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# Transhumanist Nietzsche?

# An Interpretation and Critique of Stefan Lorenz Sorgner's Position

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### Abstract

*Stefan Lorenz Sorgner has argued that Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy constitutes a type of transhumanism. While Sorgner's interpretation is original, we deny that the transhumanist vision of the "posthuman" as a technologically enhanced human being accords with Nietzsche's Overhuman. While the two share superficial similarities, they are nonetheless distinct, for Nietzsche did not believe in Enlightenment ideas such as liberalism, progress and scientism, all of which feature prominently within transhumanism. Furthermore, we shall argue that scientistic transhumanist ideas relating to human "enhancement" are too modern and progressive to be Nietzschean. More seriously, Nietzsche's emphasis upon amor fati, a central feature of his thought, is all but ignored by transhumanists. According to the reading presented here, transhumanism constitutes an "all-too-human" position. While of interest as a system of thought, we reject Sorgner's ahistorical claim that Nietzsche can be counted as a transhumanist. In our view, Nietzsche's tragic hero is a singular individual who follows the call of Nature, but not a technologically enhanced posthuman.*

**Keywords:** *humanism; Nietzscheanism; posthumanism; speculative posthumanism; transhumanism*

### Introduction

In this paper, we summarize and comment upon the position of leading transhumanist philosopher, Stefan Lorenz Sorgner. His "Nietzschean" brand of transhumanism has spawned a contemporary debate on the relationship between the ideas of 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and transhumanism, one we have already reflected upon in greater detail elsewhere (Horvath and Lovasz, 2025). Therefore, in this context we shall concentrate upon Sorgner's reading of Nietzsche specifically. In the first half of this paper, we provide an outline of Sorgner's interpretation of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. In the second half of our essay, we summarize our own reasons for rejecting Sorgner's hypothesis of a "transhumanist Nietzsche." Engaging with Sorgner's critique of Michael J. Sandel's rejection of human technological enhancement, we argue that Sorgner's interpretation of Nietzsche suffers from selectivity. Nietzsche's voluntarism is overemphasized, while his deification of Nature in particular, as inflected by Romanticism, is ignored by Sorgner. If we take *amor fati* seriously, it precludes the possibility of a Nietzschean transhumanism.

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## Sorgner's Transhumanist Interpretation of Nietzsche

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, a leading philosophical proponent of transhumanism, has argued for a transhumanist reading of 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's work. The controversy regarding a possible connection between Friedrich Nietzsche and transhumanism was first ignited by transhumanist philosopher Nick Bostrom's 2005 article, "A history of transhumanist thought." In this paper, Bostrom associates transhumanism with the rationalist Enlightenment, while rejecting the idea of a Nietzsche-transhumanism nexus. Because transhumanism is a continuation of the European Enlightenment, which Nietzsche was critical of, there can be no meaningful association between the two. Despite the superficial similarity of the transhumanist vision of an enhanced "posthuman condition" with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Bostrom holds the two to be distinct and incompatible:

> "What Nietzsche had in mind (...) was not technological transformation but a kind of soaring personal growth and cultural refinement in exceptional individuals. (...) Despite some surface-level similarities with the Nietzschean vision, transhumanism – with its Enlightenment roots, its emphasis on individual liberties, and its humanistic concern for the welfare of all humans (and other sentient beings) – probably has as much or more in common with Nietzsche's contemporary the English liberal thinker and utilitarian John Stuart Mill" (Bostrom 2005, p. 4).

Transhumanism is rationalist and utilitarian, and Nietzsche rejected both. Furthermore, the Nietzschean vision is more pedagogical than eugenic. But does this apparent separation do justice to Nietzsche's outlook? In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes of "new philosophers" of the future who will "make use of religion for (...) breeding and education work" (Nietzsche 2002, p. 54). Breeding and education seem interlinked here. Indeed, the primary objective of Nietzsche's "future philosophers" will be to eradicate chance from human reproduction: "to teach humanity its future as its will, as dependent on a human will, to prepare for the great risk and wholesale attempt at breeding and cultivation and so to put an end to the gruesome rule of chance and nonsense that has passed for 'history' so far" (2002, p. 91). While one must be careful to avoid the methodological error of anachronism, it is also genuinely difficult to avoid the transhumanist and eugenicist implications of these claims.

To better understand Sorgner's transhumanist interpretation of Nietzsche, it is worth revisiting how the question of the human manifests in Sorgner's early book on Nietzsche, *Metaphysics Beyond Truth* (2007). By briefly touching upon this question, we may shed light on how Sorgner has arrived at his peculiar Nietzschean brand of transhumanism. As a point of departure, we must understand what Nietzsche's concept of the Overhuman reacts to. What Nietzsche is searching for is an exit from the perceived nihilism and relativism of modernity. Sorgner elucidates Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism not as a static, terminal state, but as a dynamic, "transitory phase" between the world of tradition and an era of new values yet to be born (Sorgner 2007, p. 109). Nihilism emerges when previously dominant "absolute standards" — such as traditional Judeo-Christian values — lose their compelling force, no longer aligning with "the strength of the majority of the

people" (2007, p. 137). Nietzsche defines this sorry civilizational state in an aphorism from *The Will to Power* as follows: "What does nihilism mean? — That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (1968, p. 9).

Nietzsche distinguishes between two primary forms of human response to this crisis of meaning: passive nihilism arises from a position of weakness. It occurs when an individual or society finds itself too feeble to uphold or achieve its former aims, this leading to the erosion and, eventually, loss of purpose and meaning. This can manifest as pervasive pessimism, where suffering outweighs pleasure, or a retreat into strategies aimed at minimizing pain, often seeking a state of "calmness and peace" (Sorgner 2007, p. 119). Sorgner points to Schopenhauer's philosophy and Buddhism as exemplars of this passive nihilism, at least for Nietzsche. In contrast, active nihilism stems from a position of strength. Here, the individual's or society's abilities are higher than what previous social frameworks allow for. As Nietzsche observes, the power of self-renewal in a culture "reaches its maximum of relative strength as a violent force of destruction — as active nihilism" (1968, p. 18). This leads to a creative destruction of outdated values, clearing the ground for the emergence of new forms of values. The onset of nihilism is intrinsically linked to "decadence," which Nietzsche views as a necessary consequence of life's inherent dynamics, where nothing remains perpetually fresh and young. "Decadence," insofar as a subset of a declining culture still has a surplus of nihilist and creative energies, "effects a liberation of the spirit" (Sorgner 2007, p. 111). In this state, the raw experiences of pain and pleasure become the primary criteria for human judgment, leading to what we may term a psychological hedonism generative of new values (Katsafanas, 2015). The overcoming of nihilism however is reserved for the "strongest" human beings, namely those who possess the capacity to create new values and new truths (Nietzsche 1968, p. 24). These newly forged values are "self-imposed" and exist independently of any eudaimonism, thereby forming a new, consistent set of types of action that provides a stable foundation for life beyond the vacillations of mere sensation.

Nietzsche's conception of nihilism reframes human historical development as a cyclical, yet transformative, struggle for life, wherein destruction serves as a necessary prerequisite for creation. Sorgner emphasizes that nihilism is an "intermediary period" and "part of a process of change" (Sorgner 2007, p. 106). The Nietzschean perspective counters the commonsense understanding of nihilism as a purely negative phenomenon or an unequivocal sign of decline. For Nietzsche, nihilism represents a necessary cyclical phase of re-evaluation: "every major growth is accompanied by a tremendous crumbling and passing away: suffering, the symptoms of decline belong in the times of tremendous advances" (Nietzsche 1968, p. 69). These considerations imply that human history is not a linear progression towards an ultimate, fixed truth or an end of history. Instead, history constitutes a megacycle of value creation, its inevitable devaluation (manifesting as decadence, then nihilism), and subsequent re-creation of values. The human, in this light, emerges as a historical being whose very existence is defined by this ongoing process of growth, decline and self-overcoming. But what does all this have to do with the figure of the technologically enhanced transhuman?

Nietzsche's concept of the "highest man," or "over-human being," (we shall use Sorgner's term *Overhuman*) represents the zenith of human potential and the ultimate trajectory of humanity's future. This individual is envisioned as a "legislator of the future"

who possesses the capacity to create new values and redirect history. For Nietzsche, the prime exemplars of this type of human are philosophers, "those who make the most extreme efforts to test how far man could elevate himself" (1968, p. 511). Such a "full, rich, great, whole human being" is deemed capable of "[justifying] the existence of whole millennia," for this "high" type of human individual has fulfilled the sum of human potential (1968, pp. 518-9). A defining characteristic of the "highest man" is the embodiment of opposites. This individual must "represent the antithetical character of existence most strongly, as its sole glory and justification," in other words, someone who can "grow better and more evil" simultaneously, achieving the maximum intensity of life in the process (1968, p. 470). This entails integrating in oneself seemingly contradictory forces such as creation and destruction, good and evil, and reconciling the ceaseless flux of Becoming (driven by the will to power) with the stability of Being (manifested in eternal recurrence). This internal integration is indicative of the highest feeling of power. Sorgner holds that Nietzsche perceived himself as this "predestined man," an "inventor of new values" who possessed the unique "know-how" to "reverse perspectives" and initiate a comprehensive "revaluation of values" (Sorgner 2007, p. 133). Nietzsche's entire philosophical project seems to attribute a central role to philosophers. Nietzsche believed his philosophy was destined to dominate future millennia due to its perceived alignment with the ascendant "scientific spirit" (2007, p. 150). This spirit, having supposedly defeated religion, embraces the world of appearance as the sole reality, adopts an evolutionary understanding of organisms, and favors a physical and evolutionary interpretation of the universe. Nietzsche's theories, including the will to power and eternal recurrence, are presented by him as manifestly "scientific," inherently appealing to the intellect, rendering his hypotheses "inevitable" for the coming age.

The emergent "age of science" is intrinsically linked to a "tragic outlook on life." This "rebirth of tragedy" signifies humanity's growing capacity to "affirm all the terrors of life" and embrace existence with a resounding "Yes" by embodying the concept of *amor fati*, which Sorgner summarizes as follows: "the ability to affirm all the terrors of life, to say yes to life, to reach an *amor fati* which is linked to the beginning of a tragic age, for it is the sign of strength that a tragic age comes about. All this is what Nietzsche is describing in his own world view" (2007, p. 151). Symptomatically, Sorgner does not dwell much upon *amor fati* (love of fate), which is arguably Nietzsche's central concept, perhaps *the* most important component of the entire Nietzschean philosophy. For Nietzsche, *amor fati* is a manifestly ontological commitment, an ethics (and acceptance) of "being at home in the world" (Huddlestone, 2025, p. 16). As Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*, "I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who makes things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer" (Nietzsche 2001, p. 157). If *amor fati* is an uncompromising acceptance of nature and reality, as Nietzsche's quote seems to suggest, then this is very damaging for any proposed transhumanist interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy. For transhumanists, nothing could be more foreign than an attitude of accepting one's limitations or accepting the unavoidable fact of suffering. Transhumanism is not simply a philosophy, but a broad intellectual movement. For transhumanists, the phrase "posthuman" denotes an improved, enhanced and technological being that has

evolved out of *homo sapiens,* a creature who has overcome suffering (Nayar 2013, p. 5). Transhumanist "interventions aim to improve the state of an organism beyond its normal healthy state" (Bostrom and Roache 2007, p, 120). Here the term "posthuman" refers to superhuman modes of being that transcend the limits of the human condition (Abrams 2004, p. 248). Transhumanists are generally committed both to "perpetual progress" and "intelligent technology, self-direction, or rational thinking" (More 2013, p. 5). The transhumanist emphasis on human self-determination, as well as the desire for subjugating the process of natural evolution for human goals, are essential features of transhumanism. Transhumanists believe in the perfectibility of humans and see the biological limitations of the human condition as something to be transcended via technology. In their view, evolution must be redirected, planned and changed, eliminating its contingency, so as to enhance humans and build up our capabilities.[3] None of this aligns well with Nietzschean *amor fati.* It is difficult not to view transhumanism as, far from being a triumphant Nietzschean affirmation of life, rather a denial of life and a rejection of nature (Babich 2017).

Returning to Nietzsche, acceptance of the fact of Eternal Recurrence serves as the ultimate "test" of life-affirmation (Sorgner 2007, p. 151). Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo,* his final philosophical testament, explicitly identifies himself as the "last disciple of the philosopher Dionysos," affirming "passing away and destroying": "the affirmation of passing away and destroying, which is the decisive feature of a Dionysian philosophy; saying Yes to opposition and war; becoming" (Nietzsche 2007, p 3). Nietzsche also embraces the provocative title of "Antichrist," explicitly positioning his philosophy as "inverted Platonism" and a direct countermovement to Christianity, with the overarching aim of a "Revaluation of all Values" – including eudaimonism and utilitarianism, positions which – as we have mentioned – are of key importance for transhumanists (Faustino 2024; Anomaly 2005). Nietzsche's self-identification as the "highest man," "legislator," and a "Dionysian lover of fate" reveals a performative dimension to his philosophy: he is not merely describing a future human type, but rather he is attempting to embody the higher human type, actively enacting a historical transition. This extends beyond mere abstract argumentation, for Nietzsche's life and writing style become integral parts of his philosophical practice. The Overhuman, as exemplified by the Nietzschean philosopher, is not only a creator of values but also a mythmaker and a prophet. Nietzsche's philosophy is not simply a set of abstract ideas but a cultural intervention, an attempt to reshape human consciousness and historical trajectory through a powerful, self-exemplifying act that can overcome nihilism. Can one affirm the Eternal Return and the Overhuman simultaneously, without rendering the human condition itself paradoxical? Does the affirmation of both fate and self-overcoming mean that Nietzsche shares with the transhumanists a rejection of human nature?

Sorgner's study of Nietzsche's philosophy in *Metaphysics Without Truth* provides a coherent, albeit complex portrayal of the place of the human within Nietzsche's

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[3] More does reference the idea of "spontaneous order": "extropians have a specific conception of transhumanism, involving certain values and goals such as boundless expansion, self-transcendence, dynamic optimism, intelligent technology, and spontaneous order." More, Max. "Transhumanism. Towards a Futurist Philosophy." (1996) https://www.ildodopensiero.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/max-more-transhumanism-towards-a-futurist-philosophy.pdf These concepts – engineering evolution along the lines of rational principles vs spontaneous order – appear to be at odds with one another.

philosophy. The human being, in this framework, is fundamentally an embodied "will to power," a "power-constellation" whose cognitive faculties — the intellect, mind, and consciousness — serve as tools for both survival and the enhancement of power. These aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy do lend themselves to a transhumanist instrumentalization. As Sorgner notes, the human for Nietzsche "is no longer a single power-quantum, but a collection of power-quanta" (Sorgner 2007, p. 50). Why not attempt to enhance our power, even beyond that which is normatively considered as compatible with human nature? On a Nietzschean view, human epistemology is inherently perspectival, leading to the implication that objective truths do not exist. Rather, we are condemned to rely upon "perspectival falsifications" that are paradoxically necessary for life itself (88). One could view transhumanism as precisely such an instrument, a mobilizing myth that allows us to build up our own power.[4] This basically pragmatist understanding liberates humanity from the futile pursuit of an unattainable "truth" and re-orients its fundamental motivation towards the active creation of self-imposed and sovereign values, allowing us to become what we (always and necessarily) are and have always been (Franco 2018). The human journey is characterized by significant historical transitions, notably the current shift from a declining Judeo-Christian age to an emerging scientific one, a transition mediated by the transformative creative destruction of nihilism. Ultimately, the human is depicted as a dynamic, indeterminate, self-overcoming flow of becoming, capable of embracing a "tragic age" by affirming life in its entirety, including its inherent suffering.

As we have seen, Nietzschean affirmation is exemplified by the love of fate and the affirmation of Eternal Recurrence – although the former aspects are underemphasized by Sorgner. The latter's exegesis of Nietzsche's philosophy reveals a view of human history that is cyclical yet possesses a distinct progression, where each "age" is defined by its dominant "spirit" and its corresponding "truths." Such a stance, which Sorgner has maintained in later works, is distant from the usual linear progressivism and optimism of mainstream transhumanism. This implies a continuous, self-referential process of human self-creation. The human's "truth" is not static but evolves in accordance with its prevailing "spirit." Nietzsche is not merely interpreting historical trends; he is actively participating in and accelerating this profound historical shift. The "human" for Sorgner's Nietzsche is a being that constantly re-invents and reconfigures its realities, its values, and its understanding of "truth" based on its evolving "will to power." The Eternal Return, if we take it as a literal ontological truth, makes the human condition a perpetual process of self-overcoming and self-creation, a dynamic process of becoming that finds temporary concretion in its self-imposed "falsifications."

## Nietzschean Transhumanism?

It has been important to summarize Sorgner's early interpretation of Nietzsche for, in our view, it informs his later views regarding the supposed compatibility of transhumanism and Nietzschean philosophy. Sorgner's article, "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and

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[4] An advocate of transhumanism could feasibly accept that transhumanism is indeed a "religion of technology," as certain critics of the movement point out, but also indicate that myths are necessary for growing human potential (Burdett 2015). Like Sorgner, Brett Carollo recognizes the need for a mobilizing mythology for any truly powerful political and social movement (Carollo 2022). Transhumanism can only be legitimated by a belief in apotheosis (Fuller and Lipińska 2014, p. 45).

Transhumanism," is a direct response to Bostrom's rejection of Nietzsche. Sorgner lists commonalities among transhumanists and Nietzsche. Both hold a processual view of reality and human nature: "there is nothing which is eternally fixed," writes Sorgner, and both Nietzscheans and transhumanists agree with such an assertion.[5] As a consequence of the Nietzschean transvaluation of values, "there are no absolute and unchanging values" (2009, 32). However, if this is so, then human enhancement also cannot be an eternal value, but rather a temporary stage in human history. The dynamism of reality precludes objective, ahistorical value systems, and this necessitates open-endedness when it comes to constructing our values and ourselves. It is true that "a willingness to revise one's beliefs and assumptions" is a key component of liberal individualist transhumanism too.[6] Even the most speculative ontological concept of Nietzsche's philosophy, the idea of eternal recurrence, was grounded in 19th century evolutionary science (Sorgner 2009, p. 33). Transhumanists are also highly supportive of the natural sciences and hope to achieve enhancement of the human condition via technological means. Yet Sorgner's reading of Nietzsche as a positivist ignores the fact that Nietzsche was also highly critical of scientism as the fanatical validation of science as a panacea for all human woes. The scientist is, for Nietzsche, a similar figure to the priest: both are negators of the will to life insofar as they advocate for fixed value systems. Similarly to the pragmatists, Nietzsche views ideas as instruments and not aims, something adherents of scientism get wrong when they idolize knowledge and science (Cristy 2023; Bamford 2005). Sorgner concedes that, when writing of the *Übermensch* (Sorgner's preferred English translation is "Overhuman"), "Nietzsche does not refer to technological means of improvement (...) However, Nietzsche does not exclude the additional possibility of technological enhancement either." (2009, p. 38). Yet Sorgner seems to ignore Nietzsche's critical attitude towards the predominance of science in the 19th century, as exemplified for instance by the following quote from *Untimely Meditations*: "after the panting and harassment of the daily race which the world of the sciences is today, how many of them will be able to maintain that courageous and steady glance that characterizes the champion of culture even if they ever possessed it – that glance which condemns this daily race itself as a source of barbarism" (Nietzsche 1997, p. 38). It does not seem evident that Nietzsche shared the transhumanist enthusiasm for the redemptive capacities of science and scientific knowledge.

As we have seen, the Overhuman is above all the philosopher who invents new frameworks of human theory and practice. Of course, a transhumanist may point out that too rigid and dogmatic academic philosophy has lost this ability, therefore the role of the "higher human" is to be filled out by daring transhumanist start-up entrepreneurs who experiment with their bodies. But Nietzsche never could have foreseen such a development, and we cannot know if he would agree with such an evaluation of the contemporary situation. Anachronism is, in any case, unconvincing, for it is counter-intuitive to infer the presence of implicit content from the absence of explicit references. Sorgner attempts to circumvent this criticism with a radical equation: *what if breeding and education are one and the same?* To support the contention that pedagogy and selective breeding are similar, Sorgner mentions Nietzsche's high esteem for Goethe. The latter is at the very least a proto-overhuman. In *Twilight of the Idols*, among Goethe's characteristics

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[5] Sorgner, Stefan Lorenz. "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism." *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20.1 (2009): 29-42., 30.
[6] Bostrom, Nick. "Transhumanist values." (2001) http://www.nickbostrom.com/tra/values.html

Nietzsche lists several which *can* be read in a transhumanist light. For example, while Goethe "made use of (...) natural science," he "did not divorce himself from life but immersed himself in it," he "fought against the disjunction of reason, sensuality, feeling, will" and, most importantly, "he disciplined himself into a whole, *he created himself*" (Nietzsche 1998, pp. 73-4). Goethe is both strong and highly educated, that is, well-bred, a human who has achieved "wholeness."

Nietzsche's hagiographic image of Goethe as a quasi/proto-overhuman "Dionysus" supposedly demonstrates that education is a form of breeding. Sorgner asserts that "it might be the case that many qualities one develops on the basis of one's education are embedded so deeply in one's personality that they cannot get altered significantly," leading to the conclusion that there is no real difference between breeding and pedagogy (Sorgner 2009, p. 34).[7] While the reunification of nature with culture is a nonmodern move and one that could indeed prove highly productive, there is no indication that Nietzsche shares the basic values of transhumanism, especially eudaimonism. The absence of suffering is not more empowering than the presence of suffering, quite the opposite: Nietzscheans love fate, and therefore cannot reject the contingency of reality. *Amor fati* is also *amor mundi*, a love of the world in all its imperfection (Roodt 2001). This simply does not square well with the general transhumanist emphasis upon the – supposedly self-evident and unpolitical - "perfectibility" of the human condition (Le Dévédec 2018). Sorgner asserts that both education and breeding are forms of enhancement: "if genetic engineering, or liberal eugenics, can actually be seen as a special type of education, which is what transhumanists seem to hold, then it is possible that this position would have been held by Nietzsche, too, as education played a significant role in his ethics" (Sorgner 2009, p. 35). If Goethe is an exemplar of the proto-overhuman, as Sorgner claims, then transhumanists ought to be Nietzscheans and Nietzscheans ought to be transhumanists, for "the overhuman comes about via an evolutionary step which originates from the group of higher humans," such as Goethe (2009, p. 38). Furthermore, if "it is in the interest of higher humans to permanently overcome themselves," then all those who commit themselves to such permanent self-overcoming can be regarded "as an ancestor of the overhuman" (2009, p. 40). If "the world is will to power," as Sorgner maintains elsewhere, then we have no reason not to will our own self-enhancement (Sorgner 2010, p. 2). Nietzsche's mythology of the Overhuman provides a source of meaning for transhumanists, who, like Nietzsche, reject traditional religiously-grounded values.

In our opinion Sorgner's reading of Nietzsche suffers from a recurring selectivity. While Nietzsche's depiction of Goethe does contain an imperative to improve one's self, it also references "nature-idolatry" and "a reverence for everything actual" that culminates in a fatalistic, albeit joyful acceptance of reality, the tragic sense of life: "such a liberated spirit stands in the midst of the universe with a joyful and trusting fatalism, with faith in the fact that only what is individual is reprehensible, that everything is redeemed and affirmed in the whole — he no longer denies" (Nietzsche 1998, pp. 73-4). Sorgner does not refer to this paragraph, and rightly so: fatalism is alien to the spirit of transhumanism. In his defense of transhumanism, Sorgner never once references the tragic idea of life as

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[7] Sorgner, 2009, p. 34. In this regard, Sorgner is not alone in the philosophy of pedagogy. John Dewey, the great American pragmatist philosopher, held that "habit" is the foundation of human subjectivity. Our habits are limitations which can only be changed very gradually over a lengthy period of time. There is therefore no inherent distinction between breeding and education.

explicated by Nietzsche, hence we reject the idea that Nietzsche could have been a transhumanist, for optimism, progressivism, scientism, liberalism, and a belief in the perfectibility of human nature seem essential components of transhumanism. Nietzsche believed in none of these modern values, precisely because the Nietzschean overhuman, while a self-improver, is at bottom also characterized by a fatalistic yet heroic attitude regarding nature.[8] The implication of Sorgner's position would be that transhumanism is an applied Nietzscheanism, a practical realization of Nietzsche's ideas relating to the overhuman. Nietzsche's Zarathustra does assert that "human being is something that must be overcome."[9] Furthermore, "life must overcome itself again and again! (...) Life itself wants to build itself into the heights with pillars and steps; it wants to gaze into vast distances and out upon halcyon beauties – therefore it needs height!" (2006, p. 78). Overcoming is an ascending movement. But can the interpreter pick and choose among a philosopher's concepts, selecting those most in harmony with one's own views? Is such selectivity truly helpful or illuminating? What is to prevent us from selecting other passages from Nietzsche that undermine transhumanism, such as references to Romanticism, nature-idolatry and Nietzsche's love for natural beauty?[10] Nietzsche was an admirer of life as it is, a thinker of immanence, and this in our view puts him at odds with any idea of transcendence, including secularized eschatologies such as transhumanism. Nature worship seems incompatible with transhumanist rationalist constructivism and scientism.[11]

As a final step in our investigation of Sorgner's transhumanist Nietzscheanism, or more accurately, quasi-Nietzschean transhumanism, we must delve into the former's critique of Michael J. Sandel's bio conservative position, as elaborated in Sorgner's 2016 article, "Nietzsche's Virtue Ethics and Sandels' Rejection of Enhancement Technologies." The issue of contention here is the divisive topic of human enhancement, something all transhumanists advocate for and which "bio conservatives" of various hues reject as either immoral or unfeasible, or both. Sandel is a communitarian of conservative dispositions, but it is not immediately self-evident why this normative stance should imply wholesale rejection of all human enhancement technologies. Hence, we must reconstruct Sandel's position, before summarizing Sorgner's response and, finally, evaluating what this issue says about the possibility and feasibility (or lack thereof) of Sorgner's transhumanist brand of Nietzsche.

Sandel's critique of human enhancement stems from a communitarian virtue-ethical framework, which he believes offers a more robust basis for ethics and political philosophy than arguments grounded in autonomy or equality. His primary concern is that enhancement technologies, particularly genetic modifications, threaten fundamental collective moral and social goods. Sandel expresses skepticism regarding the ability of

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[8] Respect for nature and its resistance to human designs is a recurring theme in Nietzsche's thought, an influence attributable to both German Romanticism and American Transcendentalism. The most obvious and explicit influence here is of course Goethe though (White and Hellerich 1998).

[9] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None.* tr. Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge University Press, 2006, 41.

[10] Under this we understand not an uncritical Romantic anthropomorphic understanding of Nature (which Nietzsche rejected), but rather a recognition of the chaotic and inhuman character of Nature as in itself beautiful and worthy of respect, without attempting to force our human ideas of beauty upon it.

[11] Nietzsche's skepticism regarding the relatively inferior status of culture as opposed to nature is completely ignored by transhumanists. Nature, the wilderness in particular, is a model for healthy human beings sufficiently wild to be free yet pragmatic to remain within culture. A Nietzschean position would militate for a tragic view of human entanglement with nature. For more on Nietzsche's philosophy of nature, see: (Trusso 2014).

individualist ethics to counteract the perceived danger of eugenics: "an ethics of autonomy and equality cannot explain what is wrong with eugenics" (Sandel 2007, p. 81). Consequently, Sandel turns to a virtue-ethical approach to articulate a communitarian rejection of eugenics and related technologies. As a communitarian, Sandel opposes what he sees as the myth of the "self-made man." If everything were indeed the product of individual striving and talent, it would become difficult to perceive talents as "gifts" for which individuals are indebted to society, family and community institutions. Instead, talents would be seen as "achievements" for which they are solely responsible. Furthermore, human enhancement is predicated upon individual and human hubris, which are not promising recipes for morality (Sandel 2009). Sandel's argument highlights a broader concern about hubris and the loss of humility in a supposedly increasingly atomized and individualized liberal society. Sandel's argument here relies on a perceived moral boundary between "gifts," which imply indebtedness, humility, and a recognition of something "given," and "achievements," which imply sole responsibility, self-creation, and potentially hubris. Sandel is not claiming that talented individuals should not be rewarded, but rather that there are parts of us which result from collective goods. An exclusive focus upon individual merit alone risks undoing the common good (Sandel 2020).

The posited dichotomy between gift and merit serves as a foundational premise for Sandel's bio conservatism. The implication is that crossing this boundary through human enhancement is morally problematic because it distorts our understanding of human agency and our place in the world, potentially eroding virtues like gratitude and humility while further increasing individualism. Sandel's most significant objections to genetic enhancement are directed towards its implications for parenting. He argues that the "telos of parenting" is fundamentally about "acceptance" of children as they come on the basis of an accepting "openness to the unbidden" (Sandel 2007, p. 45). This perspective is rooted in the belief that parental love, at least ideally, is not contingent on the talents and attributes the child has. Implicit in this position is the claim that authentically virtuous parents would refrain from using genetic enhancement technologies, whether for selection (e.g., choosing a fertilized egg after IVF and PGD) or trait modification. Such actions, in Sandel's view, would be inconsistent with "openness to the unbidden" and thus with the parental virtue of "accepting" or "unconditional love" (2007, pp. 49–50). While transformative love has its place when we seek to improve others, as in the case of education, in Sandel's view it is not fitting for parents to pick and choose between what kind of traits their children should be born with. Sandel claims that transformative love, as manifested through the provision of education, can be a virtuous expression of parental care, but he draws the line when it comes to genetic enhancement by modification. Despite acknowledging a potential "structural analogy" between traditional education and genetic modification, Sandel characterizes genetic enhancement as "hyper-parenting" and a "problematic attitude which is characteristic of our times" (2007, p. 62).

One could of course ask the question that if transformative love is acceptable for education, why would it not be for genetic modification, especially if both aim for similar outcomes, such as enhanced talent? Sorgner directly addresses Sandel's argument that autonomous enhancement undermines the notion of talents as "gifts" on precisely such terms. The former contends that Sandel's framing of talents as either "solely indebted or solely responsible" is a "false dichotomy" (Sorgner 2016, p. 370). Sorgner claims, in an anti-essentialist vein, that human beings have always been, at least partly, responsible for

the development of their talents. Pedagogy and self-transformation are not unnatural, but rather part and parcel of being human: we have always been anthropotechnical beings reliant upon artificial modes of cultural mediation, such as language.[12] Talents, Sorgner asserts, inherently require engagement, effort, and various transformative processes, which often involve the use of technology. From a Nietzschean perspective, the use of genetic enhancement would not fundamentally alter the existing situation nor make us more artificial than we already are. Instead, it would simply introduce a novel means of talent development, analogous to traditional technologies and educational practices. Sorgner claims that Sandel's argument is weak due to its reliance on an implausible categorical distinction between receiving and being responsible for talents, and between traditional modes of reproduction and genetic technologies (2016, p. 374). Sorgner's critique dissolves Sandel's sharp distinction between natural "gifts" and technologically "achieved" talents. By asserting that human development always involves artifice and technology, Sorgner establishes a continuum wherein genetic enhancement is not a radical break from an always already anthropotechnical human history, but merely an extension of existing practices of self-improvement and interaction with the environment.

While Sandel affirms "transformative love" through education as virtuous, he rejects genetic modification, even though both can aim for similar outcomes. Sorgner argues that Sandel's stance is "inconsistent if he claims that certain types of shaping a child's life through education are virtuous, while all types of genetic enhancement by modification are vicious" (2016, p. 372). Sorgner asserts here, as elsewhere too, that "traditional education and genetic enhancement by modification are structurally analogous procedures" (ibid). Both can pursue similar goals, both are instrumental and not ends-in-themselves. More radically though, Sorgner also claims that educational measures themselves can lead to "genetic modifications" through epigenetic changes (ibid). In Sorgner's view, epigenetics provides a biological basis for blurring the line between "natural" and "artificial" development, and between "education" and "genetic modification," a nonmodern move intended to undo the modern distinction between culture and nature. One worry though is that Sorgner places undue emphasis upon modifiability, while ignoring what makes human nature "natural." As a transhumanist, Sorgner cannot accept the possibility of the unmodifiable. More broadly, transhumanism can be framed as an ideology of control that seeks to subordinate nature to human designs (Loh 2025). Sandel's moral differentiation based on the nature of specific interventions does seem more responsive to this concern regarding lingering doubts around the classic *nomos* vs *physis* distinction (convention/culture vs nature). The decomposition of the culture-nature boundary does not make the world into a human/transhuman playground wherein we may impose upon nature whatever we see fit. And it is difficult to see how a Nietzschean ethics squares with all this.

Sorgner's stance implies that we should not focus upon specific methods of enhancement, but rather upon desired outcomes and their ethical implications, regardless of whether these are achieved via traditional or genetic means, for both can have biological impacts. The Nietzschean must supposedly be preoccupied with creating the posthuman. As Sorgner notes elsewhere, "higher human beings constantly want to overcome

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[12] This contention Sorgner shares with the prominent representative of German philosophical anthropology, Arnold Gehlen (Gehlen 1988).

themselves to become stronger with respect to the different qualities to be enhanced in human beings, so that ultimately the overhuman can emerge. In transhumanist thinking, the overhuman is called the posthuman" (Sorgner 2021, p. 65). "[H]igher humans still belong to the human species, but they also possess qualities that overhumans could possess. In contrast to overhumans, higher humans cannot pass on their special qualities through reproduction" (2021, p. 68). Most interestingly, Sorgner launches a Nietzschean immoralist attack on Sandel's reliance on "unconditional love" as the sole virtue in parenting, arguing that this position is problematic and can lead to severely negative consequences. He introduces an argument drawing upon psychological research relating to "narcissist personality disorder," a scientific consensus which identifies "too much unconditional love" during childhood as a cause of narcissist personality disorder (Sorgner 2016, p. 374). Excessive praise and esteem for a child's talents, coupled with the automatic fulfillment of their wishes, can lead to an inflated self-image and a fear of not meeting impossibly high expectations, resulting in symptoms later on in life such as depression, auto-aggression, aggression, hyperactivity, and suicidal tendencies. Sorgner also connects these considerations to Nietzsche's concept of the "will to power" as a fundamental drive to overcome the gap between one's ideal and real self, suggesting that a lack of challenge, fostered by unqualified unconditional love, can hinder this natural drive. Sorgner concludes that "solely unconditional love might not be the proper virtue for parenting, as it can lead to severe personality disorders that hinder a child's ability to lead a flourishing life" (2016, p. 377). This argument presents an ethical paradox: a virtue (unconditional love), when applied without qualification or balance, can lead to significant harm. A Nietzschean skepticism regarding morality is evident here. Sorgner demonstrates that an ethical ideal *can* have detrimental real-world consequences if it ignores human psychological realities and the demands of a "competitive, naturalist world" driven by the will to power: "the virtue of unconditional love fails to respect the fact that we are living in a competitive, naturalist world, in which we need to become strong and fight for ourselves to be able to flourish and to find and defend our own position in it" (ibid).

In light of his critique of unconditional love, Sorgner advocates for Nietzsche's virtue of "truthfulness" as an important alternative or complementary parental virtue. Sorgner frames unconditional love as a "slavish virtue," arguing that such virtues are "dangerous, because they do not support and promote one's self interest but instead they are in the interest of the people who do not have those virtues or do not stick to them" (2016, p. 378). Sorgner contends that Sandel's emphasis upon unconditional love exemplifies a slavish virtue, potentially leading to detrimental outcomes for parents and children alike. Nietzsche's "will to power," as well as the imperative to be truthful beyond good and evil, implies that parents should not "solely affirm every action of their child but also demand something, based on their truthful self-understanding" (ibid). This aligns with Nietzsche's "perspectival theory of power" and a radically pluralist understanding of the good which allows for a wide range of goals in parenting beyond an overly narrow focus on unqualified acceptance (ibid). Introducing "truthfulness" as a parental virtue re-conceptualizes parental responsibility. It moves beyond passive acceptance to an active, honest assessment of a child's potential and challenges, implying a duty to foster strength

and self-reliance rather than merely providing comfort.[13] Sorgner supposes that human enhancement aligns with Nietzsche's naturalistic worldview, where flourishing often involves struggle and overcoming using all tools at our disposal. The implication is that "virtuous" parenting (in the Nietzschean sense) may necessitate making choices, including human enhancement, that prepare a child for the realities of the world, rather than shielding them from it with unqualified love, thereby broadening the scope of ethical parental duties. Despite the overall Nietzschean flavor of Sorgner's immoralism and vitalist emphasis upon strength, in his critique of Sandel's virtue ethics, once more no mention is made of Nietzsche's respect for a more-than-human nature, nor the love of fate.

## Conclusion

If one is genuinely strong, then one has both the confidence to both increase one's power and the realism to accept the inherently limited nature thereof. As Ciano Aydin has argued, the transhumanist emphasis upon human enhancement is redolent of scientistic hubris, something Nietzsche was opposed to from the outset (Ciano 2017). Because of its weddedness to a progressive and teleological view of human flourishing, its eudaimonism and utilitarianism, as well as its adherence to scientism, transhumanism cannot be compatible with anything other than a severely truncated form of quasi-Nietzscheanism. While it would obviously be methodologically unsound to make any such retrospective judgment, a resurrected Nietzsche would almost certainly not be a philosophical ally of transhumanism. An essential component of Nietzsche's philosophy is respect for nature. In Nietzsche's thought, the human is an inseparable part of nature, in the context of a more-than-human world we cannot control but must respect, in all its terrible beauty. A Nietzschean philosophy would advocate for a loyalty to the Earth (Parkes 1999). Making nature the objective of planning and transformation cannot but strike us as a fundamentally non-Nietzschean position.

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[13] In this regard, there is some truth to the contention that transhumanism is inherently individualistic, fragmenting community and introducing new distinctions, resulting in the acceleration of human diversity (Déchaux and Jacobs-Colas 2019).

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