

The Pneumopathic Genesis of Human Enhancement

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Abstract. The philosopher Byung-Chul Han affirms that the present age reduces the human being to a performance-machine, and that, because of this reduction, the type of disease that characterizes it this age is neuronal. In the present article, I argue that Han's analysis is correct but incomplete. Behind this reductionism, which leads to neuropathologies of different types, lies another type of pathology that the philosopher Eric Voegelin calls 'pneumopathology'—disease of the spirit. The transhumanist view of human enhancement deepens this reduction and shows that the pneumopathology that blights today's society is in a process of unprecedented chronification. To justify this thesis, I first explain the connection between human enhancement and the achievement imperative denounced by Han; I then analyze the Voegelian category of pneumopathology to show its value for an ontological-historical understanding of human enhancement.

Keywords: transhumanism, achievement-subject, pneumopathology, Byung-Chul Han, Eric Voegelin.

Introduction

In his now-classic work *The Burnout Society*, philosopher Byung-Chul Han begins by pointing out that “Every age has its signature afflictions”

(2015, 1) and that, from an epidemiological point of view, the beginning of the twenty-first century “is determined neither by bacteria nor by viruses, but by neurons” (2015, 1). Indeed, this century seems to be defined by illnesses such as depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), burnout syndrome, among others. Writing before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the reasons Han puts forward to justify his thesis on the predominance of neurological pathologies in today’s society are undoubtedly powerful and deserve our attention. Nevertheless, one might wonder whether the beginning of this century does not also reveal (in an increasingly extreme way) the presence of a more subtle type of affliction, one that can be detected not from a medical perspective, but from a philosophical-theological perspective. I refer to what the German philosopher Eric Voegelin has called *pneumopathology*—that is, a disease of the spirit. The present article suggests that Han’s analysis of the neuropathological imprint of our age should be complemented by a study of its pneumopathological drift, paying particular attention to the transhumanist narrative of human enhancement in which such a drift becomes crystal clear.

A common denominator of the neuropathological and pneumopathological traits of today’s society is the paradigm of *achievement* (Han 2015). For Han, the achievement society is characterized by the unlimited use of the positive modal verb *can* (*können*) (2015, 8), which is understood as “having the possibility of”, “being capable of”, or “having the capacity to”. The affirmative and collective expression “Yes, we can” could be the *motto* of the achievement society. But other common phrases in everyday language—ranging from the simple “everything is possible” to “where there is a will, there is a way” or “the impossible just takes a little longer”—also suggest that the achievement imperative has permeated all levels of society. Thus, today’s society is one defined by the maximization of achievement and by the transformation of the human being into a “performance-machine” (*Leistungsmaschine*) (Han 2015, 30). This society promotes the transformation and reinvention of the subject.

The achievement-subject, in this sense, is based on freedom, pleasure, and inclination, and focuses primarily on itself (Han 2015, 38), especially

when it comes to physical health. The latter aspect is of great significance in a society in which the value of the subject is measured in terms of performance, productivity, and efficiency. According to this logic, the achievement-subject absolutizes *bare life* and *labour* (Han 2017, 2). Health represents the ideal of the bare life, because to perform at the highest level requires good health. That is why fitness culture is strongly instilled in our developed societies. Gyms are full of people training to perform better, to live up to the demands they impose on themselves, because in the achievement society, subjects are “entrepreneurs of themselves” (Han 2015, 8).

This kind of society is distinguished by an excess of positivity, by an unlimited “you can do it”. Projects, motivations, voluntariness, and assertiveness are some of the traits that characterize the achievement-subject. For these subjects, the imperatives of self-fulfilment and self-optimization constitute the primary value. The achievement-subject belongs only to itself and builds itself. He is, in the end, a subject who, in his process of self-referential development, only works and exploits himself in the illusion that it is self-fulfilling. The fact is that he becomes a slave to himself (Han 2015, 30–31). This is so because, in his desire for self-fulfilment through performance, the subject coerces, monitors, besieges, and even blames himself, without the need for external agents. From this situation of placing constant pressure on himself, the subject of achievement finally collapses and becomes neuro-psychologically ill. In Han’s words:

Depression—which often culminates in burnout—follows from overexcited, overdriven, excessive self-reference that has assumed destructive traits. The exhausted, depressive achievement-subject grinds itself down, so to speak. It is tired, exhausted by itself, and at war with itself. Entirely incapable of stepping outward, of standing outside itself, of relying on the Other, on the world, it locks its jaws on itself; paradoxically, this leads the self to hollow and empty out (2015, 42).

This accurate description of Han’s achievement society also applies to the posthuman one, the society of enhanced humans promoted by the transhumanist movement. The narrative of human enhancement is con-

sistent with the logic of achievement. But it takes this logic to its paroxysm as it proposes to reach the highest standards of achievement without burnout, without fatigue, without depression, and without disorders of any kind. In such a society, the augmented human being would have no need to sleep, no need to recover its strength, no need to experience major frustrations because it would be capable of almost anything. The most important aspect of human enhancement is the complete transformation of the subject in order to optimize its achievement and, consequently, the complete transformation of society—or rather, of reality as a whole.

This is where Han's thesis and the concept of pneumopathology intersect. The latter "is one of the most important analytical concepts of Eric Voegelin's philosophy" (Parotto 2018, 127) and could be defined, in general terms, as a pathology of the spirit that manifests in the form of a revolt against immanent or transcendent reality. That said, in the next section I will explain in more detail how transhumanist proposals for human enhancement are bound up with the achievement imperative. Subsequently, I will analyze the Voegelian category of pneumopathology and attempt to justify the thesis that the idea of human enhancement—which leads to a radicalization of the achievement imperative—is rooted in a metastatic pneumopathology.

1. Human enhancement and the achievement imperative

How are human enhancement and the achievement imperative denounced by Byung-Chul Han related? To answer this question, it is essential, first of all, to explain what human enhancement consists of. The transhumanist proposal for human enhancement is an ontological engineering project that consists of using biomedical technology to improve the physical, cognitive, and even moral capabilities of human beings. At best, it aims to free human beings from their biological "ballast" (the body)¹ by

¹ The idea of the body as an obstacle from which we must liberate ourselves is very recurrent in the transhumanist literature (Moravec 1988; Kurzweil 1999; Rothblatt 2013, 2014). For example, Hans Moravec, a pioneer of the transhumanist movement, says that "It is easy to imagine human thought freed from bondage to a mortal body" (1988, 4). Even more moderate transhumanists, who attribute some value to the body,

transferring the mental contents to some kind of non-organic substrate. This work of ontological engineering is carried out through a process of progressive fusion of man and machine, that is, a process of cyborgization that will culminate (so its promoters hope) in the complete abolition of the human, with the transformation of *Homo sapiens* into *Homo cyberneticus*, the human being into posthuman.

The reason offered by those advocating for this transformation is that, since ancient times, human beings have wanted to eradicate suffering, disease, and death (Bostrom 2003), and that only technology will be able to achieve this. Utilitarian transhumanist philosopher David Pearce notes in his book *The Hedonistic Imperative* (1995) that his main objective is to defend the “moral urgency” of “the abolitionist project”, “a project devoted to eradicating suffering ‘in all sentient life’ and ushering in a future of ‘sublime and all-pervasive’ happiness or what Pearce refers to as a ‘heaven’ or ‘paradise on earth’” (Huberman 2021, 71). The construction of this “paradise on earth” entails resorting to a “paradise-engineering” (Pearce 1995), which is nothing more than an enhancement technology.

To better understand human enhancement, it is useful to distinguish between two paradigms: 1) the therapeutic paradigm; 2) the enhancement paradigm. The former focuses on curing diseases, on re-establishing a standard level of functioning, on reversing damage. In other words, to fix what is wrong, to restore lost health. The second paradigm, by contrast, strives “to break the barriers of normality and go beyond the ‘natural limits’ of mankind”, “to move the level of functionality above the standard” (Garasic 2012, 33). The application of therapy-oriented technologies is undoubtedly less invasive in medical terms and less costly in economic terms than the application of enhancement technologies. For the sake of clarity, human enhancement is identified, as its name indicates, with the second paradigm. Now, what kind of technologies are used to carry out the improvement? In 2002, the Natural Science Foundation (NSF) published an extensive report on the convergence of nanotech-

aspire to “get out” of it. Such is the case of Max More, for whom “Rather than denying the body, transhumanists typically want to choose its form and be able to inhabit different bodies, including virtual bodies” (2013, 15). Certainly, More does not seem to ostensibly disown the body, but he implies that it is better to abandon it.

nology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive science (NBIC) for the enhancement of human capabilities.

It is important to highlight here the value of “convergence”, which is an effort to combine these fields of scientific research to obtain more and better results in human improvement. As Gilbert Hottois states, the NSF report proposes a theoretical-practical unity of science and technology based on the premise that everything is the product of a natural (material) mixture more or less achieved and that, therefore, it is plausible to try to improve the results of those mixtures and “generate new constructions” (2013, 169). Thus, it is not surprising that technological developments at the nano-level are of particular interest.² At that scale, Hottois notes, “there is no difference between inert, living and thinking matter; between the natural and the artificial; between man, machine and animal” (2013, 168). In short, from NBIC technologies, BICs converge at N (nanoscale).

From these premises, the aforementioned converging technologies are expected to give rise to a vast range of improvements—for example, radical life extension (even indefinite life), brain-machine interfaces, reproductive technologies, artificial body substitutes (organs, arms, legs, etc.), neuro-enhancers to optimize memory, intelligence, attention, etc. Such converging technologies would not only enable individual enhancement, but would also have a profound impact on people’s lifestyles, society, and the economy (Canton 2004, 188). This is because *enhancement*, understood in transhumanist terms, is synonymous with efficiency and increased productivity. What is posited, in principle, as an improvement in the conditions of existence is nothing more than the maximization of the achievement imperative. An example will serve to better illustrate this idea. The elimination of sleep is a major goal to be conquered for some transhumanists (e.g. Zoltan Istvan) who understands sleep as “the most universal and onerous of all time-wasters” (Asla 2021, 82).

² Nanotechnology consists of the fabrication of devices, structures, and systems with dimensions on the order of a few nanometers. A nanometer (1 nm) is equivalent to one millionth of a millimeter. For example, a human hair is between 50,000 and 100,000 nm thick.

Istvan is refreshingly clear about what “sleep” means to a transhumanist: “I hate sleeping and always have. I see sleeping as an early form of dipping in and out of death. Sleeping is probably the most wasteful thing all humans do—we spend a third of our lives in basically a lobotomized state” (2016). He then adds:

Currently, I live in San Francisco and hang out with a lot of busy Silicon Valley types. Some friends—often CEOs—claim to only sleep three to four hours a night. I get jealous when I hear that. But of course that’s partially why they’re generally so successful. They have more time to work instead of counting sheep. Even the recent *Wall Street* sequel was titled *Money Never Sleeps* (Istvan 2016).³

These two sentences are extraordinarily revealing. The first defines sleep as an illness, or even a disability (a state likened to that of a lobotomized person). The second, on the other hand, reveals a purely instrumental understanding of human life, because for Istvan, sleep prevents him from working more—at least as his friends in Silicon Valley do—which, in his opinion, is a serious problem. Thus, the battle against sleep, although presented as a supposed improvement, actually responds to the achievement imperative and self-exploitation. As I noted earlier, the sleep problem is just one example of how so-called enhancement technologies are understood in terms of achievement. The logic of achievement that prevails in modern societies, as described by Han, becomes so radical in transhumanist circles that some authors prefer to use the expression “Human Performance Enhancement” instead of “Human Enhancement” (Scharre & Fish 2018; Wolbring 2009, 2008; Canton 2004).

Moreover, the idea that human enhancement responds to the logic of achievement seems to be reinforced if one considers the mechanistic assumptions on which it is based. The promoters of enhancement

³ Istvan is not alone in this. Another proponent of sleep elimination is transhumanist philosopher Anders Sandberg, who in a Twitter message on October 2, 2022 attached an article titled “Orexin and the quest for more waking hours” and commented as follows: “This looks like a potential candidate for wakefulness enhancement that fulfills the evolutionary optimality challenge”. This is the link: <https://www.lesswrong.com/posts/sksP9Lkv9wqaAhXsA/orexin-and-the-quest-for-more-waking-hours>

assume, in effect, that the individual is a machine whose parts can be manipulated at will, and that society is composed of fungible individuals who can be modified (or even discarded) in favour of the whole, in order to optimize the gears of the socioeconomic machine. On the basis of these assumptions, it is argued that human enhancement could “create fatigueless and compliant workers in a world without disease or social unrest” (Koch 2010, 687). In short, subjects capable of reaching maximum performance standards, but exempt from the neuropathologies identified by Han.

2. From pneumopathology to neuropathology

As I highlighted at the beginning of the article, the greatest affliction of today’s society, according to Han, is to be found in the neuro-psychological illnesses that derive from a life subsumed to the imperative of performance. Is it really feasible that in a techno-enhanced society such pathologies can be eliminated? It is very difficult to foresee such a favourable scenario. Indeed, in my view, not only will these pathologies not be eliminated, but they will even increase. While there are good reasons to suspect that this will be the case, a detailed justification of this thesis would require a separate article.⁴ What I intend to demonstrate here is that today’s achievement society has its origin in a pathology of the spirit which, in the narrative of human enhancement, reaches a terminal stage of development. The term *pneumopathology* was introduced into the philosophical lexicon by Friedrich Schelling, who coined it in an attempt to explain the progressivism of his time. However, the term did not receive sufficient attention from the philosophical community until Eric Voegelin recovered it and used it as a technical term for the analysis of human structure and behaviour. In Voegelin’s work, the term appears for the first time during a series of talks given in the summer of 1964 at the University of Munich. These talks were later published under the title *Hitler and the Germans*.

⁴ I make a general reference to this problem in another article (see Gaitán 2021).

In that work, Voegelin distinguishes between psychopathology and pneumopathology, stating that (as can be suspected from the etymology of the words) the former alludes to a mental disease, while the latter alludes to a disease of the spirit. According to Voegelin, pneumopathology has its origin in an existential tension that is constitutive of the human being. Human existence unfolds between two dimensions of reality: the immanent (or mundane) and the transcendent. This sort of middle-earth in which man dwells was described by Plato in terms of *metaxy* or “in-between”. Man becomes aware that he inhabits a de-divinized world that is essentially imperfect, incomplete, insecure, and uncertain, but at the same time experiences (or receives the promise of) his participation in the transcendent order of being.⁵ Existence in the *metaxy* does not consist merely in inhabiting an empty space between the two poles of the tension, but, as Voegelin says in a translation of the *Symposium*, “‘the realm of the spiritual’; it is the reality of ‘man’s converse with the gods’ (202–203), the mutual participation (*methexis*, *metalepsis*) of human in divine, and divine in human reality” (Voegelin 1990, 103).⁶

Understood in this way, existence in the *metaxy* could be symbolized as a tension between ignorance and knowledge, imperfection and per-

⁵ The awareness of living in a contingent world as a punctual self (situated in clearly defined coordinates of time and space) that yearns for transcendence is also present in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Psalm 63 provides an example of this when it says “God, you are my God, I pine for you; my heart thirsts for you, my body longs for you, as a land parched, dreary and waterless”. This ontological tension between the finite and the infinite, between the instant and the totality—noted since ancient times, both in the Greek tradition (Platonic *metaxy*) and in the Judeo-Christian tradition—has been sustained almost unalterably throughout the history of Western thought and defines a fundamental component of the human condition. To mention another example, the contemporary philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, in harmony with Eric Voegelin, defends this idea from a phenomenological-existential perspective. In his book *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l’extériorité*, Levinas states that, because we are in the world, the desire for transcendence arises, the desire towards the Other, considered in an eminent sense. This desire for the infinite Other is a desire that is not satisfied in this world and which, in Levinasian jargon, is called “metaphysical desire”. According to Levinas, subjectivity is constituted in service of this desire or existential tension.

⁶ The Italian sociologist Pierpaolo Donati affirms, in consonance with Voegelin, that transcendence consists in an emergent relation between immanent reality (what exists) and transcendental reality (what can be). In his own words, “What I call the ‘relational order’ is precisely the transcendental, generative mechanism linking immanent and transcendent realities” (Donati 2019, 179).

fection, time and eternity, mortality and immortality. Thus, in order to dwell healthily in the *metaxy* it is necessary to harmoniously articulate the divine and mundane realities from which these antinomies arise. The human being—as an entity that is more than an animal but less than a god—unfolds his existence and constitutes his identity in a permanent polar tension, that is, by reference to realities in which he only partially participates (Franz 1992, 28). As such, it is not uncommon that he manifests a deep dissatisfaction with this existential tension and seeks to dissolve it by disregarding or abolishing one of the two poles in tension—or, inversely, by affirming only one of these poles.

As the Voegelin scholar Michael Franz notes, the “attempts to artificially relax the tensions associated with the de-divinization of the world tend to assume one or the other of two characteristic forms: disregard for the requirements of existence in the world or a turning-away from transcendent reality to live in this world alone” (1992, 7). In a nutshell, Voegelin considers that pneumopathology has its origin in the attempt to dissolve the “in-between” in one of two directions: by abolishing the immanent order or by abolishing the transcendent order. That “realm of the spiritual” which is the life in the *metaxy* is altered and sick when the tension is broken. It is crucial, in this sense, to keep in mind that Voegelin’s ontological premise for the analysis of the pneumopathic condition consists in affirming that the human being is metaxological by nature.⁷

Now, what semantic content does Voegelin attribute to the notion of pneumopathology? He associates this type of pathology with what the writer and essayist Robert Musil identified as the “higher, or intelligent, stupidity” (Voegelin 1999, 101), a sort of “presumptuousness, of *hybris*, of spiritual arrogance” (Voegelin 1999, 101). Musil distinguishes between two types of stupidity:⁸ 1) the honorable or simple; 2) the higher or intelligent. The first is defined as a lack of capacity for understanding (or

⁷ In other words, that existence in the *metaxy* is a constitutive characteristic of the human being.

⁸ It should be made clear that neither Musil nor Voegelin use the term *stupidity* in an insulting or pejorative way, but as a category of philosophical analysis directly related to its etymological root. Indeed, *stupidus* comes from the verb *stupere*, which means to be paralyzed, astonished, stupefied, or stunned. Pneumopathology as stupidity, therefore, refers to a kind of existential stupefaction or perturbation.

cognitive affection), although this lack of capacity is often accompanied by virtues such as honorability, loyalty, reliability, good manners, and purity of feeling. The second, by contrast, is not the result of a defect of the mind, but rather one of the spirit. According to Musil,

The higher stupidity is the real disease of culture [...] it is a sign of nonculture, of misculture, of culture that has come about in the wrong way [...] It reaches into the highest intellectual sphere... Years ago I wrote about this form of stupidity [...] stupidity is active in every direction, and can dress up in all the clothes of truth (quoted by Voegelin 1999, 102).

Voegelin identifies pneumopathology with this form of stupidity, which consists of a kind of contempt or hatred of reality (at its immanent or transcendent pole), which leads to the creation of a new order, to substitute reality with a pseudo-reality that conflicts with the former. To make the distinction between these levels of reality clearer, Voegelin uses the expressions *first reality* and *second reality*, and states that “The consequence of living in the second reality is, exactly, conflict with the first reality, which indeed is not canceled by the fact that I make for myself a false idea of it and live according to it” (1999, 108). That is to say, the attempt to radically modify the structure of reality does not destroy that reality, but rather increases disorder—natural and social. In any case, the negation of the given order, and the imposition of the pure will to dominate (*libido dominandi*) on that order, can only result in an increase in disorder. Examples of this phenomenon are the great modern narratives, such as Marxism, fascism, positivism, anarchism, etc. All these movements are hubristic revolts that seek humankind’s salvation through immanent action. In situations of rebellion against reality, such as the above-mentioned cases, “humanity appears as an autonomous, self-created species capable of assuming control of its destiny through the self-conscious application of new forms of knowledge” (Franz 1992, 6). Human enhancement could be included in this group.

At this point, it is necessary to explain that, for Voegelin, modernity stands out insofar as it suffers from that form of spiritual disease which consists in the complete abolition of the transcendent order, and the af-

firmation of man's autonomy and his absolute reign in the world. Modern pneumopathology consists in eclipsing

the transcendent dimension of human experience by establishing man as the measure of all things. This type of pneumopathological consciousness may take the form of hatred of the gods or, among more ambitious moderns, of attempts to usher in an era of human autonomy through a redirection of humanity's energies toward a perfection of the "estate of man" (Franz 1992, 8).

The proof of this is that the modernity to which Voegelin refers takes its inspiration from the figure of Prometheus. As I have argued elsewhere, "The Promethean ideal is a sort of radical anthropocentrism that confers on human beings the authority and the capacity for self-enhancement, self-transcendence, and finally self-redemption" (Gaitán, 2019, 5). Relevant figures of nineteenth-century thought, including the likes of Ludwig Feuerbach, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Auguste Comte are key to understanding the Promethean dimension of modern thought.

The escape from metaxological tension through the Promethean ideal is also present in the narrative of human enhancement, but in a much more radical form, because it abolishes not only the transcendent pole, but also the immanent pole. In its disdain for all that is human, especially the corporeal dimension of human existence, the narrative of human enhancement defines man as a mere flow of information and understands enhancement as the technological route out of the human condition. Human enhancement represents the search for a radical autonomy, for an existence that rebels against both poles of existential tension and that, for this very reason, seems to have its origin in a metastatic pneumopathology. Human enhancement is the logical conclusion to which the search for the subjection of all that is real to the *libido dominandi* leads. In this case, it is not just a matter of subjugating human nature to build supermen, but to build a completely new type of being, beyond all that is human: the post-human. In Nick Bostrom's words, the posthuman is a being "whose basic capacities so radically exceed those of present humans as to be no longer unambiguously human by our current standards" (2003, 5).

The desire to reach a posthuman stage of existence expresses a kind of ontophobia, a rejection of that which is given to us involuntarily and which, by its very characteristics, constitutes an obstacle to our *libido dominandi*. The narrative of human enhancement finds no positivity in the given reality, only chaos, uncertainty, and suffering, which must be replaced by a paradise of order, certainties, and improvements, enabled by “paradise-engineering” (Pearce 1995). The consequence of pneumopathology, according to Voegelin, is that “man, thus, no longer lives in reality, but in a false image of reality, which claims however to be the genuine reality” (1999, 108). When a person begins to live in conformity with the second reality, he gradually becomes more and more immune to the stimuli and demands of the first reality. An ontological substitution takes place, leading to a state of complete alienation.

Another issue to consider in relation to the pneumopathic condition is the place of language as a tool for the substitution of realities. According to Voegelin scholar Giuliana Parotto, “The escape from reality [...] is achieved through language as its principal instrument. Language is the main expression and also the main carrier of spiritual pathology—it is, thus, at the same time the main ‘seismograph’ of it” (2018, 128). Linguistic transformation is the most evident pneumopathological symptom, “sometimes at the level of intellectual jargon of a high level of complication, sometimes on a vulgar level” (Voegelin 2006, 75). Through language, pneumopathological tendencies become contagious, spread socially, and become hegemonic. As a consequence, the substitution of first reality is consummated and normalized. Anthropologist Jennifer Huberman argues that transhumanism, as a movement to promote human enhancement, has a principal interest, namely “to reconfigure conceptions of the person, the body, kinship, cosmology, the social and political order, and the physical environments in which our future descendants will dwell” (2021, 2).

That said, the substantial contribution of the Voegelian analysis of the pneumopathic condition consists in affirming that the emergence of the great Promethean narratives (among which the one studied here stands out for its radicality) is not due to particular historical or idiosyncratic

circumstances, nor to the influence of certain influential figures; rather, it is bound up with the human condition itself, to perennial patterns of consciousness—the *metaxy* and the different forms of escape from it that man has been trying out. Voegelin goes to the heart of the matter and offers an ontological explanation of such narratives (rather than an ethical, social, or political one). He claims that pneumopathology reduces man to mere production relations, to libido drives, to will to power, to scientific/instrumental rationality, or, as Han puts it in the context of the twenty-first century, to an achievement-subject.

When the spiritual disease metastasizes, when the harmonious tension between the immanent and transcendent poles is broken, there is an extreme narrowing and flattening of the existential horizon. Any hint of freedom is dissolved, and existence becomes inauthentic and ephemeral. All the complexity and consistency of the Self that longs for transcendence is diluted in a prosaic and empty life, with neither God nor authentic Self. In other words, the chronification of the pneumopathic condition leads to the realm of nihilism. Philosopher Glenn Hughes argues that Voegelin never denied the importance of the scientific discoveries, technological developments, historical knowledge, and passion for research that have brought the modern West to world domination. But his comparative analysis of what has been lost and what has been gained leads him to affirm that the price of progress is the death of the spirit (Hughes 1993, 114–115). It can be assumed, in this respect, that Voegelin would not see “progress” toward the posthuman condition as a valid option, but rather as a possibility that we should avoid at all costs.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this article, I set out two objectives: 1) to explain the connection between human enhancement and the achievement imperative denounced by Han; 2) to analyze the Voegelian category of pneumopathology and attempt to justify the thesis that the narrative of human enhancement—which leads to a radicalization of the achievement

imperative—is rooted in a chronic pneumopathology. What I propose through the development of these objectives could be summarized as follows. According to Byung-Chul Han, each era has its own medical pathologies and those of the twenty-first century have a definite neuronal imprint. These neuropathologies, however, are just the tip of the iceberg; they form the visible part of a larger problem that is more difficult to detect, namely a type of pathology that has a spiritual imprint—a pathology that has been present throughout history (at least in the West), but especially since the beginning of modernity, and which has gradually reached a level of chronification never seen before. In this case, we cannot speak of a pathology whose potential cure can be achieved by means of medical treatments (as with neuropathologies). Rather, this other kind of pathology demands philosophical-theological reflection.

Pneumopathology underlies the reduction of the human being to a performance-machine, and this reduction is at the origin of the neuropathologies to which Han alludes. It is necessary to pay attention to this phenomenon in order to observe the whole picture. Han's analysis is, in my opinion, correct but incomplete. As such, it was necessary to enrich it with a reflection in an ontological-historical key. In this context, the Voegelian interpretation of modernity (particularly of the modern meta-narratives) in light of the notion of *pneumopathology* brings in this element that is missing from Han's diagnosis and helps us to discern the complexity and risks involved in human enhancement. The present article has only intended to take a first step in this direction, and it is far from exhausting the problem. In any case, it opens the door for future work that could further examine, for example, the connection between pneumopathology and the array of ethical problems posed by human enhancement.

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