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## Introduction: Are We Still Destined to Be Human?

There seems to be a universal yet rarely mentioned consensus among pedagogues that education, upbringing and socialization are ethically rooted in a culturally produced and reproduced image of man. It is an idea of mankind, along with its various cultural manifestations, that legitimizes different forms of sociation and power structures, whose alleged prerogative and function is to make us more “human.” However, through the development of philosophy and science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the meaning of the term “human” has become highly dubious.

Not only has globalization almost forced us to experience and—at least partially—acknowledge the fact that there are multiple ways of understanding “human” life in its different cultural manifestations but also contemporary technological progress and the almost parallel regress of environmental security over the last few decades has called into question the once metaphysically fixed borders between man and machine and man and animal. This insight has led many philosophers, scientists and artists to move beyond the epistemological and axiological limitations of humanism, which resulted in the rise and development of both post- and transhumanism. Those among us who want to confirm their identity as human beings will have to look for new ways of describing and legitimizing the concept of man and mankind. Yet there are also those who oppose the human temptation to



affirm the “human being” as the crowning achievement of creation. Metaphorically speaking: the Riddle of the Sphinx has to be either solved again or completely rewritten. Could we not—for example by means of technology or simply through engaging in posthuman thought patterns—move beyond the metaphysical limitations, which seem to have lost their once undisputed credibility? Wouldn’t the redefinition of mankind force us to reconceptualise all of our basic concepts of individual and social development, i.e. education, upbringing, socialization, social integration? What might eventually happen to our human (“all too human”) values, ideals and objects of faith—goodness, beauty, God?

It is our pleasure to present our new volume of the *Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana*, in which our authors raise exactly these questions and try to deliver possible answers to them. We are aware that none of our conclusions can be perceived as “ultimate” and yet we certainly believe that all of the papers contained herein will contribute to a broader understanding of the social implications and philosophical complexity of post- and transhumanism.

Riccardo Campa opens our discussion with his contribution entitled “Automation, Education, Unemployment: A Scenario Analysis,” in which he takes a critical look at the future scenario outlined by the McKinsey Global Institute in the year 2013. According to this perspective, our education systems will have to adapt to a new socio-economical condition constituted by technological innovations in the upcoming decades. Campa—although appreciating technological progress—criticizes the one-dimensional perspective on education as enhancing human operative skills, which could be in the long run replaced by non-human systems such as artificial intelligence. Therefore, the sociologist proposes an alternative scenario, according to which human work might—due to accelerating technological progress—vanish in its traditional sense, “where people need to work in order to survive.” In a jobless society, where robotics have taken over a large amount of human activity, education will have to redefine its aims and basic purposes—however, contrary to the McKinsey report, “in a totally automated society, we will not register the decline or disappearing of social sciences, fine arts, and humanities. Quite the contrary.” Campa indicates an optimistic scenario in which technological progress will not only not lead to a dehumanization of cultural

standards, but might rather—paradoxically—strengthen the humanistic values and perspectives on education.

Could transhumanism make us—unexpectedly—more “human”? This picture seems to be directly taken into consideration by Estel-la Hebert and Thomas Damberger in their contribution entitled “Is Pedagogy Transhuman?” The authors argue that although transcending humankind was never the principle aim of education in the first place, we can still understand the pedagogical process as a way of overcoming limitations. The question, therefore, is not whether we want to cross certain borders but rather: which limitations should not be overcome, even if technology and scientific progress (will) enable us to do so? The authors indicate that the emergence of new technologies gives us—once again—the opportunity to raise the most fundamental question of any pedagogical reflection: “What defines a human being and how does the human become human?” It seems to be the most “human” thing to explore, understand and realize oneself through the given limitations—including the most crucial one: death. Therefore, as the authors argue, the transhuman should not be seen as “the other of the human,” but “being human” itself should be recognized as essentially transhuman. At the same time limitations should be preserved in order to avoid the dangerous concept of “complete perfection” as an ultimate target. For this reason, as Hebert and Damberger argue, pedagogy should not aim to solve the ambiguity of human existence, but rather to position itself right at the heart of these (trans)humanistic contradictions and oppositions.

Pavol Dancák also recognizes the essential human desire “to better himself, to enhance his capacities and limits.” However, in his article “Homo Perfectus versus Educatio” the philosopher takes a rather critical position on trans- and posthumanism as contradictory to education and medical treatment. Instead of delivering the means for human self-realisation and cultivation, trans- and posthumanism rather aim at breeding a new species. Not only do these “anthropotechniques” propose treating human beings in an instrumental fashion which is analogical to our (and—as I would like to stress—quite often inhumane) treatment of plants and animals, but, as Dancák indicates, they also promote the counter-pedagogical image of man as a “homo perfectus.” The idea of transhuman perfectionism refers to the notion of fighting the “flaws” and “errors” of nature—diseases,



aging and, eventually, death—and taking full control of human development. However, by taking a Christian standpoint, Dancák suggests that this way of “perfecting” the human being entails the reduction of man’s existence to his biochemical condition. This impetus to reduce posthuman existence to a “paradisiacal,” yet secular state of being stands in opposition to the Christian perspective and humanistic concept of education, which has to be understood as a risky, uncertain and endless process, which opens the opportunity of becoming an arguably non-perfect, yet *free* individual to man.

In his article entitled “Pedagogical Anthropology as Existential Risk Prevention” Markus Lipowicz takes a critical look at transhumanist proposals for handling the potential threats deriving from the emergence of new technologies. In particular, the author criticizes the concept of biochemically stimulated moral enhancement as reifying strategies and argues for the intensive integration of the pedagogical discourse into the transhumanist debate. Lipowicz suggests that a far more promising existential risk prevention than biochemically stimulated moral enhancement would be rooted in educational programs that would intensify the communication skills of both man and machine. In conclusion, instead of recognizing technological forms of action as the future matrix of human existence, we might rather explore the pedagogical possibility of raising—instead of programming—non-human beings, so that they might in turn adopt the human ability to obtain ethical values. Instead of reifying human and non-human beings alike, we could also aim at integrating intelligent non-human beings by letting them play a major role in the communicative social systems of the human “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*). However, a necessary condition for such a future scenario would be fundamental exchanges of opinions between techno-progressive societies and pedagogues, which does not seem to be the case at the moment.

Giuseppe Mari traces the ideas of posthumanism to their Nietzschean roots and in his contribution—entitled “Posthumanism: A Danger, Opportunity and Challenge”—arrives at the conclusion that this concept should not be perceived as a legitimate alternative to humanism. Although Mari acknowledges the fact that many atrocities and various forms of injustice (such as slavery) have been legitimized through humanism, the Italian pedagogue and philosopher claims that these depraved forms of humanism should motivate

us to intensify and enhance the idea of human uniqueness rather than replacing it with ontological relativizations. In order to distance himself from both depraved humanism and posthumanism, Mari advocates “neohumanism,” which would even more radically and consistently realize such fundamental ideas as human dignity, personhood and education understood in terms of the Greek *paideia*. After all, Mari suggests that posthumanism should not be evaluated in terms of progress, but rather as a regress to ancient, or even archaic mindsets which were unable to distinguish between the subtle yet nevertheless fundamental differences between human and non-human potential.

The author of the final contribution, Alexander Y. Nesterov, considers the transition from the human into a “neo-human being.” However, he adopts an optimistic take on transhumanism as a promising option for the near future. In his article “Evolutionary Transhumanism in the Context of Philosophical Anthropology,” the philosopher argues that contemporary anti-humanistic tendencies are a direct result of the (postmodern) crisis of the modern ideas of Enlightenment. In order to reconstruct the ontological difference between man and animal, which has become fluid over the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nesterov promotes the idea of transhumanism as it is presented by Dmitry Itskov, the founder of the “2045 Initiative” project. Nesterov claims that this form of transhumanism does not focus on “trivial notions and wordplays for feuilleton,” but actually aims at the development of all crucial human values, e.g. culture, ethics and technology. Ultimately, the goal would be to achieve a social condition in which the “wisdom examined by philosophers for hundreds of years” would cease to be an elitist mind-set and become a current and basic feature of the majority of people.

Only time can tell whether the more pessimistic or optimistic expectations with regard to trans- and posthumanism were more accurate. For now, as we believe, the most important task of the academic community can only be the opening and constant widening of discourse to include all the relevant hopes and fears together with the various (and at times even contradicting) standpoints, concepts, ideas and assumptions. We hope that this volume of *Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana* will be recognized by our readers as exactly this kind of attempt to open up new horizons for thought and reflection on the future.