

September 2020 Entry (on transhumanism)

“Humanists believe that humans matter, that individuals matter. We might not be perfect, but we can make things better by promoting rational thinking, freedom, tolerance, democracy, and concern for our fellow human beings. Transhumanists agree with this but also emphasize what we have the potential to become. Just as we use rational means to improve the human condition and the external world, we can also use such means to improve ourselves, the human organism. In doing so, we are not limited to traditional humanistic methods, such as education and cultural development. We can also use technological means that will eventually enable us to move beyond what some would think of as ‘human.’” – Humanity+, [What is Transhumanism?](#) (Kindle Locations 69-74).

“Many transhumanists wish to follow life paths which would, sooner or later, require growing into posthuman persons: they yearn to reach intellectual heights as far above any current human genius as humans are above other primates; to be resistant to disease and impervious to aging; to have unlimited youth and vigor; to exercise control over their own desires, moods, and mental states; to be able to avoid feeling tired, hateful, or irritated about petty things; to have an increased capacity for pleasure, love, artistic appreciation, and serenity; to experience novel states of consciousness that current human brains cannot access. It seems likely that the simple fact of living an indefinitely long, healthy, active life would take anyone to posthumanity if they went on accumulating memories, skills, and intelligence.” – Humanity+, [What is Transhumanism?](#) (Kindle Locations 147-150).

GGDM Thoughts on [What is Transhumanism](#) by [Humanity+](#):

1. Frederik Pohl's 1966 short story "Day Million" is the quintessential transhuman fiction. Transhumanism is embedded in GGDM, for example, in [1 Stardrive](#), p. 783, I opine that FTL travel may not be possible in our current physical form and that we would need to become *something else*. While transhumanism is never assumed in GGDM – because GGDM follows most of the mainstream [space-opera tropes](#), which have not really embraced transhumanism, and because GGDM is also an adult table conversation of human civilization as the participants know it – it certainly is possible to have transhumanism pre-game or as a story arc in the game (the same being true of the related [Technological Singularity](#), which I also commented in [2 Technology](#), p. 706, is not assumed to have occurred before the game, and may or may not be played out in-game). There are 'social' parts of GGDM which might be construed, interpreted in a transhuman manner, such as [Proficiencies](#), [Fuzzy Groups](#), [Writs](#) and [Enlightenments](#).

a. There are many thoughts in the [Humanity+](#) book [What is Transhumanism](#) that I had previously arrived at independently (or absorbed from our cultural milieu and thought I had thought of them) while designing GGDM; I did not know of the existence of this work until many months after GGDM was published. So, once again, I have not thought

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of anything new, there is nothing original in GGDM, others thought of it all first. But, since I had arrived at the same conclusions on my own, it is easy for me to understand the arguments in What is Transhumanism, a sort of natural cognitive bias because that is what I already believed. Very little of What is Transhumanism was novel or surprising to me, but it was still good to read because of the organized cognitive framework it provided.

2. In one sense, GGDM's 'looking laws' are the ultimate form of humanism (i.e., "that humans matter"). The 'looking laws' resulted from my thought attempting to connect humanity to the universe, describing a special relationship (which I necessarily assume exists, as evidenced in the later development of the 'fractured universe' theory in GGDM) in terms of a quantum physics interpretation. Conversely, my anti-natalism comments and even possibly the *existential void* idea against which I project human existence and human civilization are not really aligned with humanism, depending on how you interpret them. One could argue that my anti-natalism and non-existence comments are anti-transhuman, but on the other hand, that the existential void is *the ultimate barrier which transhumanism must overcome*. In fact, I suggest that is the only meaningful definition and measure of posthumanity.

3. The transhumanist.com webpage argues for the 'three S' approach to transhumanism, which they describe as "Superintelligence, Superlongevity, Superhappiness." The first two are discussed throughout GGDM in the form of SQ ([Sentience Quotient](#)), for example, and discussions about human lifespan limits and sleeper ships, but I want here to focus on the last of the three, "Superhappiness." 'Happiness' is identified in [4 Culture](#) as the 'meta-aspect' of all human civilizations, societies, relationships, and as the central, core function of religion against the existential void. I also argued in [1 Technology](#), p. 694, that religion and science must remain separate and that science must not become a religion (keeping the ontic questions separate from the ontological questions); the duality is the core of modern humanity. It is thus that we arrive at the transhumanist goal of "Superhappiness" which one must assume comes through (in their terms) technology and social reform. It seems to suggest that transhumanist think that science and religion will somehow merge or at least that the duality will disappear in a posthuman civilization.

a. [Transhumanist.com's](#) 'Superhappiness' seems to be contradicted by the words of another transhumanist document: "In some ways, human minds and brains are just not designed to be happy." – Humanity+, What is Transhumanism (Kindle Location 277). I think more people would agree with this than with the ideal of superhappiness. However transhumanist have already suggested broadly that posthumanity would require a structural change in the human brain, which might mean being "designed to be happy."

4. The posthuman goal to "experience novel states of consciousness that current human brains cannot access" connects transhumanism to 1960s 'drug counter-culture' (e.g., psychedelic drugs, LSD, hippies, Timothy Leary, Alan Watts, Ken Kasey) who confused drug-altered consciousness with a form of transcendence, meditation, enlightenment.

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This concept crept into literary fiction, most famously, the black hole scene in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the ultimate psychedelic drug-user fiction, [Dune](#). Of course, at this point, with 50 years of bad history behind us, few transhumanist would admit a relationship to or endorse recreational, mind-altering illegal drug use as a form of transhumanity (at least not without caveats).

a. The idea of achieving enlightenment through mind-altering drugs is embedded in our zeitgeist of the 1960s counterculture and is usually presented in a satirical, comedic way. I can see why law enforcement and mainstream establishment criticized the LSD studies and spreading practice; it is easy to refute: Alcohol consumption also produces altered states of consciousness and no one in the West has claimed for a very long time that it produces enlightenment. Rather, the opposite.

b. While most transhumanist are normal people who embrace the ideal to a greater or lesser extent (in this way, it mirrors any religion), the early transhumanist (like early religious figures) were eccentric figures and radical thinkers (e.g., [FM-2030](#) who coined the term). This is a necessary paradox of humanity, because 'normal' people would not go down those pathways.

5. In the current political climate, if a transhumanist were to speak on television, they would be labeled radical left (i.e., futurist, progressive), though that would be mostly inappropriate (and why does progressive and future-oriented thought make one a radical leftist?) because transhumanism is non-political, beyond the politics of this moment, and not an active force outside of literary fiction and a small part of the intelligentsia. This is very similar to the stand taken in GGDM of trying to be [non-political, and not of this moment](#).

6. Transhumanism depends on an extreme amount of vague extrapolation to reach post-human states, or even to posit the 'progress' of the next 50 years or century. At what point does extrapolation become faith? A mild form of *sacrificium intellectus* to human progress and goodness, to continuation of technology? Because it all requires an underlying faith (which sort of makes them more to the right, right?) – all the while they freely admit they could be dead wrong – to accept their conclusions and predictions. Nonetheless, the reasons behind their inability to truly discuss what would be post human are very similar to the discussion in [1 Eras](#) of GGDM's inability to describe 2nd and 3rd Era technology.

7. Finally, the discussion of [cryonics in the latter part of What is Transhumanism](#) brings to the top the major division of GGDM from transhumanism. Reading the section, I experienced the vague feeling of absurdity; while the assertions of fact and extraopolations are solid, it feels like they are missing the point. Consider two schoolboys in a crowded school hallway, John pushed Peter, Peter shoved John, who fell back and knocked Sharon down and broke her leg. Peter says, "He pushed me first!" but that misses the point. The underlying thread of transhumanism is the nearly unbounded assumption that everyone wants to live longer ("superlongevity" on transhumanist.com) as long as they are healthy ("healthspan") and I don't think that's automatically true for

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over 95% of the adult population, as evinced by GGDM (for example, that seeking immortality stories have almost disappeared in sci-fi, [4 Taxation & Census](#), p. 328). It is an unfounded assumption arising from a confusion: Our civilization may ethically (and because it makes us feel righteous and upstanding) want people to live longer, but that doesn't mean that most adult humans want to live longer. Aging is not just physical, I think that our push to extend life, now regularly reaching the octogenarian age in the West, has reached the limits of human mental and spiritual lifespan as well. And if you think that is a problem, well solve it.

a. I do admit that the Humanity+ authors came somewhat closer to the point in their answer to "[Why Do Transhumanist want to live longer?](#)" to which they began, "This is a personal matter, a matter of the heart." It's like they somehow know what it is, but don't want to name it; it is the [elephant in the room](#): The older you get the thinner the veil becomes that blocks your consciousness of the Existential Void. What then of 'superlongevity' when modern Western longevity is already problematic?

b. Ultimately, the concept of "superlongevity" in transhumanism runs *almost directly counter* to saṃsāra which is embedded in some form in nearly every thought and religious system, including the cheap direct-to-the-afterlife parlor trick version in Christianity, as discussed in [4 Fallen to Earth](#), pp. 1564-1565. That is, for those who believe in reincarnation as a means to finally exiting this universe (or at least, endless existence on Earth), superlongevity is an artificial delay in the process. Thus, transhumanism will have difficulty in non-Western parts of the world that believe in multiple cycles to reach saṃsāra, but it is not surprising that it developed in the West where Abrahamic religion holds a mostly unstated, unrealized belief in a single cycle to heaven (i.e. saṃsāra); that is, the concept of reincarnation does not occur in the Western thought until contact with India based religions.

By Charles W. Phillips