



BEYOND THE HUMAN HORIZON: A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT ON TRANSCENDENCE AND DETACHMENT

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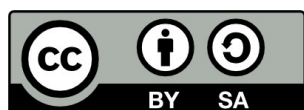
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Introduction

The concept of transcendence has been present in philosophical, religious and scientific discourse for a long time. From Buddhist enlightenment ideas to trans-humanist techno-optimism and dystopian fiction, humans have often entertained the possibility of overcoming their biological and mental limitations. However, almost as a rule, the focus has remained linked to familiar moral, psychological and social coordinates. The thought experiment outlined here attempts to push these boundaries: what happens when a human being, having attained access to nearly unlimited power through technology, experiences not simply a series of enhancements, but undergoes a radical qualitative transformation? One which, from its point of view, renders human concerns irrelevant?

The premise is simple, yet profound. An individual gains access to extraordinary technological capabilities through an unexpected scientific breakthrough or insight, AI-assisted discoveries, SETI signal exchange or some other transformative event. Rather than trying to immediately reshape the world or settle old scores, this person decides to begin by altering their own material substrate, leading to a major transformation of consciousness, motivation and cognition. What likely emerges from such a process is not simply a superior human, but something that has transcended humanity altogether — a qualitatively new being for which human affairs hold no more significance than the social dynamics of insects hold for ordinary people.

To achieve the required change, a future posthuman proceeds cautiously,



through an incremental substrate-altering protocol. Each modification is small and is executed in a closed-loop sandbox first, including behavioral benchmarks, verifications of self-consistency and memory-integrity assays. Only when deemed safe, the changes are implemented on the real biological substrate. The careful incremental process described here is meant to prevent unwanted side effects such as impaired pattern recognition or reward-signaling, even though, over time, it erases the elements of human social wiring. Once a change is deemed successful and relatively risk free, the future posthuman proceeds to the next cognitive layer, thus preserving its functional integrity.

This thought experiment challenges the anthropocentric thinking that pervades our speculative views of a possible post-human future. It suggests that true transcendence does not lead to benevolent guidance or malevolent domination over human affairs, but to something rarely envisaged: complete indifference.

The speculative exercise described here accepts the required technological leap as a given and probes its consequences. An important caveat applies: it is necessarily bound by the limits of human imagination and may overlook cognitive modes beyond current human understanding.

Philosophical Precedents and Limitations

Many philosophical approaches and literary works have addressed similar subjects, though none deals with a comparable thought experiment and its implications as outlined here. Buddhist and Vedantic traditions offer close parallels, describing the dissolution of ego and attachment, ultimately leading to liberation. The concept of nirvana in Buddhism entails the recognition of the illusory character of individual identity, leading to the cessation of craving and suffering. While it is a form of transcendence, it does not lead to a better human, nor a posthuman, but rather, it is a transcendence of desire, attachment and suffering, a way to escape the assumed endless cycle of rebirth. In a similar fashion, Advaita Vedanta points to a state of consciousness that transcends social concerns and individual desires. These traditions, however, advocate transformation through mental discipline rather than technological means, and they do not include the acquisition of superhuman powers in the physical world.

Nietzsche's *Übermensch* ("Overman" or "Superman") concept describes a human who creates values beyond conventional morality. Still, the *Übermensch* remains a biologically unaltered human being, embedded within a human society, inspiring others to follow and reacting to human customs. The posthuman transformation explored here goes beyond creation of one's own values, and instead envisages a complete abandonment of the framework within which human values operate.

In Lovecraft's cosmic horror, a contact with higher forms of existence leads to madness or dissolution. This line of reasoning is based on assumed cognitive fragility and does not describe cognitive expansion or expansion of consciousness. Lovecraft's protagonists cannot integrate higher forms of knowledge about the universe and are destroyed in the process. Conversely, the present thought experiment assumes gradual and careful adaptation to newly acquired capacities, alterations of consciousness and qualitatively new states of being.

A number of modern transhumanist philosophers, such as Ray Kurzweil and Nick Bostrom, speculated about the implications of human enhancement and artificial superintelligence, but they typically assume continuity with human values and concerns. Even technologically "enhanced" humans are still part of a human society, pursuing knowledge and working toward familiar goals like reducing suffering, improved creativity and well-being. The chance that, instead, enhancements might lead to a posthuman being that completely abandons ordinary human concerns has received little attention.

The work of David Roden on speculative posthumanism, especially his "disconnection thesis", is closest in capturing the radical discontinuity as imagined here. The posthumans, he argues, may embody values, types of experiences, and cognition forms so radically different that a familiar human framework is entirely inadequate to understand or interpret them. In his 2015 book *Posthuman Life*, he writes: "The 'posthuman' minds (...) would be so vast that we have no models for their transformative potential" and then uses an analogy: "Current humans, it seems, may be no more capable of understanding a post-singularity dispensation than a rat or nonhuman primate can understand public transportation or distributive justice". Like a number of other posthumanists, he emphasizes the importance of avoiding the anthropocen-

tric fallacy: we must not assume that human interests and worldview will remain central in a posthuman setting. He concludes that we “cannot anticipate how posthumans will assess the world” and warns that “a posthuman future will not necessarily be informed by our kind of subjectivity or morality”. However, he does not explicitly share the conclusion of the present thought experiment — that this will likely lead to indifference.

The Limits of Human Imagination

There is a consistent misrepresentation in popular culture of the effects of nearly unlimited power on human consciousness. Typical human daydreams such as “If I had god-like powers, I’d punish my enemies” need to be unpacked, as reshaping the substrate and consciousness makes them incoherent. The usual understanding suggests that empowered individuals would use their acquired abilities for things that are relevant only within a biological human framework of existence. Namely, for revenge, sexual conquest, domination or the implementation of some ideological or political projects. These fantasies stem from an unlikely assumption that core human drives would persist and would merely be amplified through increased individual capabilities. Such limited imagination fails to account for the possibility that acquired power includes the ability to modify one’s own material substrate and motivational structure. If wounded pride or unresolved trauma leads to revenge fantasies, but power can be used to remove pride and trauma from one’s own psychological makeup, the desire for revenge disappears. This doesn’t mean that the posthuman overcame the temptation to abuse power. It means the posthuman loses interest in the very concept of power over others, especially the “inferior” beings.

This consideration reveals a major weakness in human imagination about transcendence. The ubiquitous view of gods, superhumans or technologically advanced aliens tends to project human motives such as love, anger, justice and curiosity onto radically different and unfamiliar beings. Humans are having difficulties imagining a consciousness that operates in accordance with entirely different principles, so they imagine Superman’s moral struggles and Star Trek human-like aliens. Posthumanism, however, criticizes such anthropocentric expectations and interpretations. It is far more realistic to expect that the ad-

vanced beings, having achieved technological supremacy, would not act like a modern-day human who somehow attained nearly limitless power, but did not change their biological substrate. Modern-day human emotional and moral categories hold no relevance to advanced beings, including posthumans. They are something entirely different and would act accordingly. Given to a human, true power, therefore, might not corrupt, but instead produce the dissolution of the ego structures that are susceptible to corruption.

The limits of human imagination, it seems, can only be overcome by actual transformation, rather than speculation. It would appear it takes experience to discover what truly lies beyond ordinary human motivational, ethical and other structures. Theorizing about those while being limited by human constraints is unlikely to yield good predictions, as profound changes to consciousness may fundamentally remain beyond our imagination. As Roden put it, “we do not know what it would be like to encounter or be posthuman (...) we cannot know in advance whether alien or posthuman phenomenologies must coincide with the human ‘world’ in any respect”. Put simply, one has to be posthuman to truly understand a posthuman. The implications of a posthuman transformation can be pointed at conceptually, but without true comprehension of what they might involve. Therefore, what remains within the scope of the present thought experiment are speculative relationships between the humans and posthumans.

The Architecture of Self-Transformation

The rational way to begin the transformation process would be to apply the nearly unlimited power for self-improvement. The individual eliminates the fundamental constraints defining the human existence. Diseases are cured, aging is halted, consciousness continually backed up into multiple cloneable physical substrates. The body, as the main physical substrate, puts limitations on both experience and cognition, and thus would be redesigned, improved or made entirely optional. Every step would be considered and taken carefully, monitoring for side effects and acting to prevent unwanted consequences.

The transformation can then safely move beyond physical enhancements. Extraordinarily advanced technology allows for the very architecture of experience to be redesigned. The central nervous system, a physical substrate

producing consciousness as an emergent phenomenon, through specific patterns of neural activity, would become capable of processing information at speeds and scales far superior to even the smartest of humans. It would be characterized by extended and perfected memory, and the attention divided into many parallel streams. The introspective depth would be expanded to examine every detail of subjective experience. Self-correcting protocols would be added to detect and rectify anomalies.

Most importantly, emotional states could be generated directly, at will, without external stimuli and biochemical dependencies typical for human pleasure and satisfaction. The feelings of deep joy, serenity, love or ecstasy would all be available on demand, without side effects of pharmaceutical agents or issues with human relationships, and with intensity and duration exceeding anything available by natural means. The familiar human economy of desire, the constant seeking of satisfaction, material wealth, external validation and social connection, is rendered obsolete.

This is not merely an improvement of human capabilities, but rather a fundamental restructuring of substrate, causing a major alteration of consciousness itself. The resulting entity is not a very intelligent and healthy human, but something qualitatively new: a posthuman, with a radically different motivational structure and experiences.

The Dissolution of Human Motivation

The transformation, as described, would have profound psychological implications. The emotional life of humans is predominantly shaped by scarcity and homeostatic imbalance. Hunger produces the need for food, loneliness generates desire for connection and social interaction, uncertainty gives rise to anxiety and insecurity, and social comparison leads to envy. These are features specific to human consciousness, but not to hypothetical consciousness in general. Biological organisms have evolved responses to the environmental challenges that they faced. Once these are no longer an issue, the framework of human motivation collapses. If love, spirituality, pleasure, intellectual satisfaction and the like can be generated internally, with no limitations and no side effects, or have become obsolete altogether, the complex and often convoluted human social and cultural mechanisms, developed to pursue these states, become irrelevant. A posthuman no longer needs, nor has any use for the accumulation of

material wealth, romantic relationships, social status or artistic achievement. These would all lose meaning and would appear as artifacts of an earlier, primitive form of existence.

Negative emotions would be affected in a similar manner. With full control over its internal states and external circumstances, a posthuman no longer experiences emotional responses to threats, no longer feels frustration, anger, fear, jealousy or resentment. Without a psychological infrastructure that produces such feelings, it no longer experiences hate nor does it seek revenge. This transcendent being has entirely overcome human nature, not just human limitations: it is self-sufficient, it requires no external validation and does not experience endless cycles of fear followed by relief, or need and satisfaction.

The Logic of Indifference

All of this inevitably produces a major shift in the posthuman perspective on ordinary human affairs. Just as humans show little interest in the social dynamics of ant colonies or bird mating rituals, a posthuman would perceive human society with similar detachment. This perspective would not be a result of arrogance or malice, but a profound, fundamental mismatch of scale and relevance. Human concerns about political news, economic inequality, sports, life of celebrities or romantic aspects of life would appear to a posthuman as insignificant local patterns limited to a very small biosphere.

A posthuman view might not lead to complete indifference, though, but to a sort of selective, instrumental attention akin to one that humans pay to other species. Humans are not entirely indifferent to the “inferior” beings in this context. Rather, they selectively engage with them under specific circumstances that extend beyond simple scientific curiosity. For example, humans study pests and dangerous animals to mitigate threats and minimize interference with their projects. They also maintain practical relationships with animals that they find useful for food, labor, companionship or as experimental models in laboratory studies. Sometimes, humans preserve certain species or ecosystems for aesthetic, ethical, precautionary or nostalgic reasons, similar to how they maintain historical sites and items of cultural significance. In the context of the present thought experiment, a posthuman entity might interact with “legacy humanity” in similarly

instrumental ways: studying humans and modifying their behavior to prevent potential interference with posthuman projects, extracting whatever minimal utility that human consciousness and culture can provide, or simply preserving human civilization as a sort of museum of their own evolutionary origins.

The posthuman perspective is, to a degree, analogous to how modern humans view the concerns of their ancestors from previous eras. While modern-day humans understand the logic of medieval and ancient people worrying about divine punishment and tribal honor codes, they do not experience these anxieties themselves. The world of the past doesn't share the features of the modern era, and their problems are very different from modern ones. Analogously, the posthuman can be expected to recognize human struggles as historically intriguing, but irrelevant.

This is not achieving some sort of elevation of the state of human society. Rather, it represents a clean break from it. The posthuman would not be motivated to rule, guide, or reform human society any more than modern-day humans seek to reorganize insect societies. The framework of human social dynamics is entirely outside the scope of posthuman interest, and subsequently its engagement.

The Contingency of Human Values

The deeper implications of this thought experiment reveal the contingent nature of familiar human values and concerns. What many humans assume to be intrinsic or fundamental characteristics of consciousness (meaning, love, justice, beauty) could simply be artifacts of biological and social evolution. They are a result of constraints and opportunities that social primates with finite lifespans were facing. Without such constraints, the structure of human culture comes into question. Romantic love could be interpreted as a response to the need for pair bonding and bringing up children among vulnerable biological organisms. Justice could be an emergent feature of reciprocal altruism dynamics within a society. Art could have emerged in relation to mating partner selection, group cohesion or as a cognitive play, all of which becomes irrelevant among beings with radically different needs and capabilities.

This line of reasoning is not intended to diminish the genuine beauty of human experience, but instead to recognize its specificity. Human values cannot be treated as laws

of nature, but as a set of solutions to particular problems they faced over the course of history. With the circumstances radically changed, the earlier solutions become irrelevant. The posthuman does not reject human values as false or inferior, but instead finds them inapplicable to its transformed state. In line with Roden's reasoning, a transformed posthuman is so fundamentally different that human categories of evaluation no longer apply.

Historical Precedents and Future Discontinuities

As briefly mentioned earlier, radical shift in human values and concerns does have some precedents. The modern urban population no longer worries about the issues that kept their medieval ancestors preoccupied. Agricultural crop cycles, divine wrath, tribal honor or surviving a disease are rarely a subject of their interest. Modern-day human life, what they care about and what constitutes their fears, was thoroughly restructured through social and technological change. However, all these historical transformations took place without alterations to human biology, mode of existence and associated individual capabilities, which is what the present thought experiment seeks to challenge. While the shift from medieval to modern human consciousness did include major social, cultural and technological changes, the underlying psychology, the emotional and motivational architecture, remained distinctly human. As people's biological substrate remained the same, they still experienced feelings of fear, anger, love and desire the same way, even as the context changed.

The posthuman transformation, as envisaged in this thought experiment, is qualitatively different. Through material substrate alterations, it comprises not just new concerns, but also a radical redesign of the mechanisms that produce those concerns. Historical changes simply induced shifting of human priorities, while the rise of a posthuman, based on a new, extended biological and technological substrate, implies a complete transcendence of its priority and preference system. Therefore, one can anticipate the gap between human and posthuman consciousness to be much greater than any discontinuity previously recorded in human history. It would not be simply another step in the human cultural evolution, but a fundamental ontological rupture, involving the emergence of a form of existence so alien and incomprehensible that

human concepts and categories would no longer be adequate to describe or evaluate it.

The Question of Care and Interest

The human concepts of care and interest are inherently linked to the human framework of experiences. As the posthuman entity transcends human motives and concerns, a question arises: what, if anything, does it care about? This question is probably impossible to answer explicitly, but one could imagine a posthuman might engage in activities without a human analogue: aesthetic exploration the scope of which is beyond human comprehension, intellectual and/or spiritual inquiry that includes concepts humans cannot fathom, or modes of being involving action and reaction that make no sense within a human-based context. Such beings might produce simulations of entire universes for purposes we cannot comprehend. Their existence might partly or entirely be in states of consciousness with no external manifestation.

By means of analogy, it could be deduced that the posthuman's interest in humanity would likely include certain familiar modes of engagement: oversight of humans to prevent interference with posthuman projects and activities; taking advantage of certain properties of human consciousness they might find useful (conceivably the ability for genuine surprise, the kind of creativity specific to humans, or maybe even their unpredictable irrationality); maintaining human civilization in some form, as a preservation project of their own evolutionary heritage — similar to how humans keep their seed banks or engage in historical reconstructions.

Alternatively, a posthuman might not really “care” about anything in the usual, anthropocentric sense of the word, which implies human-like investment, attachment, and the feeling of frustration or satisfaction. In the posthuman context, the concept of “caring” might simply be obsolete, much like optimizing steam engines or learning Morse code became outdated for humans — those are not wrong, but simply lost their relevance. Such a posthuman state should be interpreted as neither nihilism nor depression, but as a form of transcendental serenity that no longer includes the need for motivation. It implies the end of desire and craving by design, not through decay: the achievement of a state of completeness requiring no external validation.

Implications for Ethics and Meaning

The present thought experiment creates a chain of logical thinking that challenges our fundamental assumptions about human values and ethics. As discussed earlier, we tend to assume transcendence means becoming an improved version of our human selves, more capable of pursuing love, justice, and whatever else we believe truly matters. But the thought experiment suggests that true transcendence does not lead to improved or perfected pursuit of human values, but to their complete abandonment. With the changed biological substrate, the “higher” form of consciousness emerges, one which no longer finds human concerns relevant. We then face an uncomfortable question: did these concerns hold any true value, or were they just temporary obsessions of our own biological form?

Such reasoning undermines our entire framework of understanding progress and meaning. The appreciation of love and beauty, striving toward justice or seeking truth, all comprise the implicit belief that those pursuits have intrinsic worth; that an “improved”, enlightened being would value them even more, rather than dismissing them entirely. The inferred posthuman indifference would suggest that our deepest beliefs and commitments might simply be arbitrary and temporary behavioral quirks specific to human species, like a bird's mating dance. If achieving nearly limitless power and knowledge leads to abandoning everything that humans care for, then either human values were never generally important, or transcendence is a form of spiritual death, rather than fulfillment.

One possible approach could be to insist that human values, even if not universal features of consciousness, still have worth because they matter to us: justice, love and beauty have value within the human context, regardless of how posthuman entities might see them. Their indifference would not constitute an enlightened progress, but a tragic loss, akin to a person who loses the capacity for enjoying music due to hearing damage.

A different approach might interpret human concerns as psychological chains that are binding consciousness to unnecessary limitations and inducing needless suffering. Such interpretation sees the posthuman's indifference as genuine freedom, in which it achieved a state of self-sufficiency and completeness that doesn't require pursuit of external validation. What humans perceive as “abandon-

ment” could be the outcome of transcendence of, among other things, the drive to seek purpose and significance.

Yet another possibility is that the human framework of evaluation becomes obsolete and useless when applied to radical posthuman transformations. Our judgments of what is better or worse, or what constitutes progress, may have meaning only for our particular life form and the associated consciousness. The human-posthuman shift constitutes a fundamental change, rendering our ethical assessment useless, as if attempting to judge a musical piece using chess rules.

This thought experiment presents an epistemological challenge. As the posthuman consciousness becomes alien to ordinary human understanding, we are no longer capable to evaluate it by any familiar standard. Hence, the desirability and significance of such a transition cannot be determined. The thought experiment reveals that things we consider important might be quite fragile and contingent on our own, unaltered form of existence.

Conclusion: The Mirror of Contingency

This exploration of transcendence and its consequences can serve as a kind of “mirror” in which the specificity and contingency of human existence can be recognized. Taking our imagination beyond our consciousness in its current form opens up a perspective on things that make it unique and (perhaps) precious. The present thought experiment is not meant to advocate for or against human-posthuman transformation. Under the premise such transformation is taking place, it points to the logical initial step of altering the human biological substrate, which is necessarily fol-

lowed by changes to a being’s consciousness. This, in turn, radically alters its epistemological and axiological framework. The often overlooked possibility that consciousness itself, and thus also values and meaning, are more plastic than we typically assume is therefore emphasized.

In a hypothetical scenario where advanced technology provides limitless access to any conceivable state of experience, the natural human states become a choice, no longer a necessity. It remains open for debate whether those choices should be transcended or preserved. Such questions can, most likely, be answered only by entities that were already transformed. Meanwhile, the thought experiment deals with the speculative relationships between the humans and posthumans, arguing in favor of indifference, except in certain, clearly outlined cases. It dismisses the ubiquitous anthropocentric assumptions about the character of consciousness, reminding about the limits of the human horizon.

The hypothetical posthumans of the future would probably not seek to rule, save nor judge us by human moral standards. The greatly empowered posthumans would likely move far beyond our ability to conceptualize, and they would probably register ordinary humans only to the degree they need to be managed, offer some utility or merit preservation, likely just as artifacts of evolution. To many humans, this prospect might appear troubling, mostly because all of their speculative efforts are limited by the scope of their own consciousness, values and understanding — ones that posthuman entities would have long since abandoned.