Thomas, A. (2024). *The Politics and Ethics of Transhumanism. Techno-Human Evolution and Advanced Capitalism*. Bristol University Press.

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Criticisms of transhumanism are often as weak or even weaker than transhumanist proposals. If we consider that a significant number of criticisms arise from the fear of the dangers that techno-optimistic proposals might pose to human nature—whatever that might mean—then the effectiveness of arguments against transhumanism is null. When technical production is effective, no one cares about the complaints of sages who are detached from the world we inhabit. In this sense, it is refreshing to find a systematic argument against transhumanism that does not rehash conceptual clichés that contribute little, especially when cutting-edge technology belongs to a few entrepreneurs who care little or nothing for the complaints reminiscent of the Vatican.

I say "systematic argumentation" because Alexander Thomas's book, divided into eight chapters—the last one being a conclusion or summary of the proposal—comprises a series of reflections that presuppose each other in order to illustrate transhumanism as a phenomenon that reflects the complexity of advanced capitalism.

One advantage of the book is that, although it presents itself as a specialized critique, it is also an excellent introduction for newcomers to the topic. The first chapter, 'A Brief History of Transhumanism and Its Critics' (1-31), not only summarizes what others—spokespeople for transhumanism and its detractors—have said on the subject, but dares to propose a thesis that will serve as the basic premise of the entire book: that transhumanist projects share an ideological faith in the possibilities technology offers to solve humanity's problems while forgetting the crucial role that social structures play in the execution of enhancement projects (5). From this, it consistently follows that the Enlightenment roots of transhumanism allow its projects to be considered as a simplistic metanarrative (23), incapable of overcoming anthropocentric practices (29) and, therefore, hardly able to allow an existence beyond what their imaginaries can conceive.

However, the simplicity of the narrative is merely a consequence of transhumanist projects and imaginaries. The possibility of morphological freedom, digital immortality, or cryogenics, to name a few projects that might be described as science fiction-worthy, depends on a phenomenon that can indeed be characterized as real: advanced capitalism. In this sense, 'The Logics and Trajectories of Advanced Capitalism' (32-70) represents, in my opinion, one of the most powerful critiques of

transhumanism found in academic literature. The logics that function as the condition of possibility for transhumanism are identified as follows:

> the quantification of all utility into exchange values; the commodification, objectification and exploitation of humans through labour and the class conflict this necessitates; a requirement for perpetual growth; and, finally, a competitive imperative directing all agency towards instrumental processes and technological dynamism (34)

In cases like those of transhumanists Max More or Natasha Vita-More, these logics can be easily identified in their trust in market rationality, which, from a critical perspective, is nothing more than a narrative myth or pseudo-fact that tries to conceal biases regarding the exclusively instrumental use of reason in neoliberal contexts (38). But when the ways of understanding the market are limited to its realism—with no other alternative, as Fisher would say—and everything is reduced to economic values, ethical failures are relegated to individuals and not the market. If, supposedly, free choices can be made within the neoliberal system, then we can also choose instability or precariousness because we are atomized and reified subjects who experience the hedonism of the now. However, the project of achieving immortality once again presents itself as a modern phenomenon that refuses to disappear. The perpetual progress sought by transhumanism implies that we must consume all immediately available resources in the pursuit of a future of radical abundance (45). Carrying out enhancement projects within the context of advanced capitalism does not seem feasible for everyone, nor for nature and living beings that must be consumed for this end. Nevertheless, for ideologues like Nick Land, this would not be a problem, but rather the solution: the weak will be destroyed by civilization, in this case, a civilization that encourages hyper-instrumental relationships (68). The logics of advanced capitalism do not allow for alternatives because their representatives do not need them.

The characterization of "realism" in advanced capitalism allows Thomas to delve into the "epistemological" assumptions of transhumanism. If the goal is to achieve morphological freedom, then an instrument is needed to achieve enhancement: reason. Thus, trust in reason as an epistemological stance is embedded in the 'Technologies of Power and Control' (71-98) because, for transhumanists, the world becomes "manageable, predictable, knowable, controllable" (73). However, one of the author's most notable arguments is that this "supposed" epistemological stance implies a philosophical problem. If what needs to be improved is reason in order to know more, what is forgotten is that reason is not separate from either the body or the environment in which we live (75). What is revealed is a fetishization of science through metaphors and stories that, in their utilitarian instrumentalization, could create a utopia for some. In this way, the technocapitalism that shapes transhumanism demands new ways of thinking about power relations. Of course, this is the task of the movement's critics, not its representatives.

The effectiveness of instrumental reason is strong enough that the fourth chapter is titled 'Data Totalitarianism' (99-126) and deals with the ways in which we become objects reduced to information and, subsequently, to economic profit for the owners of that data. If we consider that we coexist with social networks, it becomes evident how we are both users and objects of capitalist surveillance, where access to truth—what can be known about us and how our subjectivity can be shaped—is not symmetrically available. Although we voluntarily agree to be understood as data, this data exclusively belongs to the corporations that colonize our subjectivity. Thus, techno-scientific utopias can be realized in reality: data enables the definition of the physical world, how we relate to each other, and how we understand ourselves (122). This utopia represents, for Thomas, a

totalitarianism based on market imperatives and grounded in knowledge that depends on data surveillance. The entity we are becomes just another instrument for accessing 'Transcendent Conformity,' as the fifth chapter is titled (127-158). Liberating oneself from the human condition is the type of agency that transhumanists seek to achieve through the concept of morphological freedom, but it is not possible to find clear descriptions of how to do this. In reality, this project, at best, relies on the defense of a notion of negative freedom that cannot withstand counterfactual premises (129). How is it possible to enable negative freedom when what is being preserved is the instrumentalization of the entity we are in order to generate more economic profit? Or, in Han's words, how would self-optimization be possible if in the neoliberal context the goal is self-exploitation? (133-134). It is the market that generates new forms of transcendence that are neither democratically accessible—the U.S. military could be considered among the "enhanced" of today—nor scientifically grounded, since the transhumanist delusion even seeks to improve rationality without a contextualized analysis of how our brain is affected by social interactions (138), disregarding emotions (140) and offering a naive understanding of ourselves. In this way, transcendence is exhausted in conformity with the possibilities of capitalist relationships.

The sixth chapter, 'Systemic Dehumanization' (159-194), provides one of the most devastating analyses of the representatives of this movement. Negative freedom is incapable of sustaining morphological freedom where authors like Savulescu propose addressing social problems with technological solutions. Why engage in dialogue to resolve the grievances behind protests if protesters can be enhanced until their morality aligns with the dominant normative order? (163). Worse still, why consider "humans 1.0"—the non-enhanced—equal to transhumans? Following the proactionary imperative of Steve Fuller and Veronika Lipinska, it has been argued that necroeconomics (the economy of death) is fully justified if it is in the name of progress. Non-transhumans could be subjected to genocide if necessary to achieve a "better" existence exclusive to a few. Moreover, this was already a reality even for authors like Bostrom, whose immortalism (or longtermism) is even rooted in white supremacism, as evidenced in his ideas and emails in the extropian community forums (175). Fascism and neo-reaction (NRx) are also present among transhumanism's ideologues, assuming reductionist and hierarchical understandings of intelligence that justify causing injustice to those not recognized as equals. Thus, Elise Bohan is able to solve societal problems not through wealth distribution or universal public services but by excluding low-status people, those with low skills, low IQ, and unemployed people who are least adapted to reality, into virtual worlds and drugs because they cannot be trusted to know what to do with their lives (187). Genocide is, then, systematized by the ideologues of advanced capitalism.

The "what" is guaranteed: a full, superior, comfortable life… for a few. And with no alternative, it is unnecessary to ask "why." At least that's the case until others start reflecting on the overcoming of humanism, and consequently, the hyper-humanism of advanced capitalism. By now, it is well known that transhumanism is not the only movement attempting to surpass the human condition; posthumanism also exists, which, without needing technophilia, proposes the project of reflecting on ourselves using categories different from those that have led us to the capitalist realism in which we live. This is why the chapter 'Towards an Ethics for the Future: Posthumanism and Adorno's Aporia' (195-213) seeks to outline an ethical framework to confront the genocidal project that arises from the ideological relationship between advanced capitalism and transhumanism. An ethical evaluation is necessary regarding the dangers of instrumental scientific reductionism as an epistemological stance because the condition of possibility for not conceiving alternatives beyond capitalism is the subjugation of relationships with other living beings and existence itself to pure

utility (200). We are all still in this together, as Braidotti says, and knowledge must be situated if a critique from non-universalist perspectives is to be made (212).

Alexander Thomas's book is an excellent introduction to contemporary critiques against transhumanism from a political and ethical perspective. Without resorting to bioconservatism, the work dares to generate concepts that, in the medium term, could stabilize as central ideas to understand the phenomenon of transhumanism as a situated instance: there is no transhumanism without advanced capitalism. I hope that Thomas's book can become popular beyond the English language, because this is a work that can be read progressively without requiring many prior readings. The future needs critiques, and this book is a good preparation for it.

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