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# Perfecting Human Beings: From Kant and Nietzsche to Trans- and Posthumanism<sup>1</sup>

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## I. Introduction

In this article,<sup>2</sup> I will provide some reflections concerning the question which concept of human perfection can be seen as plausible. I will progress as follows. I will deal with three types of perfection which are currently particularly relevant within academic bioethical debates: moral sainthood, the Renaissance ideal, and authenticity. I will dedicate one section to each of these types of perfection. Furthermore, each type of perfection will be presented within a historical as well as in a contemporary philosophical framework. In each section, I will initially focus on a historical figure who upholds the type of perfection in question, as thereby the related challenges come out best, because their anthropologies have already been dealt with in detail by many scholars. In the second part of each section, I will focus on a contemporary figure who upholds a similar position. By critically presenting each of the various types of perfection, it will become clearer which concept of human perfection can be seen as most plausible.

The concept of human perfection belongs both to the realm of ethics as well as to that of anthropology, and it will become clear that the various anthropologies with which I will be concerned here are strongly related to the ethical aspects of the various thinkers.

By perfecting human beings, I am referring both to autonomous as well as heteronomous versions of the process of perfecting. Hence, it is possible that

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1. The outline of this paper was initially presented at *Kant, Nietzsche and Anthropology*, organized by Universität Salento (on invitation by Marco Brusotti), April 2013.

2. Regarding abbreviations of Kant's and Nietzsche's works, refer to page 62.

perfection can be reached by altering oneself as well as by altering someone else. Both versions can be realized in various ways, e.g. genetically, morphologically (e.g. plastic surgery), pharmacologically, or through cyborg-technologically (e.g. by creating a mechanic or digital cyborg or by developing into a digital entity e.g. by means of uploading the content of one's mind onto a computer). However, I will not be concerned with the technological aspects here, but will focus on various goals with which perfection can be identified, i.e. moral sainthood, the Renaissance ideal, and authenticity.

The ideal of moral sainthood has been argued for by several philosophers. Stoic philosophers put forward arguments in favor of a virtuous ethical ideal of a moral saint, and Immanuel Kant's philosophy with its deontological ethics and pragmatic anthropology moves into similar direction. The difference between their ideals is that the moral saint of Stoic philosophers possesses specific virtues and lives the good life, whereas moral sainthood in Kant is connected to someone who does what is right. In contemporary philosophy, there are some transhumanists who stress the need of moral bio-enhancement in order to enable human beings to deal with all the technological advances in an appropriate manner.

Transhumanism is a cultural movement which is closely related to the Anglo-American world of evolutionary theory, and analytic and utilitarian bioethics. Its main characteristic is the affirmation of enhancement technologies to increase the likelihood of moving beyond the traditional human boundaries, i.e. of the coming about of the posthuman. The concept of the posthuman is not a unified one but is related to several meanings (Sorgner, "Stammbäume").

Some transhumanists also uphold the Renaissance ideal as a concept of perfection which implies a specific universally valid ideal of the good. This concept encloses both physiological as well as noetic capacities. Again, it is their goal to promote the enhancement of these capacities by means of technologies. In the history of philosophy, several varieties of the Renaissance ideal have been defended. Aristotle's virtue ethics represents a paradigm case in question. Some aspects of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's thinking also suggest the affirmation of a Renaissance type of ideal, and it is this version with which I will be concerned with here.

However, the affirmation of a Renaissance type of ideal represents only one aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy. By focusing on different traces of his anthropology, it can also be argued that Nietzsche regards a version of

authenticity as the appropriate type of perfection. It is this tradition which has been received strongly in the continental philosophical tradition. A leading movement of this tradition has been postmodernism which is determined by the doubt concerning the possibility to express a foundational truth by means of language. It is possible to divide postmodern thinkers into at least two different traditions. Firstly, there are the ones whose work can also be classified as a type of negative theology, and Jacques Derrida represents a paradigm case in question. Secondly, there are postmodern thinkers who also affirm a rather this-worldly understanding of the world like Gilles Deleuze, and it is this second tradition out of which posthumanism has developed. Posthumanism can be defined as a philosophical and cultural movement which both doubt the possibility of grasping ultimate truths, but at the same time aim for a this-worldly, immanent, and non-dualist understanding of the world, because they regard such an understanding as most plausible at the moment. So far, mostly cultural critics and literary theorists like Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway can be seen as leading representatives of this tradition. One of the basic insights of their way of thinking is that the psychophysiologicals of human beings differ greatly from each other such that any universal concept of the good is bound to be implausible. Hence, each human being needs to find a way of living which is appropriate with respect to one's own particular demands, and this appropriateness is being referred to as authentic life. This is one anthropological aspect of posthumanism which is closely related to the affirmation of plurality in the political and ethical realm (Ranisch and Sorgner).

## **II. Moral Sainthood as Perfection**

Moral sainthood is an ambiguous term. Morality can be used to refer to the practice of the good and the right. In this case, ethics stands for the reflection about morality. In other traditions morality is concerned with the right and ethics with what is good. Here, morality is employed in a wider sense. The moral saint can be one who possesses the virtues necessary for leading a good life. However, it can also be the case that a moral person is who someone possesses merely a good will and acts rightly. Hence, it is an open concept which can be filled in various ways here. I will particularly focus on the Kantian version who relates morality with doing what is right on the basis of the appropriate motivation, i.e. respect for the moral law.

## 1. Kant

Kant's anthropology is strongly connected to his ethics, and it can be seen as a further treatise in which he deals with a question with which he has been concerned for a long time, namely the question concerning the relationship between the good and the right, whereby the right stands for the moral duties all rational agents ought to fulfill out of respect for the moral law. The good, on the other hand, represents the values necessary for leading a good life. In several of his writings he suggests answers to the relationship between these two realms, in particular in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*) published in 1785, in *Critique of Practical Reason* (*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*) which came out in 1788, and in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (*Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*) from 1798 (Sorgner, *Menschenwürde* 82–108).

The challenge he tackles is connected to one of his most important contributions to the field of ethics in which he separates the field of the good from that of the right. The starting point of Kant's ethics is the right or the moral law which he regards as a fact. Anyone who acts in accord with the moral law out of respect for it acts rightly. The question which has been raised as a response to this theory is the question of motivation why one ought to act in accord with the moral law. Kant's reply was the respect for the moral law. However, it could be asked why I should respect the moral law. An implicit reply given by stoic philosophers was that there is no conflict between the good and the right. Hence, a moral saint who possesses all the virtues necessarily lives the good life. However, this reply was no longer available to Kant, because he realized what has been realized by many enlightened people: those who act rightly do not necessarily lead a good life. Kant who was strongly influenced by Cicero's *On Duties* (*De Officiis*) concerning his ethics seemed to have been uncertain concerning the appropriate reply to this question, as he felt the need to put forward several different replies. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he upholds that the highest good and the moral life does not lead to the good life, but rather limits the option of leading a good life. There he sees the good life as independent of the moral life.

The highest good lies in the good will which is being possessed by any rational being which acts out of duty in correspondence with the moral law. Whoever acts thus becomes worthy of the good life, but does not necessarily lead such a life. In *Critique of Practical Reason*, he returns to the issue but

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suggests a slightly different solution: the good life as proportional to the moral life. Someone with a good will not only becomes worthy of a good life, but will be rewarded with such a life, but this does not occur during his/her life in this world (AA, KpV, 5, 122). A person will be rewarded with the good in proportion to his/her leading a moral life (119). However, leading a moral life implies that one is motivated out of respect for the moral law, but by acting thus one must not hope and expect to be rewarded with a good life. This is quite a tricky line of argument with many problematic implications. I assume that Kant has realized this, too, which might have been his reason for having another go at this problem in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*.

Kant makes it explicit that he deals with the ethical aspects of anthropology in this work and not with the physiological ones, when he introduces this distinction (AA, Anthro, 7, 119). Therein, he also mentions the question concerning the problematic relationship between the good and the right (277). However, he specifies that doing what is right out of duty is the *telos* of human beings. Thereby, the process of perfecting human beings can be promoted (321–22). Kant explicitly uses the phrase of “perfecting human beings” in this context whereby he makes clear that he refers to a moral perfecting process or in other words a development towards becoming the moral saint (144). While doing so, he is aware that this moral sainthood can never be fully realized (199–200) even though it makes human beings more human (276). Still, it is the capacity to act morally which provides human beings with a categorically special status in the world (322).

The various reflections which Kant puts forward in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* are aimed not at a physiology but at a pragmatic anthropology (AA, Anthro, 7, 136) which reveals that they contain suggestions concerning how to find an agreement between the moral and the good life whereby he provides the reader with several very specific hints both concerning eating habits (278) as well as concerning more fundamental issues such as education (AA, Päd, 9, 444), so that the process of perfecting human beings is promoted in a way which is pragmatic and is in agreement with the human wish to lead a good life. Hence, the anthropology shows a pragmatics of the good life in agreement with the moral life.

From the above, it becomes clear that Kant gives three slightly different replies concerning the appropriate relationship between the good and the moral life whereby his latest suggestion, the one from his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, is his most pragmatic, in an everyday sense of the

word, and maybe the one which comes closest to an ancient understanding of ethics in which the question of the good life has been the central one. Thereby, he does not give up what is characteristic of his own ethics, the focus on the right and the question of promoting the right which Kant relates to the process of perfecting human beings. Doing what is right out of duty promotes the process of perfecting human beings.

Even though his later suggestion seems more plausible than his earlier one, the problem of moral motivation remains. In his anthropology Kant shows an option how the good and the right can be in agreement with one another. Still, it is not sufficient as a plausible reply to the question why rational beings ought to have and act on respect for the moral law.

## 2. Transhumanism

The idea of perfecting human beings concerning morality by means of education and further means was not abandoned after Kant. It has returned in the most recent bioethical debates due to the biotechnological advances which have taken place. Leading transhumanists and thinkers closely associated with transhumanism argue for the need of moral bio-enhancement due to the potential dangers connected with all the other enhancement technologies. Most noteworthy are Julian Savulescu and his colleague Ingmar Persson who are not transhumanists but who are closely related to this philosophical movement. They even argued for the need of compulsory moral enhancement (174).

It needs to be stressed that Kant's concept of morality is different from Savulescu's. Savulescu is a Utilitarian thinker, Kant is a deontologist. Savulescu stresses the need of moral bio-enhancement so that we can face the challenges related to technological advances. Kant stresses the importance of moral enhancement out of respect for the moral law. However, both point out the relevance of moral enhancement: Kant by means of education, Savulescu and transhumanists by means of education and biotechnologies. Transhumanists regard themselves as belonging to the Enlightenment tradition, and it seems that with respect to moral bio-enhancement, this is an appropriate self-understanding. However, this self-understanding is implausible with respect to their anthropology, because most transhumanists are naturalists and hence reject that solely human beings are categorically different from other solely this-worldly beings. This insight, on the other hand, was affirmed by traditional

Enlightenment thinkers like Descartes and Kant.

Still, concerning the option of enhancing morality biotechnologically, transhumanists stand in the Enlightenment tradition. The option of discussing this type of enhancement has become available due to the most recent scientific developments. An important scientific project concerning the possibility of moral enhancement was undertaken by Molly Crockett at the University of Cambridge. For her Ph.D. research she gave citalopram, an antidepressant drug, to test persons to increase the discharge of serotonin in their brains. Then, she checked the consequences with respect to the trolley problem and the ultimatum game. Both experiments were interpreted by her that there is a connection between the level of discharge of serotonin and the willingness to inflict direct harm to individual persons. Doing harm is bad. Hence, it can be argued that citalopram promotes moral enhancement (Crockett et al.).

Similar arguments can be put forward with respect to another drug: oxytocin which increases trust in another person. It is a drug which is mentioned very often in the context of moral enhancement debates. A further aspect which is discussed in this context is *akrasia*. Most people know what the right thing to do is, scholars claim. However, due to a weakness of their will, they do not act accordingly. If a drug was found to strengthen the will, then this would promote morality enormously.

The case of Crockett raises several questions. Is it always bad to inflict direct harm upon an individual? It is easy to find counterexamples. John Harris and Sarah Chan mentioned the case of Jasper Schuringa who saved nearly 300 lives by doing harm to the underwear bomber. However, it needs to be acknowledged that harming an individual in most cases is bad. If moral enhancement by means of citalopram promotes moral behavior in most cases, it can count as moral bio-enhancement. It must not be forgotten that moral education counts as such as well, even though it is not always effective. It might work very often, but certainly not always (Crockett).

What are some of the central challenges of moral enhancement? The underwear bomber example makes clear that avoiding harm is not a reliable example for a good act. A better case would be the consideration of the norms of negative freedom and equality. A person who acknowledges negative freedom and equality and acts accordingly acts morally. Still, if the person misinterprets a situation, he might fail nevertheless. However, to consider the norms of negative freedom and equality seems to me as a more reliable concept of morality than the avoidance of harm variant. Consequently, proper moral



enhancement would take place, if respect for negative freedom and equality was promoted by biotechnological means. This kind of respect presupposes a high level of understanding which is related to several cognitive faculties. To promote such acts by biotechnological means might not be impossible, however, it seems to me as highly unlikely that such drugs can be developed in the near future. Maybe, cognitive enhancement is needed for moral enhancement. Harris's argument against direct moral enhancement goes along these lines.

Still, it needs to be acknowledged that the avoidance of harm doing can be seen as a fairly reliable method of moral enhancement. Even if this is the case, the problem remains, how can moral bio-enhancement technologies be implemented? Free choice and legal compulsion are two options. Concerning free choice, I wonder who would be willing to use and pay for these technologies. As I see morality as an obstacle for the good life, I doubt that many people would use these technologies. Maybe some religious believers might be interested in moral enhancement in order to increase the likelihood of being saved. The second option is legal compulsion which does not have to be seen as an absurd one. Moral enhancement by means of education is compulsory in many countries, e.g. Germany, and pharmaceutical enhancement methods are also legally compulsory in many countries, e.g. this applies to vaccinations both in Austria as well as in Italy. Hence, it seems clear that it is not completely out of the question that moral bio-enhancement technologies can be enforced politically. However, I wonder whether it is in the interest of a country to have moral citizens. To increase the morality of citizens might reduce the possibility of being successful in a globalized world. Moral enhancement might impede economic flourishing of a country, especially given the competition in a globalized world. Maybe a global government would be needed to enforce moral enhancement procedures. In this case, the challenges related to any global government would have to be dealt with, e.g. the need of an external enemy.

In any case, I think that it has become clear that the concept of moral enhancement which was mentioned by Kant is still being dealt with in bioethical debates concerning some suggestions made by transhumanists. However, I also hope that it has become clear that I doubt the relevance of moral bio-enhancement procedures. Legally enforced moral bio-enhancement technologies might reduce a country's capacity to survive in a globalized world. By free choice, on the other hand, these technologies will not be widely used as they are obstacles to leading a good life. The most important reason for

doubting the relevance of moral bio-enhancement is that I do not see a reason for believing that a reliable technique which deserves to be referred to thus will be available within the forthcoming decades. The challenge of motivation, by the way, is one which also applies to Kant's suggestion concerning perfecting human beings morally.

### **III. The Renaissance Ideal as Perfection**

The classical or the Renaissance ideal represents an alternative type of perfection to the moral saint. In contrast to the moral saint, the Renaissance ideal is connected primarily with the good life and not with the moral life. The classical or Renaissance ideal stands for a fully rounded human being with both strong noetic as well as physiological capacities. Aristotle's ethics identifies the good life with such a fully rounded personality. However, it is also possible to see Nietzsche as a defender of the classic ideal even though one thereby has to focus solely on selected aspects of his philosophy. Many statements within his unpublished writing in particular support such a reading of Nietzsche.

#### **1. Nietzsche**

Nietzsche is not very specific concerning his description of the overhuman which is the reason why I am not concerned with it here even though there are reasons in favor of the position that there is a structural analogy between Nietzsche's overhuman and the concept of the posthuman of some transhumanists' (Sorgner, "Nietzsche, the Overhuman"). However, it is clear that Nietzsche advertised the concept of higher beings with which he identifies the concept of the classical ideal and great health (KSA, NF, 11, 289). The connection between the classical ideal and health can already be found in Goethe's reflections. According to Eckermann, Goethe said to him the following on April 2, 1829: *Das Klassische nenne ich das Gesunde, und das Romantische das Kranke*. The book with the discussions between Eckermann and Goethe was one of Nietzsche's favorites.

According to Nietzsche, the will to power dominates all our acts, and we all aim for the highest feeling of power. In certain passages, Nietzsche attempts to specify the qualities necessary for experiencing this highest feeling of power which he identifies with the grand style, classical style, the classical type, and

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the classical in general (WP 868, 776, 341, 849, 799; KSA, GD, 6, 119). The most poignant of his description of the classical might be the following: “To be classical, one must possess all the strong, seemingly contradictory gifts and desires—but in such a way that they go together beneath one yoke” (WP 848).

It becomes clear from some of his unpublished notes that a certain unity is needed for being classical, but it is not a simple minded unity but merely a unity which is constituted out of seemingly contradictory qualities. A human being fights with the various aspects of his personality and unites them in a permanent struggle. It is this struggle which Nietzsche also associates with “great health” (KSA, NF, 12, 108), the capacity to overcome diseases again and again.

Nietzsche distinguishes these higher men clearly from geniuses or “inverted cripples,” as he refers to them in *Zarathustra* (KSA, Za, 4, 178). Geniuses have one outstanding capacity on which their fame rests. However, according to Nietzsche, the highest feeling of power is being possessed by the ones who manage to unify the multiplicity of drives of their body within a classical order which makes it clear that he is not talking about geniuses in this context. Higher men are not the ones who possess solely one outstanding capacity, but they possess a unified fully rounded personality of seemingly self-contradictory qualities.

Nietzsche has reasons for identifying the classical ideal with the highest feeling of power. He saw the world as constituted out of a version of the Herclitean flux, which he interprets as will to power. However, it is difficult for any being to live with permanent change in all respects. Human beings need stability and order. “To impose being upon becoming—that is the supreme will to power” (WP 617).

One’s own several drives towards power can realize themselves best by being unified within oneself such that a certain type of being or unity can be realized.

Still, there are quite a few challenges related to this suggestion. It is not clear even within Nietzsche’s philosophy whether the Renaissance or the classical ideal is the only way of leading a good life. A good life from Nietzsche’s perspective is lived by someone who reaches the highest feeling power, as thereby the person manages to fulfill his most fundamental drive toward power best. Even though this line of thought is strong within Nietzsche’s philosophy, it is not the only line of argument possible, because he also holds that the criterion for power depends on the capacity of interpretation (WP 636). Nietzsche claims

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“the organic process presupposes permanent interpretation” (643). There is no absolute criterion for power and superiority. This judgment has to apply also to Nietzsche’s suggestion concerning the highest feeling of power. Hence, by following this line of thought, we come to a different conclusion even if we assume the fundamental relevance of the will to power presupposed by Nietzsche. Each human being is constituted out of different drives for power. However, each human being has a different interpretation concerning which criterion constitutes power as well. Hence, the Renaissance ideal does not have to be the sole way towards the good life from Nietzsche’s perspective either.

## 2. Transhumanism

Nietzsche’s higher beings are being structured upon the classical ideal, i.e. a unity which is constituted out of a great multiplicity of antagonistic drives. However, he was neither the first nor the last philosopher in favour of such an ideal, and this type of perfection was upheld both by politically decent personalities as well as by rather dubious and highly problematic ones. I am merely stressing this point as transhumanism has already been associated with a morally rather dubious culture by Jürgen Habermas, even though this is not a fair evaluation from my perspective.

In one section of his treatise *The Future of Human Nature (Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur)*, Habermas mentions a bunch of mad intellectuals who have further developed a very German ideology by putting forward a naturalist type of posthumanism (43). He also stresses that luckily this position, which comes along with Nietzschean types of breeding fantasies, has not yet gained broader support by the public (43). Habermas here talks about transhumanism. Yet, this is not a fair estimation of transhumanism (Sorgner, “Zarathustra” 8–9). However, some transhumanists identify the Renaissance ideal with the good life.

Transhumanists affirm the use of enhancement technologies to increase the likelihood of the coming about of the posthuman. Still, most transhumanists argue on either a liberal or a libertarian political basis. Hence, the worry of them preparing a Nazi like Eugenics program is far from correct. Yet, it must be acknowledged that some transhumanists regard the Renaissance ideal as valid, e.g. Bostrom who wrote the following lines in 2001:

Transhumanism imports from secular humanism the ideal of the fully-

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developed and well-rounded personality. We can't all be renaissance geniuses, but we can strive to constantly refine ourselves and to broaden our intellectual horizons. ("Transhumanist")

He holds this ideal, as he thinks that it helps people leading a good life, and he refers to psychological studies which at least partly support his line of argument ("Why" 115). Yet, it is not the case that all qualities are equally relevant for a good life. Many transhumanists refer to the following criteria which they see as most relevant for a flourishing life: intelligence, memory, health span, concentration, and impulse control. The main goal of their cultural, political, and ethical activities is to promote the development of biotechnologies which enable human beings to technologically enhance these capacities and legal and ethical situations such that citizens are free to choose these technologies.

I do not agree with Habermas's concerns, but I have different doubts myself. Firstly, what is the status of the Renaissance ideal which is supposed to promote the good life? If transhumanists merely advertise this goal as the best one, then this is unproblematic within a liberal society from my point of view. Other interest groups advertise different concepts of the good.

If this concept of the good is supposed to serve as a basis for moral or legal obligation, then it becomes more problematic. Savulescu argues for the moral obligation to employ certain genetic enhancement technologies (Savulescu; Savulescu and Kahane). He is not a transhumanist but holds a position which is also being defended by transhumanists, and he is doing so in an academically challenging manner. His point of view is highly problematic, as it treats people paternalistically who do not subscribe to their ideals of the good—even though, it must be acknowledged that they merely employ it in the moral context, but not in the legal one (Sorgner, "Is There").

From my point of view, the Renaissance ideal is not a plausible position concerning the concept of the good can be given, because I think that there is an enormous plurality of psychophysiology and therefore also of related concepts of the good. It seems to me highly implausible that any non-formal account of the good which is universally valid can be given. Even though intelligence, memory, health span, concentration, and impulse control are not the most implausible suggestions for a concept of the good and it is likely that they are valid for a great percentage of human beings, there are reasons for claiming that an enhancement of these capacities does not necessarily lead to a better life for all human beings, e.g. there are people who wish to have their

healthy leg removed, and only manage to feel content, if this is being done (Sorgner, “Is There”).

## **IV. Authenticity as Perfection**

The final concept of perfection which gets dealt with here is that of authenticity. I have already hinted at this concept at the end of the part on Nietzsche and the classical ideal when I mentioned the tension within his own approach. All human beings aim for the feeling of power. The feeling of power depends on a criterion for the possession of power. This criterion, however, is dependent upon interpretation. Due to human bodies differing radically from one another, the criteria for power are bound to differ between human beings, too. It is this line of thought which can be found in Nietzsche, and which has been received in French and German philosophical traditions and was received by postmodern philosophers as well as by posthumanists.

### **1. Nietzsche**

From Nietzsche’s perspective, each philosophy is based upon the prejudices of the philosopher who proposes them. These prejudices again are founded in the bodily constitution of the respective thinker, and the body is all there is to a human being. When Nietzsche talks about the body, one must not have a preconceived concept of the body as connected to matter alone. It is the categorical, ontological distinction between matter and spirit which he transcends with his thinking. He explains its dominance by reference to the grammar of the German language. Due to the grammatical structure of the German language, thinkers are bound to uphold the dualist metaphysics of mind and body. Martin Heidegger took this insight seriously and consequently developed his own idiosyncratic language. Nietzsche did not, but he explains that language is merely a series of metaphors. Hence, it is necessary to always mention the specific qualities associated with a word. Instead of assuming a specific concept when talking about the “body,” it would be appropriate to consider solely the specific qualities the respective author has connected with the concept in question.

Nietzsche did put forward quite a complex ontology of the body which bears many similarities to Heraclitus’s and Spinoza’s way of thinking. When

he talks about body, he refers to a set of power-quanta which form an organism and which is not solely material, as the concept of “matter” is a reductive one which focuses on specific characteristics of what there is. “Body” in Nietzsche consists of an ontology with qualities which were traditionally associated with both matter and spirit. Furthermore, he also talks about the mind, whereby he rejects the mind as an entity which is categorically separate from the body. Instead, he suggests that the mind is a part of the body which came about as an aid for realizing the goals of his drives in a more appropriate way. The goals of the various drives represent various perspectives on the world and the interaction between the perspectives brings about the specific perspective of a human being or, in Nietzsche’s words, a power-organism (Sorgner, *Metaphysics* 39–65).

One consequence of this anthropology is that the perspectives of human beings are closely connected to one’s own bodily constitution and one’s experiences. This applies also to the criterion for power. According to Nietzsche, we all aim for power. Consequently, it ought to be the case that the feeling of power can be associated with a great variety of situations, events, and experiences, which leads to a radical plurality of authenticities.

## **2. Posthumanism**

Nietzsche’s anthropology has, in part, been received strongly by various postmodern thinkers. Deleuze’s way of grasping drives is closely connected to Nietzsche’s and Spinoza’s ontologies. Postmodern philosophies in general are characterized by the doubt of grasping the truth as correspondence to the world in propositional form. Thereby, two different approaches are particularly prominent. Firstly, a negative theological approach comes out clearly in the thought of Derrida. He upholds that we cannot conceptualize justice in a propositional manner. However, we can experience justice. There are events during which justice occurs and then we are aware that justice was there. Yet, once we try to form the concept of justice, it vanishes again. This way of thinking cannot be understood properly without acknowledging an underlying negative theology. Secondly, there is a this-worldly, immanent, and rather naturalistic approach which has been proposed by Deleuze, who characterizes human beings as interplay of various drives. It is the second version of postmodernism out of which posthumanism has developed, whereby the shift was merely a gradual one. Both approaches can be characterized by an affirmation of

perspectivism and immanentism whereby perspectivism is the dominant factor of a postmodern approach, but their combination is characteristic for posthumanist ways of thinking.

Various different consequences can follow from a posthumanist anthropology. Hayles and Haraway are two thinkers who represent a posthumanist approach. Both try to move beyond an Enlightenment concept of humanism and aim for a non-dualist way of thinking, which leads to a new categorization of the male/female, matter/spirit, and human being/machine distinctions. It also implies a new understanding of authenticity, as authenticity cannot be explained any more by reference to the Enlightenment humanist notion of the immaterial self, but has to be hinted at by means of the immanent, non-dualist, or relational concept of a human being. Nietzsche's ethics of authenticity also implies the non-dualist, immanent, and relational concept of human beings. However, it also consists of the will to power ontology, and hence his concept of authenticity is connected to the feeling of power. This does not have to be the case in posthumanist approaches. From a posthumanist perspective, it can be an authentic wish to become a homosexual, to get rid of one's "healthy" leg or to willingly increase the chance of having a deaf child. As each psychophysiology is unique, each one is associated with its own concept of authenticity.

I regard the posthumanist perspective concerning authenticity as plausible in general, as I think that human constitutions differ so radically from one another that our needs are also so diversified that a radical plurality of concepts of the good can be appropriate. This approach has many problematic implications for the realm of political ethics, and bioethics, in part, not just with respect to procreation technologies but also with respect to end of life issues. Under which circumstances can the wish to die immediately be an authentic one? There are many challenging issues which need to be discussed to distinguish authentic from non-authentic wishes.

I am sympathetic to the posthumanist position which upholds a radically pluralistic concept of authenticity and herein sees perfection. Still, it is also important for me to stress some challenges related to posthumanism, as I think that there are quite a few scholars who do not apply and grasp their own approach in an appropriate manner. This gets exemplified well in an example Martha Nussbaum has mentioned (64–65). She is referring to an issue worth considering in more detail.

Western scientists introduced smallpox vaccination in India, and thereby

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destroyed the Indian cult of Sittala Devi, who is a goddess to whom people used to pray to be cured from smallpox. At a conference Nussbaum attended, an elegant French anthropologist criticized this process as she stressed that there is no privileged point of view, which according to her, has clearly and convincingly been shown by Michel Foucault and Derrida. By acting thus, Western scientists did not adequately consider the difference, and one could add further they treated the dominating local culture in a humiliating and colonial fashion one could add further. Nussbaum reports that after her speech, a participant asked her, whether it would not be better to live than die. She responded that this point of view presupposes a Western essentialist concept of medicine which is founded on dualist opposites, and categorically separates living from dying. Once someone will have freed herself from this way of thinking, it will be possible to grasp the difference of the Indian tradition.

This is a case of a misapplication of posthumanist thinking. The anthropologist is right in so far as concerning ultimate ontological questions, it is unclear whether a Western dualist or an Eastern non-dualist way of thinking is more appropriate. However, the case of smallpox vaccinations does not have anything to do with any ultimate truths about the world. It has to do with what works in this world. Given that this is the case, the fact that smallpox vaccinations are helpful in most cases whereas praying to Sittala Devi usually does not help patients, it provides us with a reason for preferring Western medicine over the use of praying to a goddess, if one wishes not to be infected with smallpox. However, relying on what has proven to be reliable in most cases does not imply that it is better with respect to some ultimate truth. Progressing in this manner is merely better with respect to some pragmatic understanding of truth, and it seems sensible to act accordingly. It is the aspect of application of postmodern and posthumanist ways of thinking to domains in which it is not helpful which is problematic for this tradition. In this respect, posthumanism needs to be revised and needs some support from a transhumanist high estimation of the natural sciences. Hence, a way of thinking in between or *meta* post- and transhumanism might be more appropriate.

## V. Conclusion

In this paper I dealt with the anthropological issue of perfecting human beings. Thereby, I critically described three concepts of perfection which

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have been upheld both in the history of philosophy as well as today. The historical positions I dealt with were put forward by Kant and Nietzsche, and the contemporary variants of these ideas can be associated with trans- and posthumanism. At the end of each section I hinted at some challenges related to each of these ideals whereby I expressed a general sympathy towards a way of thinking in between post- and transhumanism which can be referred to as metahumanism. A posthumanist ethics of authenticity as perfection seems to have the least problematic implications, especially if it gains some further support from selected aspects of transhumanism.

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## Abbreviations

### Friedrich Nietzsche

Abbreviation of Nietzsche's works = KSA, Abbreviation of the individual work, volume, page number (example: KSA, GT, 1, 46).

KSA 1967ff: *Sämtliche Werke—Kritische Studienausgabe* in 15 Bänden. Hg.v. G. Colli u. M. Montinari, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München/New York.

Abbreviations of individual works

GD: Götzen-Dämmerung (KSA 6, 55–161)

NF: Nachgelassene Fragmente (KSA 7–13)

WP: Wille zur Macht (some parts can be found here in: KSA, NF, 7–13)

Za: Also sprach Zarathustra (KSA 4, 9–408)

Due to the widespread use of the collection “The Will to Power” in the English speaking world, I used the following edition instead of the critical edition: Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968. Print.

By means of the following article, you can find the publication details of the various passages in the KSA: Simmons, Scott. “A Concordance Indexing *The Will to Power* with the Critical Editions of Nietzsche's Collected Works (KGW & KSA).” *New Nietzsche Studies* 1.1/2 (1996): 126–53. Print.

### Immanuel Kant

Abbreviation of Kant's works = AA, Abbreviation of the individual work, volume, page number (example: AA, KpV, 5, 31).

AA 1902ff: *Gesammelte Schriften* in 29 Bänden. Akademieausgabe, Berlin et al.

Abbreviations of individual works

KpV: Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (AA, 5, 3–163)

Anthro: Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (AA, 7, 117–333)

Päd: Pädagogik (AA, 9, 437–99)

## Abstract

In this article, I will provide some reflections concerning the question which concept of human perfection can be seen as plausible. I will progress as follows. I will deal with three types of perfection which are currently particularly relevant within academic bioethical debates: Moral sainthood, the Renaissance ideal and authenticity. I will dedicate one section to each of these types of perfection. Furthermore, each type of perfection will be presented within a historical as well as in a contemporary philosophical framework. In each section, I will initially focus on a historical figure who upholds the type of perfection in question, as thereby the related challenges come out best, because their anthropologies have already been dealt with in detail by many scholars. In the second part of each section, I will focus on a contemporary figure who upholds a similar position. By critically presenting each of the various types of perfection, it will become clearer which concept of human perfection can be seen as most plausible.

**Keywords:** Kant, Nietzsche, posthumanism, transhumanism, perfection

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