SEARCH FOR AN IDEAL WORLD: POST-HUMANIST READING OF DAN BROWN'S NOVEL *ORIGIN*

* **Sandra Joy**

** **Reena Nair**

Abstract

For centuries academicians, theorists, politicians put forth the need for an ideal world. Along with the quest for an ideal world, humans have been haunted by the two existentialist questions "Where do we come from?" and "Where are we going?" Post humanism is a philosophical perspective of how change is enacted in the world, as a conceptualization and historicization of both agency and the "human". It is based on the notion that humankind can transcend the limitations of the physical human form. Dan Brown is an American novelist and his novels feature recurring themes of cryptography, science and conspiracy theories. His novel *Origin* addresses these two existential questions "Where do we come from?" and "Where are we going?" Evolution is a bifurcating process - a species splits into two new species - but sometimes, if two species cannot survive without each other, the process occurs in reverse, instead of one species bifurcating, two species fuses into one. Kirsch formulates a theory of possibility for a "Seventh Kingdom" - "Technium", collaboration of human beings and technology. The resulting kingdom originates within the existing species as a process of endosymbiosis. With the advancement in technology, human beings can surpass their existing capabilities and gradually pave the way to a world of perfection. The novel provides the possibility for such an evolution to occur in the future. The paper is an attempt to analyse the scope for the emergence of "Seventh Kingdom" to occur in the future illustrating from the present scenario and thus giving rise to an ideal world.

Keywords : *Post-humanism; Seventh kingdom; Technium; Ideal world*

* *II M.A English Language and Literature, Maharaja's College , Ernakulam*
sandrajoykaithavalappil@gmail.com

Introduction

Posthumanism literally means "after humanism" or "beyond humanism". According to the philosopher Francesca Ferrando Posthumanism can be defined in seven levels i.e., Antihumanism, Cultural Posthumanism, Philosophical Posthumanism, Posthuman Condition, Posthuman transhumanism, AI takeover and Voluntary Human Extinction. Antihumanism is any theory criticizing traditional humanism and traditional notions about humanity and the human condition. Cultural Posthumanism examines and questions the historical notions of "human" and "human nature", challenging typical notions of human subjectivity and embodiment. Philosophical Posthumanism examines the ethical implications of expanding the circle of moral concern and extending subjectivities beyond the human species. Posthuman condition it is the deconstruction of the human condition. Posthuman transhumanism seeks to develop and make available technologies that eliminate aging, enable immortality and greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities, in order to achieve a "Posthuman future". AI takeover is a variant of transhumanism in which humans will not be enhanced, rather replaced by artificial intelligence. Voluntary Human Extinction seeks a "Posthuman future" i.e. a future without humans.

Posthumanism is a philosophical perspective of how change is enacted in the world as a conceptualization and historicization of both agency and the "human". It is based on the notion that humankind can transcend the limitations of the physical human form. Posthumanism Theory suggests it is one of the most possible and viable way for human to surpass these limitations, often through the use of technology to augment biology.

Transhumanism has been defined as "the intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by using technology to eliminate aging and greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities" (Bostrum, 1999). Gradually human losses "humanness" and a Posthuman would no longer be a human being. Underlying this worldview is a core belief that the human species in its current form does not represent the end of our development, but rather its beginning (Bostrom, 1999).

Katherine Hayles, in her book *How We Became Posthuman (1999)*, describes four characteristic Posthuman or Transhuman assumptions:

First, information patterns are more important or essential to the nature of being than any "material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life". Second, consciousness is an epiphenomenon. There is no immaterial soul. Third, the body is prosthesis, albeit the first one we learn to use and

manipulate. Consequently, replacing or enhancing human function with other prostheses is only a natural extension of our fundamental relationship with our begotten bodies. Lastly, the Posthuman views the human being as capable of being "seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the Posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot technology and human goals" (Hayles, 2)

The novel *Origin* put forth the evolution of human being towards Posthumanism through Transhumanism.

Origin and Post-humanism

Dan Brown is an American novelist popular for authoring best-sellers such as T*he Da Vinci Code (2003), The Lost Symbol (2009) and Inferno (2013). Origin (2017)* is his fifth novel featuring Robert Langdon, a Harvard expert in religious iconography as key protagonist.

Origin addresses the cultural relevance of science, the way in which established world-views are challenged by the incessant wave of scientific discoveries facilitated by computer science. The novel can be regarded as a literary laboratory, where technology-driven scenarios are enacted, explored and assessed. Novel initially focuses on the tension between science and religion, gradually shifts to the increased dependence of human beings on smart technologies and artificial intelligence. *Origin* is a techno-thriller portraying a diagnostic of the present and a prognostic of the future, cautioning that we are on the cusp of a global cultural transition, exemplified (spiritually and architecturally) by Sagrada Famíla, the last of the great Cathedrals, according to Brown's novel, heralds the next quantum leap in human culture, symbolising the dawn of a new civilisation, a new style of thinking. Whereas the previous epoch was an era of scepticism and conflict (science versus religion, science versus art, technology versus nature, etc.), the new era proposes an age of convergence: of science and art, science and religion, technology and nature.

Where are we going?

The novel addresses the two fundamental existential questions posed by Kirsch that form the motif of the novel, Brown tries to converge science against creationism. It is based on the thoughts, the futuristic Trans / Post-humanist "where are we going?" and on the fundamental evolutionary "where have we come from?" the protagonists Edmond Kirsch, Robert Langdon and docent AI Winston bear resemblance to Kurzweil. Brown tries to build up a fact that a new evolution is going happen from the existing organism i.e. from human beings. The taxonomic hierarchy

of living things is segmented into six kingdoms - Animalia, Plantae, Protista, Eubacteria, Archaebacteria, Fungi. Kirsch in his presentation talks about the possibility for the emergence of 7th kingdom "Technium" which is a fusion of human beings with technology or to rephrase a fusion of living being with non-living which in the future absorb human beings:

> "What you are seeing here is a rare evolutionary process known as obligate endosymbiosis," Edmond said. "Normally, evolution is a bifurcating process- a species splits into two new species-but sometimes, in rare instances, if two species cannot survive without each other, the process occurs in reverse…and instead of one species bifurcating, two species fuse into one." The fusion reminded Langdon of syncretism-the process by which two different religions blended to form an entirely new faith. "If you don't believe that humans and technology will fuse," Edmond said, "take a look around you." The screen displayed a rapid-fire slide show-images of people clutching cell phones, wearing virtual- reality goggles, adjusting Bluetooth devices in their ears; runners with music players strapped to their arms; a family dinner table with a "smart speaker" centerpiece; a child in a crib playing with a computer tablet. "These are just the primitive beginnings of this symbiosis," Edmond said. "We are now starting to embed computer chips directly into our brains, inject our blood with tiny cholesterol-eating nanobots that live in us forever, build synthetic limbs that are controlled by our minds, use genetic editing tools like CRISPR to modify our genome, and, quite literally, engineer an enhanced version of ourselves." (Brown, 397)

New species of technology are born daily, evolving at a blind rate, and each new technology becomes a tool to create other new technologies i.e. new species evolving from the existing species. New technologies like Cybernetics, Synthetic Intelligence, Molecular Engineering and Virtual Reality is changing the future of human beings.

Cybernetics was first defined by Norbert Wiener, in his book of that title (1948), as the study of control and communication in the animal and the machine. A cyborg is an organism having both artificial and natural systems. This type of organism is a self-regulating human-machine that makes use of sensor, artificial intelligence and feedback control systems. Synthetic intelligence (SI) is a refined concept of artificial intelligence (AI). SI recognizes that although the capacity for software to reason may be manufactured, it is nonetheless real intelligence and not just an imitation of how human beings acquire and apply knowledge and skill. Voice Assistants, Robots, Disease Mapping are the examples of Synthetic Intelligence. Nadine (Singapore), Sophia (Hong Kong), Erica (Japan), Vyommitra (India), Jia Jia (China) are examples of humanoid robots, they are designed to replicate human facial features. Biomedical Engineering deal with medical devices such as imaging

equipment, biocompatible materials such as prostheses or therapeutic biological or processes such as regenerative tissue growth, for example. Virtual reality (VR) is a computer-generated simulation in which a person can interact within an artificial three-dimensional environment using electronic devices. In this simulated artificial environment, the user is able to have a realistic experience.

However the scientific and technical plot components are firmly based with explicit references. There are two corollaries to the information-based evolution thread in Origin. Firstly, complex life and human intelligence are the outcome of physics i.e., a kind of cosmic teleology towards humanity Brown uses Jeremy England's Dissipative Systems work as his source. Secondly, having admitted humans to the party, several other concepts can be rehabilitated after decades, even centuries, of exclusion from science. For example, Iain McGilchrist in "Master and Emissary" has rehabilitated that the fact the human brain has a bicameral design behind human intelligence. Brown builds in his fictional artificial docent Winston using this aspect as thread. Brown's futurist predicts a benign, adaptive and progressive fusion: A Transhuman fusion between AI and humanity and a humanist fusion of science and theism, an integrated and enlightened religion.

Kurzweil predicts that a machine will pass the Turing test by 2029, and around 2045, "the pace of change will be so astonishingly quick that we won't be able to keep up, unless we enhance our own intelligence by merging with the intelligent machines we are creating". Humans will be a hybrid of biological and non-biological intelligence dominated by its non-biological component. In Transcendent Man, Kurzweil states "We humans are going to start linking with each other and become a metaconnection, we will all be connected and all be omnipresent, plugged into this global network that is connected to billions of people, and filled with data." Human beings are the only species that goes beyond limitations - Quoting Kurzweil "we didn't stay in the caves, we didn't stay on the planet, and we're not going to stay with the limitations of our biology".

Conclusion

Where are we going? New technologies like Cybernetics, Synthetic Intelligence, Molecular Engineering, and Virtual Reality will forever change the future of human beings. Human beings are evolving into something different. Gradually we are losing our "humanness" and transforming into Posthumans.
 One of the fundamental flaws of Transhumanist or Posthumanist, Utopian thinking, is the failure to understand the darkness, the fears and the unpredictability of each human heart. The lesson of the 20th Century such as the Eugenics, Fascism and Communism showed the negative power of Utopian dreams to enslave, destroy and

demean   rather than providing the promised justice, freedom and human prosperity. Now it offers another form of human contrivance to promote salvation for all. Even though the plot of *Origin* is fictional the concepts it laid forth may have a possibility to occur in the future when we analyse it from the present scenario. In this sense *Origin* can be considered a futuristic novel.

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