

WHERE ARE WE GOING? – A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DAN BROWN'S *ORIGIN* AND YUVAL NOAH HARARI'S *HOMO DEUS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF TOMORROW*

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ABSTRACT

Where are we going? Evolution is an on-going process. About 2.5 million years ago the genus Homo started to evolve in Africa and Homo sapiens first appeared about 200,000 years ago in East Africa. It was through a varied range of evolutionary processes, human beings evolved in the present form. Human beings are now gradually evolving into something different. We were all born in the era of Humanism where we believe that we are in the center of things, having unique status in the world and superior than any other inhuman things such as animals and machines. We are the origin of the meaning and the sole author of the history. Post humanism challenges the ideology of humanism. The posthuman has been called 'one of the most important concepts in contemporary literary theory, science studies, political philosophy, the sociology of the body, cultural and film studies, and even art theory' (Gane 431). It is a term associated with celebratory declarations of the end of humanity, leading to an era when human being will be superseded by technical being. It is based on the notion that humankind can transcend the limitations of the physical human form. The novel *Origin* addresses the cultural relevance of science, the way in which established world-views are challenged by the perpetual wave of scientific discoveries facilitated by computer science. Novel initially focuses on the tension between science and religion, gradually shifting to the increased dependence of human beings on smart technologies and artificial intelligence. *Homo Deus: A*

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Brief History of Tomorrow explores how global power might shift, as the principal force of evolution – natural selection – is replaced by intelligent design. The divine attributes imagined by polytheist religions are already well within our grasp. Gradually humans battle with machines in the name of freedom and individualism. We may never become eternal omniscient beings as Allah, Jah or Jehova, but we have already started to acquire Heracles' strength, Hermes' speed, Aphrodite's beauty and Ares' powers of destruction. It blends science, history, philosophy, and every discipline in between, offering a vision of tomorrow that at first seems incomprehensible but soon looks undeniable: humanity will soon lose not only its dominance, but its very meaning.

Keywords: posthumanism, evolution, Origin, Homo Deus, humanity

INTRODUCTION

We are all born in the era of Humanism where we believe that we are in the center of things, having unique status in the world and superior than any other inhuman things such as animals and machines. We are the origin of the meaning and the sole author of the history. Herbrechter states post humanism reminds us that we have never been as human as humanism made us believe. The 'myth' of one humanity based on universal values or human exceptionalism has always excluded some humans.

Post humanism challenges the ideology of humanism. The posthuman has been called 'one of the most important concepts in contemporary literary theory, science studies, political philosophy, the sociology of the body, cultural and film studies, and even art theory' (Gane 431). It is a term associated with celebratory declarations of the end of humanity as we know it, heralding an era when human being will be superseded by technical being, which, ironically, promises to vouchsafe human being for eternity.

With these developments, new discussions about human nature and the future of humans have brought up. This brings the post humans to the scene. As Hassan mentioned, five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call post humanism. Post humanism, the rebellious child of humanism is now challenging the superiority and uniqueness of humanism (Miah 5).

Everything accepted as facts such as 'the soul', 'feelings' and 'free-will of humans' are being challenged by post humanism. While humanism arrogantly puts the human and human rationality at the center of deliberations, post humanism disaggregates and dislodges the human subject, and new subjects are created (Murdoch 8). Thus, instead of the binary understanding of humanist world such as humane/inhuman, nature/culture, self/other, male/female, center/periphery, the world turns out more complex, heterogonous, nuanced (Murdoch 36) In the post human world, everything is blurrier and more complicated and the dominance between human and machine is slowly shifting (Miah 5). The limits between body and machines are being erased as the machines are becoming humanized while humans are turned into machines (Guerrero 5). At the core, humanity is in search of excellence all through an immortal life. This dream will make humans to Trans humans and finally to Post humans.

Enhancement technologies are not the only medical interventions to advance intelligence or the computer assisted systems that can be implemented to the human bodies. These enhancements involve life extension, sometimes to include immortality; physical enhancements, often achieved by integrating technological devices within our bodies, such as the ability to see and hear wavelengths normal human beings cannot perceive; and cognitive enhancement, achieved either by genetic changes or by implanted devices, such as the ability to read books or solve very complex mathematical problems in seconds (de Melo-Martin 36).

"Where do we come from?" and "Where are we going?" these two existentialist questions is haunting humans for years. Stephen Hawking assumed that AI can replace the human roles and makes the human race threatened with extinction. In July 2017, technology field was horrendous by the Facebook's experiment discharge when a staff found out their two AI's programs communicate each other with their own language made by themselves which cannot be understood by human. The artificial intelligence development that might equal human's intelligence is worrying, even it is likely to exceed the human's intelligence itself. Associated with this, there are authors writing literary works addressing artificial intelligence. One of them is Dan Brown who wrote a literary work entitled *Origin*. Dan Brown's novel *Origin* addresses these two existential questions and it put forth the possibility for a "Seventh Kingdom" - "Technium", evolved as the of process of endosymbiosis. Similarly Yuval Noah Harari in *Homo Deus* remarks that, once technology enables us to re-engineer human minds, Homo sapiens will disappear and human history will come to an end, a completely new process will begin in which people cannot comprehend.

The novel *Origin* is a mystery thriller novel published on October 3rd, 2017 by Doubleday. It is the fifth instalment of Robert Langdon series. *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. In the words of the character Edmund Kirsch:

What you are seeing here is a rare evolutionary process known as obligate endosymbiosis. 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, 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. 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)

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.

Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow, the book was first published in Hebrew in 2015 by Dvir publishing, the English language version was published in September 2016. As with its predecessor, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Harari recounts the course of history while describing events and the individual human experience, along with ethical issues in relation to his historical survey. However, *Homo Deus* (from Latin "Homo" meaning man or human and "Deus" meaning God) deals more with the abilities acquired by humans throughout their existence, and their evolution as the dominant species in the world. The book describes mankind's current abilities and achievements and attempts to paint an image of the future. As Harari himself admits, "once technology enables us to re-engineer human minds, *Homo sapiens* will disappear, human history will come to an end and a completely new process will begin, which people like you and me cannot comprehend" (46). *Homo Deus* is primarily a book chronicling the rise and fall of contemporary humanism against the backdrop of apparent 'progress.'

The grand tale Harari tells is a vaguely Western Marxist one, wherein culture is seen as a primary enabler of relations of power, a fundamental component of the 'social apriori.' The primary narrative conceit of such approaches belongs to the ancient Greeks: "The rise of humanism also contains the seeds of its downfall," Harari writes. "While the attempt to upgrade humans into gods takes humanism to its logical conclusion, it simultaneously exposes humanism's inherent flaws" (65). For all its power, humanism possesses intrinsic flaws, blindneses and vulnerabilities, which will eventually lead it to ruin.

If humans dwell on a continuum with nature more generally, then what explains the Anthropocene, our boggling dominion of the earth? Why do humans stand so drastically apart from nature? The capacity that most distinguishes humans from their nonhuman kin, it is the capacity to cooperate. "Sapiens rule the world," he writes, "because only they can weave an intersubjective web of

meaning; a web of laws, forces, entities and places that exist purely in their common imagination" (Harari). This 'intersubjective web' provides him with theoretical level of description he thinks crucial to understanding our troubled cultural future. He writes:

During the twenty-first century the border between history and biology is likely to blur not because we will discover biological explanations for historical events, but rather because ideological fictions will rewrite DNA strands; political and economic interests will redesign the climate; and the geography of mountains and rivers will give way to cyberspace. As human fictions are translated into genetic and electronic codes, the intersubjective reality will swallow up the objective reality and biology will merge with history. (Harari 151) Harari segues to the future and the question of the ultimate fate of human meaning. These once speculative issues are becoming ongoing practical concerns: "These are not just hypotheses of philosophical speculations," simply because 'algorithmic man' is becoming a technological reality (284). Harari provides a whirlwind tour of unnerving experiments clearly implying trouble for our intuitions, a discussion that transitions into a consideration of the ways we can already mechanically attenuate our experiences.

Humanism, Harari argues, turns on our capacity for self-deception, the ability to commit to our shared fictions unto madness, if need be. He writes, "Medieval crusaders believed that God and heaven provided their lives with meaning. Modern liberals believe that individual free choices provide life with meaning. They are all equally delusional." (305) Humans are shallow information consumers by dint of evolution, and deep information consumers by dint of modern necessity. As Harari himself notes, "Sapiens evolved in the African savannah tens of thousands of years ago, and their algorithms are just not built to handle twenty-first century data flows" (388).

CONCLUSION

Advances in the biosciences promise or threaten humankind with a posthuman future, theorists like Bostrom, Fernández-Armesto, Fukuyama, and Seiler have talked about it in their works. The relevant technologies are many and summarised by two acronyms: NBIC (nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive science) and GRAIN (genetic manipulation, robotics, artificial intelligence, and nanotechnology). In addition to the convergence of NBIC/ GRAIN technologies, Hughes has argued that there may also be a convergence of at least seven biotechnologies this century.

Biotechnologies may precipitate the creation of post-humans whose capacities so radically exceed those of present-day humans as to be no longer unambiguously human. In addition to the post-humans that NBIC/GRAIN may yield, such technologies may also lead to the creation of new living organisms, machines with human or superhuman intelligence, and humans with machine parts and genetically enhanced bodies.

The people should consider the future impact of technology need to pause and consider it is an unprecedented transformation in the history of life on this planet, the point when the evolutionary platform of behaviour, morphology, becomes the product of behaviour. Humanism is 'disintegrating from within' because intentional cognition itself is beginning to founder. According to a posthumanist, all mental thought, all consciousness and spirit, can be attributed to the operation of micro-material processes distributed in the autopoietic (self-creating) body. In *Digital Faces*, we are confronted with a visualisation of the idea that the self-possesses no central consciousness, but instead is a programme by many small autonomous, self-running programmes that can build to form a decentralised system.

Technology theorists Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti and Katherine Hayles theorise how contemporary technologies have caused many systems, objects and bodies to exceed their boundaries. Many embodiments of the era of high-technology are difficult to categorise; we are surrounded with artefacts that are collapsing humanist categories of existence, such as the cyborg, the foetus, the ecosystem, the database, the genome (Haraway 1997), and the cellular automaton (Hayles 239–244) to mention but a few. As a result, the social imaginary of the west is gripped by the imagination of excession; where entities slip and slide from one ontology to the other, resulting in a loss of structure and a new sensibility of process and flux which is considered liberatory. Mutation conveys the other side of the posthuman utopian imagination by hinting at the pain and difficulty of the flesh in becoming its ontological Other.

To conclude, both the novel *Origin* and the non-fiction *Homo Deus* substantiates the fact that the posthuman discourse is an on-going process of different standpoints and movements, which has flourished as a result of the contemporary attempt to redefine the human condition. Posthumanism, transhumanism, new materialisms, antihumanism, metahumanism, metahumanity and posthumanities offer significant ways to rethink possible existential outcomes. Literary and scientific works which theorise the posthuman blends the discourses of the primitive, technology and horror to explain or explore various accounts of the posthuman condition.

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