merely humanist framework. When only the human form serves as a basis for the imagination of the future state, the future state can never *exceed* the human; it can never become divine. Harari's method is telling: instead of defining what is truly divine about the Greek gods, he debases them to being merely human. In other words, the modern reader is *not allowed* to think that the Greek gods are anything more than mere projections of the human essence.¹⁸ By limiting what can be thought of when Greek gods are imagined, for instance, Harari limits humanity's access to the truly divine. He gives an inadequate excuse for this all-too-human divinity, saying that the future stage of humanity will be beyond anything imaginable, that it is *unimaginable*. But he has, in fact, presumed to limit what humanity can imagine.

Then there is Harari's understanding of freedom. For him, freedom is not a "freedom for," a freedom to do the good (see Mitchell 2015). That kind of freedom is grounded in some understanding of the excellence of human nature. Whoever acts in accordance with this imperative is free to become excellent. Harari's freedom, by contrast, is merely a "freedom from"—freedom from the toil of work, from death, from pain, from hunger, and, ultimately from any constraint. There is no room for higher values, such as sacrificial love, true friendship, faith, and so forth.

Furthermore, Harari's utopia is the result of a thought process that is deeply embedded in a particular understanding of history. While Harari appeals to scientific progress and certain positive elements of a digital society, he makes his vision appealing by omitting a large number of negative effects of digitization. His utopia has lost all traces of the downsides of digitization, such as maintenance of computers, crashing or failing operating systems, vulnerability to hackers, electronic theft of assets and data, dependence on electricity, and the limitations of batteries. Such omissions are telling. After

their structures of thought as parousiastic speculations, of the movements connected with some of these thinkers as parousiastic mass movements, and of the age in which these movements are socially and politically dominant as the age of parousiasm" (Voegelin [1968] 2012, 37).

¹⁸ We can detect a strong Feuerbachian influence here: "But the incarnate God is only the apparent manifestation of deified man; for the descent of God to man is necessarily preceded by the exaltation of man to God. Man was already in God, was already God himself, before God became man, i.e., showed himself as man" (Feuerbach 1881, 50).

all, who would support the full digitization of humanity when that includes our experience of a 404 error screen or the “blue screen of death” from the computer implanted in our brains?

Harari's projections and techno-dreams all ooze the inhuman desire to abolish the human body. He thus reflects what Molnar decries as a “longing to be beyond and above the human condition, to transmute it by an excess of spiritualization, to see the human body behave like a spirit” (Molnar 1973, 74). This wishful dreaming reflects a mind that struggles with the burdens of reality and longs for relief from pain and suffering—a natural human desire. However, while seeking respite from suffering is understandable, the suggestion of an ultimate escape creates the illusion that one can transcend reality entirely, disregarding the inescapable nature of suffering as an integral part of the human condition.

Utopian Mindset

By conjecturing a final stage of the development of humanity, Harari invites his readers to re-think the *now*. His predictions furthermore include and imply a certain understanding of human nature. His method unfolds in three steps.

First, Harari posits a specific conception of reality. Or better, he limits reality to what he wants the reader to perceive. By couching his thought in the larger framework of modernity as the project of trading power for meaning, he gives the reader a clear indicator of what he considers as central to modernity's essence. But was there not a seeking of power *before* modernity? How was it different? Harari does not seem to give an answer. Furthermore, by singling out humanism, or more precisely, evolutionary humanism, as the prime cause of all things good in the project of modernity, he emphasizes the two features of this large web of doctrines: individuality and will. But once the individual person is reduced to will—and the main thrust of history and the society that person finds himself in is the “will to power”—Harari betrays his true philosophical allegiance. He trusts in science as the domineering power over nature (Positivism) and establishes the individual will as the result of evolutionary material determinism. Free will, which is the central element of the person as praised by Harari, is thus eliminated. The will of the individual is nothing more than the result of evolution—and a crude materialistic version of evolution at that. The individual is thus dissolved into the greater forces governing the universe, making humanity subject to the whim of a deterministically developing force that necessarily determines human actions and the course of history. For Harari, the only way *beyond* this deterministic misery is transhuman transcendence. This he achieves with a cunning sleight of hand: “evolution” is simply exchanged for “technology and algorithm.” By this exchange, an invisible force, evolution, is replaced with something that humankind can control: the machine. In other words, the inhuman cause of humanity's development (evolution) is supplanted by the human invention

of technology, which now stands as an alternative—indeed, a competitor—to any traditional religious notion of divine providence, seemingly in a zero-sum contest.

Transhumanism, therefore, embodies and extends an inherent striving in modernity: the desire to gain power over nature. What supposedly makes this future projection less menacing than blind evolution is that human beings can finally take control of their own destiny. However, as C. S. Lewis warns, when humanity seizes power over nature, this inevitably results in the power of some human beings over others. In Lewis's account, the "Conditioners" control the means of technological advancement. They hold this power over other people, and they shape humanity according to their will and replace the providence of God with their own designs (Lewis [1947] 2001). Or at least they can give themselves this illusion. To be more precise, human beings do not actually take this power into their own hands (which would in turn put personal agency, responsibility, and moral questions back on the table), but rather they place it in the metal hands of the machine. Harari sells this self-enslavement as empowerment and emancipation.

Second, Harari revolts against liberal humanism's specific conception of reality. He points out its inherent problems and inconsistencies, which have produced many historical tragedies. With this critique, he himself enters into the dialectical process of history. He hails liberal humanism as the origin of many positive modern developments, but also criticizes it for being responsible for many evils. His main criticism comes down to liberal humanism's inability to achieve its own ideal. Harari gives his own interpretation of what liberal humanism actually means and what its goals are, telling the reader that these goals can only be reached if today's liberal humanism abolishes itself and is transcended in transhumanism. But this move is self-defeating. Since transhumanism is the true or fulfilled liberal humanism, it cannot bring any *real change* to the parameters of liberal humanism. While Harari can establish his own historical reading firmly within the tradition of liberal humanism, transhumanism's "new" goal is not new at all. It is merely the same search for power that is inherent in modernity, toward which all humanisms strive.

Thus the "trans" in "transhumanism," as Harari envisions it, offers nothing truly transcendental. This is crucial because, for Harari, all religion reduces to superstition or illusion, devoid of any genuine transcendence. As a result, without any transcendence, Harari's argument remains entangled in completely immanent dialectics, where one form of humanism (techno-humanism) merely replaces another (liberal humanism), which itself had displaced older myths and superstitions. There is no escape from this perpetual cycle. Harari's proposed utopia appears to be his only attempt at breaking free from this historical cyclicity.

Harari's most glaring flaw is his elimination of any transcendent dimension, which fatally undermines his entire vision. By stripping away the transcendent, he condemns his utopia to fall prey to the very forces it claims to overcome. Instead of breaking free from history's cycles, Harari's vision is devoured by them, reinforcing the same patterns it criticizes and remaining entrapped within them. What was supposed to be a bold escape turns out to be just another turn in the same old wheel.

While one might sympathize with Harari's critique of liberal humanism—its flaws, particularly its limited conception of human nature, are indeed apparent—his reaction is insufficient. Liberal humanism is only one among many factors that shaped modernity, science, and politics.¹⁹ By framing his solution as a mere rejection of liberal humanism, he fails to recognize that his own transhumanist utopia is simply another iteration of the same humanist ideals, rather than a genuine transcendence of them. In seeking to overcome human limitations through technology, he ultimately reaffirms the very framework he set out to escape.

The transhumanist illusion and desire in modernity to gain power over nature are imbued with an inherent flaw that needs scrutinizing. A significant fallacy in Harari's transhumanist vision is that he consistently overestimates the future capabilities of technology, particularly artificial intelligence, while simultaneously underestimating the essential role humanity plays in shaping the future. By aggrandizing technology's potential, Harari diminishes the richness of human agency and overlooks the unpredictability of human innovation, creativity, and moral development. This reductionist view of humanity is not only characteristic of Harari but also extends to the broader transhumanist movement, which often views human beings as malleable entities to be improved through technological augmentation. Furthermore, Harari's perspective aligns closely with the ideological currents of humanism and Darwinism that dominate much of contemporary Western academic thought, reducing the complexity of human existence to biological determinism and technological progress (see Bostrom 2005; Floridi 2014).

In this sense, Harari's work can be seen as emblematic of the broader modernist attempt to transcend human limitations through technology, rather than engaging with the more profound questions of what it means to be human. His writing often disregards the inherent uncertainties of technological advancement and the ethical dilemmas that come with subordinating human value to technological supremacy. By prioritizing data and algorithms as ultimate arbiters of truth and decision-making, Harari reflects an ideology that risks reducing the human experience to mere computation, a stance that echoes critiques by philosophers such as Jaron

¹⁹ On science, see Rossi 2000; Eagleton 2014, 1–43. On politics, see Oakley 2015, 1–7; Reale 2004. For an in-depth study of the shape of modern liberty, see Schindler 2017, 131–51.

Lanier, who warns of the dehumanizing effects of treating human consciousness and identity as reducible to information processing (Lanier 2010). That he remains firmly trapped in a particular kind of humanism—a humanism that is principally against any step towards transcending itself spiritually—can be illustrated by three of Harari's own features of thought: his negation of individuality, of freedom (both personal and political), and of objective, indubitable reality. All of these liberal humanism held dear.²⁰ In Harari's philosophy, these three are negated specifically in order to make room for transhumanism. He proposes a dissolution of the individual through merging with the machine and by outsourcing to the algorithm; he proposes a dissolution of the state and authority, since power must be ultimately centralized and subject or subjugated to digital manipulation; and he proposes a dissolution of reality as a whole, since human nature must transcend itself in order for something greater to take its place.

Third and lastly, once liberal humanism is redefined and in its redefined form negated, Harari can go on to the third step, which is reconstructing reality according to his own whim. Thus, he redefines *individual*, *freedom*, and *reality*:

1. Man must be reconstructed in his various facets (merging with machine, augmented capacities, etc.); i.e. human nature becomes something *made*, an object (Harari 2018, 77–131).²¹
2. Society must be reconstructed to form a single global government mirroring the unity of human nature.²² The “clash of civilizations” must be replaced with a unified global government. In positivist fashion, Harari wants to reshape human political existence by developing what Comte has called a culture of “sympathetic instincts” and love, replacing war and false theologisms with “true social morality” (Comte [1896] 2000, 2:249, 3:342). But, as de Lubac reminds us, “The positivist formula spells total tyranny. In practice it leads to the dictatorship of a party or, rather, of a sect. It refuses man any freedom, any rights, because it refuses him any reality” (Lubac 1983, 263).²³

²⁰ For a detailed comparison between liberalism and its alternatives, see Schindler 2021.

²¹ The fascination with an artificial human being is as old as humanity itself. See the examples of Goethe's *Homunculus*, the story of the golem, or generally, the fascination with the humanoid machine.

²² “Whatever changes await us in the future, they are likely to involve a fraternal struggle within a single civilisation rather than a clash between alien civilisations. The big challenges of the twenty-first century will be global in nature.... Though humankind is very far from constituting a harmonious community; we are all members of a single rowdy global civilisation” (Harari 2018, 95).

²³ Here again the image of Lewis's “Conditioners” comes to mind.

3. Finally, reality must be reconstructed to fit all these novelties. Since reality is recalcitrant to being manipulated on an ontological level (which arguably only God can do), the reconstruction takes the form of an illusion with certain features and characteristics. First and foremost, reality as *given* is rejected. The whole endeavor of transhumanism is based on the idea that reality is *makeable*. Being as given is rejected.²⁴ Human nature, anything divine, and the final cause of being are eliminated. Therefore reality as something *objective* is rejected. Everything becomes subjective interpretation, narrative, and merely particularized facts that can (or cannot) be assembled in any way whatsoever.²⁵ Truth is rejected. Being is rejected, and a certain hatred for being develops. This hatred spills over to the author of being, or God, thus spawning nihilism and a specific Christianophobia.²⁶

Conclusion

Yuval Harari's transhumanism inadvertently reveals some important truths about the human condition. To conclude, we can positively note three of these.

First, Harari's projections demonstrate that humanity is by nature religious. This being the case, whenever human beings try to eliminate religion—from our worldview, from our vision of history, from our narrative—it will not actually vanish, but rather reenter in the guise of something else, a pseudoreligious substitute. Consistent with Baudrillard's diagnosis, we can say that once the "sacramental order" of reality is superseded—in which the sign reflects a deeper and more profound reality (i.e., creation points to the Creator)—what follows is mere mundane and debased reality. Venerating the human being as the pinnacle of the cosmos means replacing God with an image (in fact something made *in his image*), namely, a simulacrum. Without being conscious of the more profound (i.e., transcendent) reality of God, the simulacrum turns reality into a "hyperreality" (Baudrillard 1994, 6–14. Humanity no longer even needs to pretend to be "real"; it can, as Harari does, project itself into an imaginative future without constraints. But humanity's reality is that of a creature, bound by its limitations. If we negate

²⁴ "Yet, as the analyses of early humanism and the Baroque have shown, an increased autonomy of the parts need not undermine the balance of the whole. What does follow from such an emancipation, however, is a shift in the overall structure of the synthesis. Thus when early humanists placed a new and strong emphasis on human creativity, they added a secondary center to the one traditionally reserved to the transcendent source of power. The philosophy of the subject converted this center into a primary one.... The form principle that has determined Western culture since the beginning ... has come under increasing attacks for veiling both the openness of existence and the indeterminacy of Being itself" (Dupré 1993, 249–50).

²⁵ See Harari 2017, 2033, for his explanation of the "narrating self" and his insight that the whole project of modernity is based on the trading of meaning for power.

²⁶ See Cunningham 2002.

the Creator, we do not liberate ourselves—we merely enthrone humanity as a substitute creator. Yet humanity, as history shows, makes for a miserable and self-destructive creator, forever chasing utopias that collapse under the weight of their own illusions.

Second, human beings are inherently limited; they are not gods. Harari's machine fantasy is futile because it attempts to fill a void that it only makes more glaring—humanity's inability to transcend its own nature out of its own powers. His transhumanist vision, like all utopian projections, is intrinsically inadequate. While human beings can imagine their own augmentation—modest improvements in cognition, physical abilities, or even longevity—they remain bound to their fundamental constraints. Even the most radical enhancements do not grant true transcendence; they only reinforce the inescapable reality of human finitude. Without an objective standard beyond ourselves, any effort to construct meaning or redefine human nature ultimately collapses into self-contradiction. Transhumanism, in its rejection of the given order, is not an ascent but an illusion—a futile attempt to escape reality by denying the very conditions that define it.

Third, at its core, transhumanism expresses a yearning to transcend the material limitations of the human condition—a desire that, in Harari's vision, manifests as a secularized form of “transfiguration.”²⁷ Transhumanists correctly identify the finitude, suffering, and constraints inherent in human existence, yet their response is not true transcendence but a replacement of reality with an artificial construct.

Instead of engaging authentically with the human longing for fulfillment—perhaps even acknowledging its deeper, transcendent dimension—transhumanism misinterprets this yearning as a technical problem to be solved. Harari's critique of human limitation is, in this sense, valid, but his solution is fundamentally flawed: rather than truly elevating humanity, transhumanism merely substitutes one set of constraints for another, reducing human destiny to an illusion of control rather than a path to genuine fulfillment.

As Michael Baggot (2022, 135) insightfully observes, transhumanism's faith in artificial intelligence follows the pattern of religious eschatology, yet remains confined within an entirely immanent framework. The technological singularity it envisions may radically alter human existence, but it offers no true transcendence—only a transformation devoid of higher purpose. This exposes a central contradiction at the heart of transhumanism: it rejects the given nature of humanity while simultaneously affirming the very question

²⁷ “[Transhumanist visions] bear striking parallels to Christian accounts of Jesus's transfiguration and of the resurrection of believers in the end times” (Baggot 2022, 135). Effectively, transhumanism utilizes religious tropes about the future and thus manages to stir religious hope from this envisioned future.

it cannot escape—the question of *telos*, of what human beings are and what they are for. In the end, transhumanism does not resolve the tension it identifies; it merely redirects it toward an uncertain and self-defeating pursuit of control. But the human desire for fulfillment cannot be satisfied by mere augmentation. To seek a higher destiny, we must first acknowledge that transcendence is not something we create for ourselves, but something to which we are called.

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