Our (Post)human Future

THE POSTHUMAN IN PLESSNERIAN PERSPECTIVE

Master Thesis

Student:	J. Mulder
Master Program:	Philosophy of Science, Technology and Society
Graduation Committee:	Prof. dr. C. Aydin (supervisor), Dr. S.E.J. Gauttier
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University of Twente, Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences, Enschede the Netherlands

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

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Abstract

This thesis uses Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology to analyze the question whether the posthuman is a goal that can be realized. The posthuman is understood in multiple ways, following Steve Fuller's distinction these are distinguished in transhumanist and posthumanist conceptualizations of the posthuman. Subsequently Plessner's law of the utopian standpoint is introduced. It is pointed out that the utopian standpoint follows from the awareness of the constitutive homelessness of humanity. The human being attempts to construct himself a ground to stand but this never lasts, Being aware of this deficit humans search for the ground of the world, the necessary being which rests in itself, which Plessner refers to as the ultimate counter weight of the human imbalance, or God. Based on this framework the question whether the posthuman is a goal that can be realized is analyzed.

Contents

1. Introduction

Proponents of human enhancement technologies advocate the development and use of technologies like genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, robotics and others (Coenen, 2007; Tirosh-Samuelson, 2012) to overcome current biological limitations and become "what we allegedly have always wished to be" (Hauskeller, 2012a, p. 40). Examples of what might be gained using these technologies include elongation of human lives, elimination of human suffering, expansion of human mental and physical capacities, defeat aging and perhaps even immortality (Bostrom, 2005a; Moravec, 1988). According to John Harris humanity must take control over evolution and its own future development through enhancement technologies beyond the point that humanity will have changed in a different and certainly better species altogether (Ferrando, 2013b; Hauskeller, 2012a). This better species as derived from the human being is conceptualized as the posthuman. However this is not the only conceptualization of the posthuman, rather there is a wide range of different and sometimes opposing definitions of the posthuman (Miah, 2008a).

Conceptualizations of the posthuman can be distinguished in the most general terms in transhumanist and posthumanist conceptualizations[1]. In defining these two concepts I will follow the normative distinction as put forward by Steve Fuller (2014; 2017). Transhumanism, according to Fuller, is a project that aims to intensify and extend these properties that separates the human from other natural beings. Also, transhumanists believe that pursuing these aims is valuable in its own right (Fuller et al., 2017). In Fuller's definition transhumanism emphasizes the locus of the human species, in other words the human centered worldview and in that sense transhumanism can be understood as an ultra-Enlightenment movement. Contrary to transhumanism Fuller defines posthumanism as a movement that aims to 'de-center' the human and therefore can be understood as a counter-Enlightenment movement. Whereas for transhumanists life is purposeful, as in that humanity has an overall direction i.e. the aim to improve humanity, for posthumanists humanity is merely an impermanent species with its own perspective that will one day disappear (Fuller et al., 2017), in other words humans are not as special as humanists think.

It should be noted however that both these movements are not homogeneous in their understanding of the posthuman, rather it is a distinction in general terms. For example, some philosophers that in this thesis are regard to be adherents of transhumanism refuse to be classified as one, for example John Harris who's philosophical stance appears indistinguishable from for example Bostrom who embraces the term (Bishop, 2010).

Transhumanists often portray the posthuman future as an appealing future where posthumans experience happiness beyond our current imagination (Bostrom, 2008b). According to Michael Hauskeller, ideas as such are utopias and function as motivation for the

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[1] Transhumanist do sometimes refer to "the posthuman" or "the posthuman future" however what is meant with that is different from the meaning of the term when it is used by posthumanists.

endorsement of enhancement technologies. Hauskeller further claims that without the display of such fantasies there would be far less willingness to fund research into the development of these technologies, and thus in fact these ideas are merely a call for funds (Hauskeller, 2012a).

Yuval Noah Harari, a Jewish historian notes in his book *Homo Deus* (2017) that Google has appointed 'immortality believers' Ray Kurzweil and Bill Maris as respectively director of engineering and president of Google Ventures investment fund, the latter presiding over more than two billion dollars. Harari concludes that Marris backs up his believes with a lot of hard cash (Harari, 2017, p. 28). No less important is that also other transhumanists have gained themselves positions of influence. This is also pointed out by Cristopher Coenen when he shows that Mihail Roco, one of the organizers of a workshop on the US NBIC initiative, holds and spreads techno-futuristic visions and also is a senior official of the US National Science Foundation (Coenen, 2007).

Considering this the question arises *whether the posthuman is a goal that can be realized*. This question will be analyzed using Helmuth Plessner's law of the utopian standpoint (1957).

1.1. The utopian standpoint

Plessner's work is only rather recently rediscovered. In his magnus opus *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1957) which was first published in 1928, he sets out to explore what it means to be human. In order to do so he presents a structural framework to explain how humans are different from other living creatures. Plessner argues that the difference can be found in the positionality of humans. He argues that both humans and animals are indirectly related to their environment, meaning that the relation between a human or animal and their environment is mediated, that is influenced, by themselves. The difference between humans and animals according Plessner is that animals are unaware of this mediated perception because the animal is itself at the center of this mediated process (de Mul, 2003; Grene, 1974), humans on the other hand are aware of the mediation process and therefore take on what Plessner calls an eccentric positionality. This entails that humans are at the center of their actions, similar to animals, but at the same time they are the spectators and witnesses of these actions. Or as Plessner puts it "Der Mensch lebt und erlebt nicht nur, sondern er erlebt sein Erleben" (cited in Procee, 1992, p. 92) [The human not only lives and experiences life, but he experiences his experiences]. The eccentric position is the very reason the human being is not in equilibrium, he is constitutive homeless, always becoming something, creating an equilibrium for himself which eventually is never a lasting equilibrium (de Mul, 2014b). Furthermore, to overcome the constitutive homelessness humans search for a final ground, a homeland. Plessner argues that such a homeland is never to be found, it can only be believed in. Ultimately, they are doomed to remain unfulfilled dreams. This is what Plessner coins as the law of the utopian standpoint.

Jos de Mul argues that whereas in earlier days for most people religion created a homeland, today in the modern world it seems that technology has taken over this role from religion (de Mul, 2014b). As I showed before, transhumanists believe that enhancement technologies will enable us to overcome current biological limitations and help us become what we always wished to be. It is this that triggers me to investigate whether the posthuman is a useful concept or whether it rather is a manifestation of the utopian standpoint as put forward in Plessner's account, which would also imply that transhumanists are confused about their own concept of the human. If it is indeed a manifestation of the utopian standpoint, then pursuing the posthuman is a paradox which cannot be realized.

The research question of this thesis follows from the first section of this chapter and is formulated as follows: *Is the posthuman a goal that can be realized?*

In order to be able to formulate an answer at this research question first a set of preliminary question must be answered. These questions function as sub questions and are addressed in separate chapters. In the first chapter two different conceptualizations of the posthuman will be discussed. deals with different conceptualizations of the posthuman. In the following chapter I will elaborate on Plessner's philosophical anthropology and more specifically the law of the utopian standpoint. As mentioned in the previous section the law of the utopian standpoint provides the framework which will be used in answering the research question. At last in a final chapter an answer at the research question will be formulated, building on the foregoing chapters.

Subquestions:

1. what are trans- and posthumanist conceptualizations of the posthuman?
2. What is Plessner's law of the utopian standpoint

2. Conceptualizations of the Posthuman

"What distinguishes posthumanists from transhumanists is this: while posthumanists would rather be cyborgs than goddesses or gods, transhumanists wish to be both, but if they had to choose, they would much rather be gods"

(Michael Hauskeller, 2014. p. 107)

2.1. Introduction

The posthuman is, as the term preludes itself, a renewed conceptualization of what it means to be human in a post-human era. However, as indicated in the introduction of this thesis there are multiple conceptualizations of the posthuman. I showed, following Fullers' distinction that for some, the transhumanists, the posthuman is about emphasizing the properties that sets humans apart from other natural beings, whereas for others, the posthumanists, the posthuman is the explication of the end of man as the measure of all things (Fuller, 2014). It appears that Fuller's distinction is for a large part based on the attitude towards humanism (Fuller et al., 2017). Which resonates with the values on which both movements are build (Birnbacher, 2008).

This chapter aims to describe transhumanism and posthumanism in more detail. First I will go into more detail about transhumanism by discussing four core themes that are central to the concept and subsequently I will discuss posthumanism by discussing two of its core themes.

2.2. Transhumanism

Those who pursue the transhumanist posthuman do not all strive for one and the same posthuman, rather they often have their own more or less similar view on what transhumanism is. However those at the foreground of the debate share a common ground (Bostrom, 2002; Kurzweil, 2005; Moravec, 1988; Pearce, 1995; Stock, 2003). In this section this common ground which transhumanists share will be discussed in more detail. It is made up of four core themes, which are; its humanist foundation, its aim to take control over human evolution, technology as its liberating force, and its promising outlook. I will discuss these themes one by one and end with a short discussion of bioconservatism, a current that shares with transhumanism their conceptualization of the posthuman but at the same time has a diametrically opposed view on the desirability of this posthuman.

2.2.1. The humanist foundation

The first theme of what transhumanists have in common is that they declare themselves to be the heirs of humanism and the enlightenment philosophy (Bishop, 2010; Bostrom, 2008a; Miah, 2008b). Humanist values like rational thinking, freedom, science and the belief in progress are the cornerstones of their ideas (Aydin, 2017; Bostrom, 2005b). However, transhumanists aim to take humanism further. Whereas humanism acted as the liberator from superstition, transhumanism is supposed to be the liberator of human biological limitations (Peters, 2015), which is why some refer to transhumanism as ultra-humanism (Ferrando, 2013a; Fuller et al., 2017).

While the ideas as present in transhumanism can be traced back to ancient religious myths such as the Greek Icarus myth (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014) or the myth of Prometheus (Hauskeller, 2009), the term itself is since its introduction by evolutionary theorist Julian Huxley (1887-1975) in 1957 already linked to humanism. Huxley used the term to capture what he had earlier called 'evolutionary humanism' (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014).

With his book *Religion Without Revelation* (1927) Huxley envisioned to bring evolutionary humanism in the world similar to how a midwife guides a child into the world, in order to resolve the crisis of humanity. Huxley argued that humans are the only species able to understand the evolutionary process and hence are morally obliged to direct its future course (Fuller et al., 2017). This, he argued could be achieved by using science to build a better world (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014). The goal of humanity in Huxley's view is to understand the evolutionary process and the relation between human and nature, because he argued that the source of all truth, beauty, morality and purpose is to be found in nature. Therefore he encourages his readers to utilize all available knowledge to give guidance and encouragement for the continuous development of the human being (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014). Huxley himself defined transhumanism as the belief that humanity can and should transcend itself, by realizing new possibilities of and for human nature (Hauskeller, 2012b).

While some authors explicitly denote that they build on humanist values, as for example Bostrom (Bostrom, 2005b), for others it often remains implicit. An example here is what posthumanists have critically called the anthropocentrism of humanism. Transhumanism builds on humanism and hence transhumanists claim, implicit or explicit, in line with humanism that the human species is set apart from other species because of their capability of reason and with that the human centered worldview of humanism is emphasized. In line with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's modern humanism as put forward in *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1985, [1486]) transhumanists claim that humans are special and carry the potential to invent or reinvent themselves because they are not restrained by any natural boundaries. Humans can be anything they want, even gods (Hauskeller, 2012a).

2.2.2. Taking control

The main idea of transhumanists is to overcome human limitations because it is through overcoming these limitations that the posthuman is realized (Bostrom, 2005b; Hauskeller, 2012a; Peters, 2015). Limitations to overcome include biological limitations, such as age and intellectual, psychological and emotional limitations (Bostrom, 2005a; Bostrom & Roache,

2008; Kurzweil, 2005; Moravec, 1988). The transhumanists encourage humanity to overcome limitations as these and proceed on the path to posthumanity. To become posthuman man must take control over the future of humanity in order to steer its future course (Fuller et al., 2017). Which underlines the emphasis of transhumanists on the necessity to take control (Hauskeller, 2012a; Miah, 2008a; Peters, 2016; Tirosh-Samuelson, 2012).

Another argument that promotes the idea of taking control over the future of humanity and evolution appeals to some sort of human nature. Often this argument, or a version of it refers to the Promethean myth. The myth tells the story of Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus. Prometheus and Epimetheus are given the task to distribute powers and abilities to the mortal species. Epimetheus, whose name means something like 'afterthought' convinces his brother to leave this task to him alone and as his name already indicates he did not think this through. When as last in row the humans arrive to get distributed their powers and abilities it appears that there are none of the powers and abilities left. The humans would have ended up with nothing had not Prometheus and Zeus stepped in. Prometheus stole fire from the gods and provided us the knowledge how to use it while Zeus gave us political and emotional abilities (Hauskeller, 2009).

According to Pico della Mirandola it is precisely this initial defect of humanity which is humanities greatest advantage. Because it entails that humans have no nature and hence must create one for themselves (Hauskeller, 2009), meaning that humans carry the potential to invent and reinvent who they are, without being restricted by any natural boundary. Pico della Mirandola argues that in this sense Prometheus is a 'paradigmatic' human. Both these arguments are a call to action, humans must intervene to direct their own future course.

Another reference to Prometheus, for the most part along parallel lines, is from Gregory Stock when he claims that humans will eventually gain control over human evolution whether they want it or not, because Prometheus theft from the gods was "too characteristically human" (Stock, 2003, p. 2). According to Stock humans want to gain control over evolution by virtue of being human. While Pico della Mirandola claims that humans have no nature, he and also Stock implicitly claim that humans by nature want to gain control over human evolution because that is what it means to be human (Hauskeller, 2009; Stock, 2003).

Other authors wo promote the idea to take control over evolution and the future of humanity include John Harris who argues that humans should make this world a better place and in order to do so should take control over evolution and with that of the further development of humanity until the point where humanity might have changed in a better species altogether (Hauskeller, 2009, 2012a). Also Julian Huxley and his contemporaries, science fiction author H. G. Wells, biologist J.B.S. Haldane and crystallographer John Desmond Bernal wrote futuristic texts in which they envisioned civilizations that were capable of controlling their own evolution, create improved humans and colonize outer space (Coenen, 2007, p. 7). The essays they wrote inspired Julian Huxley's brother, Aldous Huxley to write the famous dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932) which is often cited in the debate concerning enhancements technologies (Bostrom, 2005a; Carbonell, 2014).

2.2.3. Technology as a liberating force

In gaining control over the future of humanity transhumanists foresee a crucial role for technology. Proponents of transhumanism claim that technology is the means that will take us humans into the realm of the posthuman. For instance, Bostrom argues that technologies which might help to overcome human limitations include genetic engineering, information technology, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence and pharmaceuticals (Bostrom, 2008a; Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014). Hans Moravec, an expert in robotics, argues in his book called *Mind Children* (Moravec, 1988) that with the help of strong AI, superhuman computer intelligence, it will be possible in the future to digitally scan and subsequently upload the human mind. As a result, the mind is disembodied and with that the living being has discarded its biological carrier and through the mind upload the mind lives some sort of digital life. Though this idea assumes that that what makes us human is stored in our brain and that through mind uploading human consciousness is transferred to computers and other intelligent machines, through which some form of human immortality is achieved. It should however be noted that this is a certain stance in the discussion evolving around the mind-body problem and that there are other positions in this discussion as well, which also leads to a different valuation of this argument.

Kurzweil also sees a prominent role for technology, though in a somewhat different fashion. According to him merging with technology is a necessity not because it is what it means to be human but rather he argues it is necessary to survive. His main argument to support this claim is based on "Moore's Law", which states that computing power doubles every 18 months. Kurzweil applies this law to artificial intelligence and other technologies, and subsequently claims that an irreversible turning point, which he calls 'the singularity' is reached when human intelligence is superseded by artificial intelligence (Kurzweil, 2005). This is to happen in the near future, the first half of the current century to be more precise (Bostrom, 2005a). This event will be accompanied with a disruption in society, because machines will be sufficiently smart to teach themselves and humans will no longer be needed. Therefore, he argues, it is important for humans to merge with technology in order to not be abandoned by it. The merger with technology will be the salvation of humanity, it will bring about a new phase in human evolution and as the subtitle of his book *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005) suggests this new posthuman phase will be non-biological. However not every transhumanist believes that there will be such a thing as a singularity (Bostrom, 2005a).

Whereas the above transhumanists foresee technology as the road to the posthuman, Bainbridge and Roco, the authors of the NBIC report (2002), drafted in response to a conference on the potential of NBIC (Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science) technologies, go further and argue that because nanotechnology operates at the level of atoms, nanotechnology can be understood as the building blocks of matter and therefore nanotechnology provides the control over the future of humanity. Considering this they argue that the convergence of the NBIC technologies will enable us to solve all the world's problems and bring about a golden age of prosperity (Roco & Bainbridge, 2002).

Most proponents of transhumanism regard technology simply as a means to an end, bringing about the posthuman, Bostrom also has an eye for the possible negative consequences or abuse of enhancement technologies. He stresses that it is important to study the ramifications, promises and potential dangers of enhancement technologies and to make sure that they become widely available in order to improve societal equality (Bostrom, 2008a; Humanity+, 2015).

2.2.4. The promising outlook of enhancement technologies

Transhumanists encourage humans to use enhancement technologies in order to realize the posthuman. Often, such encouragements are accompanied with compelling outlooks of posthuman life. Moravec points out that once human minds are uploaded onto computers, the mind is disembodied and with that the living being has discarded his biological carrier and adopted a mechanical one (Moravec, 1988; Tirosh-Samuelson, 2012). This idea entails that also human consciousness is transferred to computers and other intelligent machines and with that some form of human machine hybrid is realized. This is how both Moravec and Kurzweil envision posthumanity. Posthuman life is lived free from biological slavery and mortality. The posthuman cyber minds will set out for the stars and spread throughout the galaxy to occupy outer space until one day in the far future the whole universe is turned in an "extended thinking thing" (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2012) where cosmic minds are omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent (Peters, 2016). Human life in such a world would entail to live either in a virtual software based world or in the physical word through the embodiment of a robot (Bostrom, 2005b; Kurzweil, 2005; Moravec, 1988).

Bostrom's envisioned posthuman life is different from Moravec and Kurzweil in that he does not necessarily foresee posthumans to be non-biological beings. In two of his contributions Bostrom explains in more detail how he envisions posthuman life (Bostrom, 2008c, 2008b). In his book chapter 'Why I Want to be Posthuman When I Grow Up' (2008) Bostrom defines the posthuman as a being that has at least one posthuman capacity, which is a general central capacity that greatly exceeds the maximum attainable level by current humans. For example health span, cognition or emotion (Bostrom, 2008c). Even though Bostrom does not specify the 'being' that this posthuman is, the capacities that are allocated to the posthuman are merely human capacities. This implies that Bostrom's conceptualization of the posthuman could as opposed to Moravec's and Kurzweil's posthuman be either a nonbiological or a biologically unaltered being, albeit that this being needs to have capacities which extend beyond current human limitations. Even though Bostrom recognizes that our ability to imagine what is beyond imagination is quite difficult, he claims it is not completely impossible (Bostrom, 2008c).

In his article 'Letter from Utopia' (2008) Bostrom elaborates further on the posthuman, or rather he gives the floor to a posthuman who addresses us from Utopia, telling us the life in

Utopia is beyond imagination. Reading in between the lines one can see that the structure of the posthuman is quite humanlike in the sense that the posthuman celebrates birthdays, enjoys music, humor, spirituality, gossip, and has a body that resonates our current appearance, most likely of flesh (Bostrom, 2008b). Although the posthuman experiences these capacities in ways far beyond our current limitations and imagination. (Bostrom, 2008b). As he says "You still listen to music – music that is to Mozart what Mozart is to bad Muzak" (Bostrom, 2008c, p. 112). Also, the posthuman has control over his biochemical processes to overcome diseases and pain, he has removed the negative and weeded out the roots of suffering to be able to enjoy the full flourishing that is currently out of reach (Bostrom, 2008b).

The posthuman Moravec and Kurzweil envision entails a shift of the mind from the body to the machine and ultimately to the universe. This is not just a shift from the biological to the mechanical but since the mind carries meaning this shift will also give meaning to the mechanical and with that to the universe. According to Moravec this preludes the New Kingdom where the curse and the burden of human biological embodiment is lifted, which is a remarkable parallel with Christian eschatological thought (Geraci, 2010; Tirosh-Samuelson, 2012). Kurzweil, on the other hand, conceptualizes the singularity as the counterpart of Christian eschatology where meaningful life is cyber life and where bodies are purified of earthiness (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2012). When this happens machines will take over and solve human problems which according to Kurzweil is benefiting for humans because now humans can live longer and happier lives and even attain immortality as promised by Christianity and other traditional religions (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2012). Even though there are parallels between some movements within transhumanism and religious thought, there are also huge differences, for instance in Kurzweil's vision God is being replaced by evolution, instead of a transcendent God, humans transcend themselves and thereby become gods (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2012).

Whereas in Moravec and Kurzweil's conceptualization of the posthuman humans can transcend themselves and ultimately can become gods, Bostrom and more particular Pearce not so much envision posthumans to transcend themselves to become gods but rather envision a naturalization of heaven (Hauskeller, 2014; Pearce, 1995). Not humans move upwards to heaven, but rather humans create the conditions for heaven to be realized on Earth. According to Pearce this will happen in the coming thousand years when the body, the biological carrier of life and more importantly of suffering will be eradicated completely. The world will then be free of pain and full of an all-pervasive happiness.

The difference between the concepts of respectively Moravec and Kurzweil versus Bostrom and Pearce can be traced back to the two of the oldest Christian heresies, Pelagianism and Arianism. Both Pelagius and Arius argued that humanity could achieve godhood, meaning that humanity could recover from the Fall. However they differ in what this state of godhood would look like. Pelagius imagined a heaven on Earth which is mirrored in Pearce's account of the

naturalization of heaven. Arius on the other hand imagined earth in heaven which is mirrored in both Moravec's and Kurzweil's accounts (Fuller et al., 2017).

2.2.5. Bioconservative concerns

Not everyone interprets the transhumanist future as promising. Those who are negative about the outlook fostered by transhumanists are often referred to as 'bio-luddites' or 'bioconservatives' (Carbonell, 2014; Coenen, 2007; Hughes, 2004). These bioconservatives share with the transhumanists their appreciation for humanist values, but concerning human enhancements they defend a diametrically opposed position. They argue that the enhancement technologies that are supposed to take humanity beyond itself in order to allow us to become fully what we are now only in hope and potential (Bostrom, 2008b), will corrupt our very human essence.

Francis Fukuyama defines this human essence as factor X, which should be understood as a kind of human dignity (Miah, 2008a). The introduction of posthumans might cause the unaltered humans to become redundant and with that lose their human dignity (Bostrom, 2008a; Fukuyama, 2002). Although as Bostrom points out it is only of rather recent date that minority groups have gained appropriate moral recognition which means that human dignity is rather a concept that an a priori given and therefore similar structures can be made for unenhanced humans as well (Bostrom, 2008a). Fukuyama also warns for a commercialization of life which would not only make life less valuable but also cause a division in society between the haves and the have nots. Such commercialization, Fukuyama argues, is the first step in the corruption of Factor X (Miah, 2008a).

Other notable critics of transhumanism besides Fukuyama are Leon Kass and Michael Sandel, all of which served on the President's Council on Bio-Ethics (PCBE) during the Bush junior presidency (Coenen, 2007). In one of their reports the PCBE refers to a report that promotes transhumanist ideas as an exemplar of a futurist vision that resembles the world as described in Huxley's dystopian novel *Brave New World,* where technological advanced beings live empty, flat and deprived lives (PCBE, 2003, p. 7). While they dismiss the aim to take control over evolution as a greatly exaggerated prophecy of a new eugenics (PCBE, 2003, pp. 31–32).

So far in this chapter the transhumanist conceptualization of the posthuman has been portrayed, by elaborating on four themes that are central to transhumanist thought. These are the humanist foundation of transhumanism, the aim to gain control over the future of humanity, the role of technology and the promising outlook of the transhumanist posthuman. The above discussion also brings to light some interesting insights. First of all I showed that there are several understandings of the posthuman, however this does not mean that transhumanists reject conceptualizations that do not concur with their own ideas, for example Bostrom does not explicitly oppose the possibility of the singularity. Also Bostrom himself presents different views on posthumanity. In one discussion he argues that an intermediary transhuman phase brings humanity to posthumanity (Bostrom, 2005b) and elsewhere

Bostrom defines the posthuman as a being that has at least one posthuman capacity, which is a general central capacity that greatly exceeds the maximum attainable level by current humans (Bostrom, 2008c). It seems here that he leaves out the intermediate transhuman phase altogether and makes it possible for humans to leap into the posthuman stage at once.

2.3. Posthumanism

Whereas Fuller defined transhumanism as a movement that aims to intensify these properties that separates the human from other natural beings, he has defined posthumanism as a movement that criticizes humanist anthropocentrism (Fuller et al., 2017). Fuller further states that his exemplar case of a posthumanist is Peter Singer (Fuller, 2014). Singer, an Australian philosopher criticized humanism for its speciesism, favoring one's own species over other species, and called for animal ethics (Singer, 2004). Which shows that Fuller's distinction is very much based on the position of the human in relation to other natural beings in both concepts.

In Fuller's definition of transhumanism and posthumanism, the concepts are mutually exclusive, either one wants to maintain or even intensify humanism or one rejects humanism. Posthumanists share with transhumanists the idea that technology is the main driver that will change the way we understand the human being. However, whereas the latter focuses on a posthuman life full of unimaginable pleasures the former is concerned with blurring the boundaries between humans, animals and machines. Of course there are also differences between the positions of various posthumanist thinkers but themes that are often held in common are the decentering of the 'human' and the rejection of clear-cut boundaries, amongst others, the human animal distinction. Therefore, in order to explain posthumanism further I will elaborate on these two themes

2.3.1. Decentering the human

Posthumanism is a philosophical critique of the Enlightenment project and more particular of humanism (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014). The horrors of the 20th century, two world wars, the atomic bombs, the Holocaust and the ecological crisis have given rise to a thorough rethinking of modernist and humanist assumptions. These assumptions include the idea that Man is the measure of all things, that he has some unique essence and is equipped with reason and therefore is a superior species (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014).

Foucault attacked humanism when he proclaimed the "death of Man" (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014) by which he referred to the idea of a human centered world view where Man as a self-contained, rational agent has inalienable human and political rights. Man, according to Foucault is no more than just a creation of a set of historical contingencies, the consequence of accidental power relations, an illusion of discourse. Discourse being a self-contained system of thoughts, beliefs, social and political practices in given periods, governed by internally accepted regulations and procedures based on power relations (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014). Humanism then is no more than just a discourse that one day will pass away "Like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea" (Foucault as cited in Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014 p.51).

Rosi Braidotti, author of *The Posthuman* (2013) argues that the posthuman turn is triggered by the convergence of anti-humanism and anti-anthropocentrism (Braidotti, 2016). Whereby the former is a critique of the humanist ideal of Man as the measure of all things and the latter is directed as a critique of species hierarchy and to promote ecological justice (Braidotti, 2013a). However, Braidotti also points out that theorizing the posthuman forces to go beyond anti-humanism (Herbrechter, 2013) which is why it is also called post-humanism (Ferrando, 2013a).

2.3.2. Blurring boundaries

The rejection of Enlightenment ideals not only concerns the humanist image of Man but also involves the recognition that we have never been as human as humanism has claimed. The idea of one humanity based on universal values and an essential human nature has in reality always excluded some humans that did not fit the universalist ideal, which is why it is impossible to speak in one unified voice about any category e.g. gender, because there are always gradations within such categories (Braidotti, 2016).

Some posthumanists point out that anti-humanism is different from posthumanism, because whereas anti-humanism fully acknowledges Foucault's proclaimed death of Man, posthumanism does not rely on modernist dualism as dead and alive (Ferrando, 2014, 2012). On the other hand, a major similarity between anti-humanism and posthumanism is that in both concepts the deconstruction of the human takes a prominent place (Ferrando, 2013a). Deconstruction as put forward by Jacques Derrida is a mode of reading texts in such a way that it exposes the text's logic against itself by showing how the logic of language can differ per context. Ferrando argues that considering this deconstruction of humanism, posthumanism is more in line with Derrida's mode of deconstruction than with Foucault's death of Man (Ferrando, 2013a).

The contributions of Foucault and Derrida have inspired feminist theorists to enact the posthuman turn (Ferrando, 2013a). Prominent figures in this field are (Braidotti, 2013b; Ferrando, 2014; Graham, 2002; Halberstam & Livingstone, 1995; Haraway, 1985; Hayles, 1999). influenced by feminist theory, post-colonial studies race theorist and others (Herbrechter, 2013) these posthumanists critique the repressive implications of humanism for those who do not fit the specific typical human as described in the Western tradition. They call for recognition for those who had formerly been left out, e.g. women, minority groups and animals (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014). This critique is not meant as merely critique but to point out that the Western tradition mostly has been dualistic, overcoming these dualisms is what is called upon by posthumanists (Ferrando, 2014, 2012).

Halberstam and Livingstone were first to write on this type of posthumanism, they argue in their book *Posthuman bodies* (1995) that there is no such thing as a human essence or some common form of human dignity. Also they claim that the posthuman does not call for the annihilation of humans, neither is it an evolution or devolution but rather it is a call for a new conceptualization of what it means to be human (Miah, 2008a).

Others say that we should not only overcome humanism but also that we should aim to go beyond humanity in its current form. An influential proponent of this idea is Ihab Hassan, who called for the need to abandon humanism and humanity and adopt posthumanism (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014). Hassan, in turn, inspired Katherine Hayles, a feminist and cultural posthumanist to write one of the most influential books on posthumanism, called; *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). In her book she discusses the translation of the body into information through digital technologies. Hayles wrote her book in the same period when Moravec wrote on mind uploading and virtual life, not only they shared an associated topic but also Hayles refers to Moravec, for instance when she shows how the digitalization of social relations through social media contribute to this transformation (Miah, 2008a). However, she also attacks Moravec's ideas when she points out that all that he wants is to repress the Cartesian mind-body dualism through mind uploading (Herbrechter, 2013)

Like Moravec, Hayles also discusses the abandonment of the body, she argues that patterns of information are more essential to the posthuman state of being that any other material form is. Biological human embodiment is an accident of history rather than a condition for life, the body is merely a prosthesis (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014). Also, there is no such thing as a material soul or consciousness. Hayles' posthuman is characterized by blurred boundaries, there are no absolute demarcations or essential differences between bodily existence and computer simulation, or between cybernetic mechanisms and biological organisms (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014).

The blurring of the boundaries between humans and machines and humans and animals in Hayles posthumanism originate in Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985). The cyborg is a hybrid, it is a reconfiguration of human embodiment which blurs the boundary between nature and culture, organic and inorganic and human and animal (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014). Though Haraway intended her manifesto as a feminist project to question gender roles in society, it is often taken as an utopian dream of a post-gendered world where being a cyborg is preferable to being a goddess (Miah, 2008a). For techno-utopians such cyborgization is not just a liberating vision from the oppression of traditional hierarchies but rather a well-developed vision of human obsolescence (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2014). However, Haraway herself has expressed her discomfort with this interpretation of her work, she asserts that her work should be read as an on the ground working feminist project (Hauskeller, 2014; Miah, 2008a). She even says that the ongoing technification of the lifeworld is something of a nightmare. In a similar fashion Hayles speaks of a nightmare, when she discusses the idea of a downloaded consciousness. She professes that her dream is

"a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being" (Hayles, 1999, p. 5)

According to Michael Hauskeller, at the core of posthumanism is, similar to transhumanism a liberationist ideal. Whereas for transhumanists this liberation refers to the limited human capacities, for posthumanists the liberationist ideal refers to a redistribution of difference and identity, which is ultimately a redistribution of power (Hauskeller, 2014). Haraway, and those who follow her footsteps, argue to see this confusion of boundaries, as technology forces upon us, as opportunities rather than threats. Also she argues we should suppress the all too human desire for clear demarcations, which would require the appreciation of disorder and illogic and a rejection of conceptualizations like health and stability (Hauskeller, 2014). Braidotti believes in line with Haraway's embracing of the cyborg that posthuman can be used as liberating force and to enact this force humans must think beyond their traditional humanist limitations and embrace the risk of becoming other than human (Herbrechter, 2013). The posthuman is just as the human a construct and not a real physical construct that is to replace the human at some point in the future, rather it is a new way of looking at things (Hayles, 1999).

A more radical version of anti-humanism, one that does aim to overcome the human is put forward by Nietzsche. Nietzsche has contempt for all core humanist values, he argues that the idea that all humans are equal and therefore have equal rights, values and duties is founded on the belief that humans share a common essence and therefore a common value system. According to Nietzsche, humans do not share a common essence and hence they should not strive for similar worldviews and value systems but attempt to develop different forms of life by continuously challenging the status quo (Aydin, 2017). However, Nietzsche argues that this is not the case, instead the humanist ideal of man as the measure of all things has imprisoned the modern individual in self-glorification and self-deification of his present state, which render other forms of life impossible. This is why Nietzsche promotes the Übermensch in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 1883). The Übermensch stands as opposed to the human, whereas the human believes he is part of an common value system the Übermensch stands in solitude challenging the status quo in order to develop different forms of live and to become sovereign beings (Aydin, 2017). While Nietzsche's critique on humanism is rather similar to the posthuman critique, Nietzsche should not necessarily be seen as an adherent of posthumanism because he opposes against any common value system.

2.4. Conclusion

Central in this chapter is the aim to elaborate on transhumanism and posthumanism as defined by Fuller. I have elaborated on transhumanism by discussing four topics that are central to this particular version of posthumanism. These topics are the humanist foundation of humanist posthumanism, the aim to take control, the role of technology and the promising outlooks it offers. In discussing the first topic I showed that humanist values such as rational thinking, freedom, science and the belief in progress that are the cornerstones of transhumanism. In line with humanism, transhumanists claim that the human species is set apart from other species.

Transhumanists aim to overcome human limitations because it is through overcoming these limitations that the posthuman is realized. According to Stock humans want to gain control over evolution by virtue of being human. In other words being human is to be struggling for control over human evolution and the future of humanity which entails that succeeding in taking control is becoming posthuman.

In gaining control over the future of humanity transhumanists foresee a crucial role for technology. Proponents of this idea claim that technology is the means that will take us humans into the realm of the posthuman. Transhumanists encourage humans to apply enhancement technologies in order to realize the posthuman. Often, such encouragements are accompanied with compelling outlooks of posthuman life. Moravec speaks of posthuman cyberminds that will set out for the stars and spread throughout the galaxy to occupy outer space until one day in the far future the whole universe is turned in an "extended thinking thing" these 'cosmic' minds are omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent.

In my discussion of posthumanism I have elaborated on its critique on humanism and its goal to blur boundaries. Posthumanism critiques the Enlightenment project and more particular humanism for the idea that Man is the measure of all things, that he has some unique essence and is equipped with reason and therefore is a superior species. The blurring of the boundaries between humans and machines and humans and animals in originate in Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) she explained that the cyborg is a hybrid, a reconfiguration of human embodiment which blurs the boundary between nature and culture, organic and inorganic and human and animal.

It appears after all that both posthumanism and transhumanism do not necessarily wish to go beyond the human as such. Posthumanism does not aim to replace the human being, rather they critique the humanist ideal of Man as the measure of all things and promote an alternative ideal. Transhumanists aim for a posthuman that has powers and possibilities beyond our current imagination but at the same time reflect and share our goals and values (Aydin, 2017). In some sense what they want is some sort of an ideal society where (post)human life has evolved into the ideal. For the posthumanists this is when there are no clear boundaries and for the transhumanists this is when humans experience unimaginable pleasures.

If one considers being cyborg and being gods as two distinct utopias, the difference between transhumanists and posthumanists is that whereas the latter would rather be a cyborg than goddesses or gods, the former wants to be both, but if they had to choose they would much rather be gods (Hauskeller, 2014). According to Hauskeller at the core of posthumanism is a liberationist ideal, a redistribution of difference and identity which is ultimately a redistribution of power and the blurred boundaries of the cyborg can help the realization of this redistribution. The transhumanists on the other hand are not interested in a redistribution of power, but rather as Hayles points out they have fantasies of unlimited power and disembodies immortality (Hayles, 1999). And to realize their ideal of unlimited power the cyborg is a means and not the goal, their ultimate goal is to be like the gods.

While Moravec and Kurzweil mirror Christian eschatological thought and envision humans to transcend themselves to ultimately become gods, Bostrom and Pearce aim to naturalize heaven meaning that humans must create heaven on earth which will allow them to be gods. Posthumanists, on the other hand, aim to blur boundaries and in that sense they wish to be cyborgs rather than gods.

In this chapter different understandings of the posthuman have been distinguished in transhumanist and posthumanist conceptualizations following the distinction as defined by Fuller. Going back to the question whether the posthuman is a goal that can be realized, it is explained how the term posthuman should be understood from both a transhumanist and a posthumanist perspective. In the following chapter Plessner's philosophical anthropology will be introduced after which the law of the utopian standpoint will be elaborated on.

3. Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology

> "[..][man] lebt un erlebt nicht nur, sondern er erlebt sein Erleben" (man not only lives and experiences life, but also he experiences his experiences)
>
> (Plessner, 1957, p. 292)

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter both trans- and posthumanist conceptualizations have been elaborated on, which has provided clarity on how the term posthuman is understood in this thesis. In the first part of this chapter Plessner's philosophical anthropological framework will be introduced. Subsequently Plessner's law of the utopian standpoint will be explained. In order to do so I discuss not only the Utopian standpoint of Plessner, but since its core theme, the eccentric positionality, is a quite difficult concept to grasp I will also discuss some of the underlying principles.

In this chapter I made use of Plessner's original work *"Die Stufen Des Organischen und der Mensch"* (1957) and a preliminary translation by Scott Davis, which is currently the only English translation available. Also I used discussions of Plessner's work by Marjorie Grene (1974), Jos de Mul (2003, 2014b; 2015) and Philip Honenberger (2015). In the last part of this chapter I will elaborate further on Plessner's utopian standpoint and discuss its relation with utopia as discussed in the previous chapter in order to show that Plessner's understanding is different from the ones discussed in the previous chapter.

3.2. Plessner and Descartes

Most authors who discuss Plessner start with the claim that Plessner aims to overcome the Cartesian Distinction between inside and outside, as is very common in contemporary writings in philosophy. Often such accounts differ in the way they proceed from this first step. While some immediately jump to the double aspectivity (Phillip Honenberger, 2015), or eccentric positionality (de Mul et al., 2015; Kockelkoren, 2006) Marjorie Grene, a philosopher of biology follows the consequences of the Cartesian dualism in the philosophy of biology (1974). Doing so, she largely neglects the impact of Plessner's work for the field of philosophical anthropology. Nevertheless, Grene's work elaborates on the concept of positionality from its very basis. Therefore, this will prove to be insightful. However, other approaches to Plessner are necessary as well. For instance, more philosophical approaches can put Plessner into a bigger context of philosophers like Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger (de Mul et al., 2015; Kockelkoren, 2006). My approach here is first to display Plessner's understanding of human finitude, which gives rise to his notion of eccentric positionality. Next, the concept of positionality is highlighted from Grene's philosophical perspective and subsequently when

arriving on the notion of eccentricity I will elaborate on the consequences of this notion for the human species.

The concept of human finitude is important in understanding the importance of the concept of eccentric positionality (de Mul, 2014b). Finitude in medieval thinking was understood as that what is created, something which has no ground in itself, as the opposing pole of transcendence, that which is caused by itself (causa sui), or God. In secularized modernity the concept of finitude has been redefined as that which is limited in space and time (de Mul, 2014b). It is here that the paths of Heidegger and Plessner part. Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927) focused on finitude in time, which points to the mortality of the human being. Finitude in Heidegger's framework is defined as being unto death (hence the famous phrase 'Sein sum Tode'). Plessner on the other hand did not focus on finitude in time but instead focused on finitude in space. Finitude in this spatial approach is then defined as positionality and human life as eccentric positionality on which I will elaborate later (de Mul et al., 2015, p. 15). Heidegger's focus on being in time results in an approach that has become detached of the body, which shows affinity with the idealistic tradition. Plessner on the other hand emphasizes the spatial dimension and hence assigns an important role to the body. For Plessner life is necessarily corporeal, which shows affinity to the materialistic tradition (de Mul et al., 2015, p. 15).

Descartes' approach also shows affinity to a materialist framework. the Cartesian dualism holds that there is a strong distinction between the inside and outside of living things. Plants and animals are for Descartes mere machines with only an outside, while in the case of the human being in some mysterious way a soul has been added on the inside (Grene, 1974, p. 321). Plessner questions this Cartesian alternative, starting with an analysis of how we humans perceive things. Descartes argues that one cannot be sure of the perception of the body, as an example Descartes discusses his well-known piece of wax example. When heated none of the physical characteristics of the piece of wax has remained the way it was. Therefore, Descartes argues wax can only be perceived by the human mind (Descartes, 1641). He shows this with the help of a second example. What does it mean, he argues, that when looking on the street through the window one claims to see humans, while in fact one only sees hats and coats which may also cover automatic machines. He concludes therefore that it is only by inference that one judges these hats and coats to be humans (Descartes, 1641).

Plessner is not that skeptical, rather he tries to figure out how to differentiate between the living and the lifeless. While Descartes focusses on the problematic nature of perception in itself, Plessner takes perception for granted and focusses on how one perceives their environment. He argues that there is a difference in how one perceives inanimate objects and animate objects. Even though one can only perceive part of an object, inanimate objects allow for a total grasp through the multiplicity of aspects by several senses. In the case of animate objects this is different. Animate objects, e.g. a cat is present in a different way, it does not allow for a total grasp as the accumulated result of a number of perceptions from different

positions and through several senses. The cat confronts one in a way that an inanimate object does not.

The difference here is similar to Merleau-Ponty's distinction between lived, bodily spatiality and objective spatiality. Whereas an inanimate object simply fills space an animate object takes its place (Grene, 1974). However Plessner's concept is not only concerning spatiality but extends beyond that, as Grene puts it, "It is a question of the whole way in which an organism 'takes its place' in an environment – arises in it, is dependent on it, yet opposes itself to it." (Grene, 1974, p. 323). This is what Plessner has coined positionality. Positionality in this sense is not only a question of shape, but also a question of boundary. Not boundary in a physical sense but rather it is the way an object bounds itself (de Mul et al., 2015; Grene, 1974), or in Plessner's terms it is not a question of 'Die Grenze' but rather of 'Begrenzung' (Plessner, 1957, p. 103). Positionality then is about the nature of the boundary between an animate object and its environment. According to Plessner a body has one of two relations to this boundary, or the boundary signals the demarcation of the body and its environment, or the boundary is part of the self, part of the body. Not a virtual in-between of the body and its environment but a boundary that sets the body over and against the environment and over and against the body itself to which it belongs. The first type of boundary is characteristic of inanimate objects like pebbles. Animate objects, on the contrary have boundaries that belong to their bodies. But at the same time the body is set over and against the body itself, a relation of itself, the body, to itself, the boundary.

Here it is that Plessner point to the failure of Cartesian dualism, whereas Descartes argued in favor of an outside, the body, and an inside, the soul or the mind, Plessner argues that the body is related to its environment through the boundary, the body is related to its boundary and the boundary is simultaneously related to its environment and to the body. This relational scheme is not divisible in an inside and an outside. The relation of the body to its environment and to itself is coined by Plessner 'Die Doppelaspektivität' (Plessner, 1957, p. 100) or in English double aspectivity (de Mul, 2014b; P. Honenberger, 2016).

Positionality, Plessner argues, entails process (Plessner, 1957, p. 155). The way a body bounds itself is then only to be realized in the process. In other words, the body bounds itself through relating to its boundary which is a continuing process. This means that the relation of the boundary of the body, to the body and to the environment, the double aspect of the body, is also a continuing process whereby the several relations influence each other. This entails that the double aspect of the body is only to be realized in change. But it is more complicated, not only is the living body a constant becoming, it also has this constant becoming as a property. In other words, the body is subjected to a process of change and at the same time it is the end-product to which the process is geared.

3.3. Open and closed positionality

Through positionality living objects have a relation to their environment and to themselves. There are certain essential variants of organization in the pattern of positionality which are the basis for differences between plants, animals and humans.

Plants have an open organization, meaning that their relation to the environment is direct, not mediated (Procee, 1991). Plants have a boundary but there is nothing like a core on either side of this boundary (de Mul, 2014b). Animals, in contrast have a closed form of organization, and therefore their relation with the environment is indirect. Their relation is mediated by their center. A mediated relation means that the relation is shaped by this relation. An example to elucidate this is when someone is presbyopic, if this person wears glasses he or she can see clear. In this case the glasses shape the way the environment is perceived, in other words the glasses mediate their visual relationship with the world.

Positionality is a boundary structure in such a way that the body has the body and is the body. In the case of plants this principle is less recognizable due to the open form of organization (Grene, 1974). For animals, thanks to their closed organization this is more explicit. A body in a closed organization becomes a lived body (*Leib*) which belongs to a subject distinct from the body, which nevertheless it is (Grene, 1974). In the earlier discussion where organization was shown to follow logically from positionality, it has also been argued that the relation between the core and the periphery represents the relation between the subject as body and the subject having the body. In animal life this is explicated in the meditative role of the central nervous system in higher animals and the sensory system in lower animals (Procee, 1991, p. 91). Though this is not to say that either the central nervous system or the sensory system *is* the subject or *is* the core. Because, as mentioned in an earlier paragraph this positional structural characteristic of living beings is not a spatial characteristic but it transcends this spatial dimension (Grene, 1974, p. 331). Rather the central nervous system or its equivalent of lower animals represents the center, the subject. The representational center mediates the relation between the body as body and its external environment, this is what Grene calls "animal organization" (Grene, 1974, p. 337). However, for the animals themselves this relation appears to be direct, because the animal itself is at the center of this mediation (Procee, 1991) and hence is not aware of the mediation. In other words, through the animal organization the animal becomes a me, it achieves selfhood. Plessner stresses that animals achieve selfhood and not self-awareness, animals become a me not an I, because they do not have a self (Davis, 2009, p. 225; Plessner, 1957, p. 288). An animal has a body and is a self but it does not have a self (Grene, 1974). The animal is not aware of itself being an individual and therefore it does not have the property of selfhood. The center of the animal is full confiscated by the here and now. In the here and now the animal acts as an agent, it confronts the world by not only taking a place but by taking a stand as lived body.

The degree to which the body scheme of animals is developed is used by Plessner as an indicator to distinguish higher and lower animals, a more developed body scheme means a

higher awareness of the body, which is a property of a higher animal. Higher awareness of the body means to have a stronger relation of having the body opposed to the subject (Grene, 1974). According to Plessner higher animals are capable of insight of some sort, but only insofar as it concerns concrete situations. The difference with humans is that humans do not only confront the world through their center, humans have a way of distancing themselves from their world in a radical way, of which animals are incapable.

Grene stresses the importance of Plessner's account of animal existence. No other philosophical tradition, she claims, has been able to answer the question of animal intelligence in a similar fashion as Plessner (Grene, 1974). Some might object that the distinction between plants and animals is not as strict as Plessner seems to claim. Plessner would say that indeed this might not be the case empirically, however the question here is not empirical but rather two ideal types to which plants and animals are allocated based on affinity (Grene, 1974, p. 337). The same goes for the objection that some animals do possess some form of self-awareness, again it is about idealness to type.

3.4. Eccentric positionality

The animal takes the position of frontality, demarcated from the environment and at the same time related to it. In this way the animal lives its life only as the body through the unity of the senses. Animal life is fully absorbed in the here and now, experiencing life out of and into their center, a centrist perspective. For humans, this is similar, humans also are a living body positioned in this centrist position from which they confront their world. However, humans have a specific relation to their center, they experience the relation with the absolute 'here-now' (reality as it is disclosed in front of our eyes), the total convergence of man's environment and his own life as against his positional center. Therefore he is aware of his center and it is this awareness that allows him to reflect upon it (Plessner, 1957, p. 291). This allows them to step out of this center and move beyond their centrist perspective (de Mul, 2003, 2014b).

The human being experiences the immediate beginning of his actions, the impulsiveness of his movements, the radical prejudice of his living being which stands in between each of his actions, the choice and feeling of himself being lost in the ecstasy of affection and instinct. The human being is free in himself, he knows himself to be free, and yet it is man's fate to be exiled in a limited existence which limits him and which he has to struggle with (Plessner, 1957, p. 291). Here Plessner stresses that the human being is aware of his centrist perspective, the human is able to move beyond his centrist perspective by reflecting upon his own experience or as Plessner puts it "[..][man] lebt un erlebt nicht nur, sondern er erlebt sein Erleben" (Plessner, 1957, p. 292), which translates as; man not only lives and experiences life, but also he experiences his experiences. The human being is the spectator of his own actions. Even though the human being is able to reflect on his experience and move beyond his centrist

perspective he is not able to let go of this centrists perspective. This is what Plessner refers to when he says that the human being must struggle with the freedom that inhibits him. While Animal live has a centric positionality human life then can be described as having an '*eccentric*' positionality, although without the capability to break through this centrist perspective (Plessner, 1957, p. 292).

3.5. Three worlds

The eccentric positionality in the human being is constituted by a triple relationship. The human is body (like the plant), is in its body (like the animal) and outside the body, from which perspective it is both (de Mul et al., 2015). As a result of these three relationships of the body the human being lives in three worlds, an outer world (*Aussenwelt*) an inner world (*Innenwelt*) and the shared world of culture (*Mitwelt*). Each of these tree worlds appear to the human being from an inner and an outer perspective at the same time because of the double aspectivity as discussed in a previous paragraph.

Our body (as part of the outer world) is both body (Körper) – that is to say, a thing among things that takes up a specific place in an objective space-time continuum – and a lived body (Leib) that functions as the centre of our perception and actions. In the inner world (Innenwelt) the double aspectivity is understood with the concepts of 'Seele'-'Erlebnis' (de Mul, 2014b; Procee, 1991), which the human again is both. 'Seele' is translated by Davis (2009, p, 231) as mentality while de Mul (2014, p, 17) uses soul. Both de Mul (2014, p, 17) and Procee (1991, p, 95), argue 'Seele' is to be understood as the source of the psychological life and therefore I opt to use soul here. The double aspect concepts of the inner world are then soul and lived experience, the latter being the place where the psychic processes take place. Here the human being is the plaything of these processes.

The inner world is made possible through the eccentric positionality of the human being. The ability to reflect on one self's experiences and actions create an inner world as the reality that the self perceives. The entire spectrum of being is possible in the inner world, ranging from I to something. This entails that the human being is not himself, not even in his inner world. Which is the case in neoKantianism, where it is assumed that the psychic experience of thinking, and lived experience coincide (Davis, 2009, p. 232). This would only be true if humans were centrally positioned and not, as Plessner argues possess eccentric positionality. For humans, their eccentricity makes that their absorption in the here-now does not fall in the point of their existence. Even in thinking, feeling and volition humans stand outside themselves, or in Plessner's words, "Sorgar im Vollzug des Gedankens, des Gefühls, des Willens steht der Mensch außerhalb seiner selbst" (Plessner, 1957, p. 298). The doubt whether one is genuinely oneself cannot be cleared by testimony of inner evidence. The seed of the double aspectivity in the eccentricity of the self causes this doubt. The human cannot be sure whether it is himself who is laughing or crying or whether it is their counter image, or even their opposing pole (Davis, 2009, p. 233; Plessner, 1957, p. 298).

In the cultural world (Mitwelt) humans are both an 'Ich' and a 'Wir', I and we. The 'Wir' stresses that the human existence, in a personal sense like my existence, is carried and given shape by others, the social environment (Procee, 1991). The I on the other hand is the person who actively shapes the cultural world. Taken together this shows how people shape culture and how culture shapes people. Humans then are both the producers and the products of their culture (Procee, 1991). Like the inner world, the cultural world is a product of eccentricity. The cultural world is guaranteed by eccentricity, it is the sphere of other humans which also have a position similar to ones own (Davis, 2009, p. 235). Because the cultural world is guaranteed by eccentricity it is carried through the person, but at the same time the cultural world carries the person. Plessner tries to elucidate this; "Zwischen mir und mir, mir und ihm liegt die Sphäre dieser Welt des Geistes." (Plessner, 1957, p. 303) meaning that between me and me, and between me and him there is the world of culture. The idea that the cultural world also exists between me and me again stresses that humans do not coincide with themselves.

3.6. Three anthropological laws:

3.6.1. I Natural artificiality

One of the main questions in human life is how one should live, or what one should do, these are typical examples of the brokenness of the human being (de Mul, 2014b; Procee, 1991). It is the essence of his eccentric positionality. There have been times that questions like these seemed to be answered by strong bonds to country, family, house or ancestry. However, even then humans did not find peace. The idea of paradise, the promise of a golden age with which every human generation lives, but never is realized, is the evidence of what humanity is lacking. And he knows he is lacking, which is why humans stand over and against to animals (Davis, 2009, p. 241). Human beings as eccentric organized beings are constitutive homeless, in Plessner's words "Konstitutiv Heimatlos" (Plessner, 1957, p. 310). For this reason, humans have to find a ground for themselves, they must make themselves what they already are. Not to live life being absorbed in the center as animals are, but to stand in this center knowing one's position and live outwards from it. In Plessner's philosophy, this brokenness of humans is explained with the notion of eccentricity, however by acknowledging that, the brokenness is not cured, it cannot be cured. The knowledge of this brokenness, the eccentricity of mankind, causes pain about the unreachable naturalness of other living beings whose instinctiveness has been exchanged for human freedom and foresight. Animals live without being aware of themselves, without being aware of their nakedness and yet the heavenly father nourishes them. humans, on the other hand, see their nakedness and are ashamed by it and therefore live life via a bypass of artificialities (Davis, 2009, pp. 241–242; Plessner, 1957, p. 310).

Humans lead the life they live to make what they are, because they are only when they accomplish, needing a complement of an unnatural unmatched kind. That is why they are

artificial by nature on the grounds of their form of existence as eccentric creatures not in balance, standing placeless, timeless, in nothingness, constitutive homeless. They must become something and create the balance, and they create it only with the help of extra natural things which originate from their creations. Which only succeeds when the results of these creative makings receive a proper weight of their own (Davis, 2009, p. 246).

Eccentricity and the need for complements are for Plessner two sides of the same coin. Herein lies the ultimate ground for tools and that which the tool serves, culture. Culture is not merely a tool to survive or the domain of spiritual life, rather it is above all an attempt to create a balance which is not provided by nature (Davis, 2009, p. 247; Procee, 1992, p. 93). In other words, technology and culture are an ontic necessity for human existence (de Mul, 2014b, p. 18; Plessner, 1957, p. 321), meaning that the concrete attempt to create a balance is something humans necessarily do. However, such a created balance may hold for a while, but it never provides a definite solution. In practice this can be seen in the acts of creation and destruction of civilizations and cultural practices (Procee, 1992). In order to retain the balance and prevent losing it human beings are restless and occupied with ceaseless action, they lastingly strive for surpassment and eternal process. Absolutized, falsely, as self-advancement or progress (Davis, 2009, p. 249; Procee, 1992, pp. 93–94).

3.6.2. II The law of mediated immediacy

Whereas the first anthropological law emphasizes that humans are artificial by nature, and therefore need artificialities, the second anthropological law, the law of mediated immediacy is about the nature and meaning of those artificialities (Procee, 1992). The belief that the things humans associate with and use receive their being from the hand of the constructors is only half the truth. Just as important is the objects inner weight, its objectivity which discloses the aspect of technology that cannot be made but only discovered (Davis, 2009, p. 250; de Mul, 2014b, p. 20; Procee, 1992, p. 93). On the one hand mankind creates his world while at the same time the world is independent of him, because of its own weight. These objects or artificialities are an expression of humanities creative urge, their expressivity, and at the same time of the objects own immanent characteristics (Procee, 1992).

To understand where the idea of indirect-directness or mediated immediacy comes from, one should turn to the relation of humans with their environment. Eccentricity in the law of mediated immediacy is to be understood as a position possessed by humans, in this position it stands in an indirect-direct relation to everything else. A direct relation is when two objects are related without an intervening link, an indirect relation then is a relation whereby this intervening link is present. The combination of both these relations is the indirect-direct relation, this is the form of binding in which the intervening link is necessary in order to restore or ensure the directness of the binding. Indirect-directness or mediated immediacy is no

meaningless self-destroying contradiction, rather it is a contradiction which solves itself and remains meaningful even if analytic logic cannot follow it (Davis, 2009, p. 252)

Animals and humans have a closed form of organization, this means that the relation between the living body, being either animal or human, and its surrounding field, the outer world, is indirect. Because due to their closed organization, their boundary mediates their relations. As pointed out in our earlier discussion of the notion of the double aspectivity. While the relation of the animal or human to its surrounding field is indirect, it appears as direct. Because the mediation takes place through itself, therefore it cannot appear in any other way than as direct and unmediated, because the mediation is hidden from itself (Davis, 2009, p. 252). The animal stands in the point of mediation and hence to notice this it needs to step out and have a contemplative perspective on its own mediation process, without being able to become detached from it. This latter position is precisely the eccentric positionality as it is realized in humans. Humans form the point of mediation with their surrounding field, and they are posited in this field. On the one hand their relation to other things is indirect, but they live their life as direct. This shows that humans indeed have an indirect-direct, or a mediated immediate relation to their surrounding field.

3.6.3. III The utopian standpoint

Plessner points out that humans are constitutive homeless and hence have no place to stand, they are artificial by nature, and these artificialities bring their own weight with them. Nevertheless, humans still try to construct such a place to stand, in order to create a balance. This drive to cultivation follows from their eccentric positionality, it arouses needs that are only satisfied by the creation of artificial objects and structures. Plessner points out that humans satisfy such needs all the time. However, in that they satisfy such a need, the invisible human inside them has already stepped beyond it and with that destroyed the balance (Davis, 2009, p. 264; Plessner, 1957, p. 341). This idea of someone inside the human refers to the eccentric positionality. Once a goal is reached there is a part of the human that enjoys the accomplishment and there is a part that has already moved beyond this goal and has set itself new goals. This discord, caused by the eccentric positionality, is referred to with the invisible human inside oneself.

Humans are aware of this surpassement in accomplishment, which gives rise to the awareness of their own nothingness and related to it, the nothingness of the world. This deficit is being experienced in different ways in distinctive cultures, the same goes for the answer to it, the leap to transcendence, as can be seen in the course of history, i.e. the numerous different religions (Procee, 1992, p. 94). Being aware of this deficit humans search for the ground of the world, the necessary being which rests in itself, which Plessner refers to as the 'ultimate counter weight of the human imbalance', the ' Definitivum', 'the Absolute', a 'home(land)', the 'ultimate ground' or 'God' (Davis, 2009, p. 265). In the remaining part of this thesis I will

refer to the ultimate counterweight using the terms listed above, however with all these terms I refer to one and the same idea.

The eccentric position raises the need for an ultimate ground but at the same time doubts its aspirations to provide a lasting ground. Eccentricity on the one hand requires some sort of univocal fixing while on the other hand it always abolishes this fixed position. As a result humans do not know where they stand, the only way to be sure, Plessner argues, is to take the leap into faith (Plessner, 1957, p. 265). The thing that is characteristic of all religions is that it creates a "Definitivum" (Plessner, 1957, p. 342).

Eins bleibt für alle Religiosität charakteristisch: sie schafft ein Definitivum. Das, was dem Menschen Natur und Geist nicht geben können, das Letzte: so ist es —, will sie ihm geben. Letzte Bindung und Einordnung, den Ort seines Lebens und seines Todes, Geborgenheit, Versöhnung mit dem Schicksal, Deutung der Wirklichkeit, Heimat schenkt nur Religion. (Plessner, 1957, p. 342)

The ultimate counterweight of the human imbalance, in Plessner's account created by religion, is different from constructed balances using artificialities. Not only is the search for the Definitivum triggered by the awareness of the failure to construct a lasting ground for themselves, also the ultimate ground must provide what neither nature nor culture can provide. Which is that what humans ultimately want, the ultimate bond, order of things, the place of life and death, security, reconciliation of fate and understanding of reality, a homeland. What humans, according to Plessner, ultimately want is an understanding of the world in which all facets of live, as mentioned above, have their place. Which would provide an "Einheit der welt" (Plessner, 1957, p. 346), where the burden of human eccentricity is lifted and Plessner claims that only religion can create such a 'Definitivum'.

The eccentric position is a contradiction which is unsolvable. Through it the human is linked to an external world, a mutual world, and comprehends himself internally in the inner world, which together shape his reality. As posited eccentrically he stands there where he stands, and at the same time not there where he stands. In other words, he stands in the sphere of reality and at the same time outside it. He is posited in his body, and he stands beyond it, above it and forms from there the center of the surrounding world. From an eccentric position reality undergoes objectification and with that becomes separated of reality. Once having been made into something, it becomes a this, objectified in a different sphere of being. And with that a whole horizon of possibilities of what otherwise could have been has yawned open (Davis, 2009, p. 266; Plessner, 1957, p. 343). This is exactly what is going on because of the eccentric positionality, humans reflect on their actions and think of how the outcome could have been different if a different line of action would have been pursued.

There is an essential relation between human eccentricity and the understanding of God as the absolute, the being grounded in itself. For as long as one holds on to the idea of the

absolute, there is the world ground as well. Giving up on this idea means to give up on the world ground as well.

Die Exzentrizität seiner Lebensform, sein Stehen im Nirgendwo, sein utopischer Standort zwingt ihn, den Zweifel gegen die göttliche Existenz, gegen den Grund für diese Welt und damit gegen die Einheit der Welt zu richten (Plessner, 1957, p. 346)

The eccentric positionality of humans, which causes them to stand in nothingness, compels them to doubt the existence of God, or the absolute world ground. Indeed, the absolute lies over and against the human standpoint, the world ground is the ultimate counter weight to man's eccentricity. However, it remains an existential paradox because the eccentricity demands the detachment of this relation of complete balance, and with that a denial of the absolute world ground (Davis, 2009, p. 268; Plessner, 1957, p. 346). Therefore Plessner mistrusts the absolutist pretensions of religious systems. A world all, an absolute, he says can only be believed in.

Ein Weltall läßt sich nur glauben. Und solange er glaubt, geht der Mensch „immer nach Hause". Nur für den Glauben gibt es die „gute" kreishafte Unendlichkeit, die Rückkehr der Dinge aus ihrem absoluten Anderssein. Der Geist aber weist Mensch und Dinge von sich fort und über sich hinaus. Sein Zeichen ist die Gerade endloser Unendlichkeit. Sein Element ist die Zukunft. Er zerstört den Weltkreis und tut uns wie der Christus des Marcion die selige Fremde auf. (Plessner, 1957, p. 346)

And as long as one believes he goes back home, but those who stick to the mind [Der Geist] are send away from themselves, beyond themselves. Into an infinite infinity, into the future, it is a dissolution of the world ground or the absolute. Such a position is according to Plessner best resembled in the blessed strangers in Marcion's Christ.

However, this does not necessarily mean, as is the case with the artificial construction, that the ultimate ground is broken. Plessner points out that a world all can only be believed in and as longs as one believes one goes home, but those who stick to the mind do not return (Plessner, 1957, p. 346). This means that the eccentric positionality makes that humans doubt their beliefs, or one might lose his or her beliefs (stick to the mind), however this is not necessarily the case. Because as Plessner argued human life is a constant becoming, meaning that this choice to stick to the mind or not is not a once in a lifetime question but rather that it pops up time and again. Because since the eccentricity is never lifted, the doubt cannot lastingly be overcome, man's eccentricity causes the doubt to arise again which emphasizes that the human never truly comes home in this world.

Elaborating further on the difference between these two attempts at creating balances as discussed above brings us to the question why the latter is understood by Plessner as the utopian standpoint, and what the utopian standpoint is about. According to Plessner the human is a being which desires to find himself a home where his imbalance caused by his eccentricity is lifted. However, Plessner points out that the human being is by definition an

eccentric being and therefore the desire of humans to lift the eccentricity can never be fulfilled. Nevertheless, we cannot be other than wish for a homeland and in that sense, we cannot exist other than as utopian beings.

The manifestation of this existing as a utopian being is precisely what the utopian standpoint is about. We, humans envision futures where we live perfect happy lives even though we know we will never reach it. While Plessner leaves open the possibility for the existence of God and with that the possibility of the ultimate ground, he is skeptical of dogmatic or totalitarian ideologies such as religions, fascism and communism. Also, Plessner is critical of the possibility to coincide with oneself (find the ultimate ground) as present in social theory (i.e. Bloch's position as discussed later in this chapter). Also Plessner criticizes Marxist theory for the idea that the abolition of the human alienation could be definitive.

The reason that the attempt to find an 'Definitivum' or the ultimate ground is part of the utopian standpoint can be found in the idea that according to Plessner the 'Definitivum' cannot be realized, at least not in this world and not in this life. This also points towards a major difference between religions and social ideologies like communism. In religion, the homeland, the ultimate counterweight to the human imbalance is extraterrestrial, in the afterlife. For communism, this is ultimately an earthbound project of which history has shown that it failed to deliver. Any human attempt at realizing the ultimate ground necessarily results in a human construct that does not hold. It appears that any human attempt cannot get beyond the human constructed balance that does not hold, the realm of the ultimate ground is out of reach. This might be a reason why Plessner used religion as a context to illustrate his utopian standpoint, because religious afterlife is not realized through human doing but can only be realized through divine intervention. And, since it is on the other side of death, it can never be reduced to other attempts of humans to create a balance using artificialities since an attempt at its realization is not in our hands.

3.7. Utopia

Plessner's understanding of utopia follows from his claim that the eccentric positionality of the human being is the origin of his constitutive homelessness. At the same time, it is the reason that he is capable of thinking of different and better futures which cause him to search for a home where his imbalance is lifted. However, Plessner points out that the human being is by definition an eccentric being and therefore the desire of humans to lift the eccentricity can never be fulfilled. Nevertheless, we cannot be other than wish for a home and in that sense, we cannot exist other than as utopian beings. This position, an understanding of the human as an utopian being is shared by Ernst Bloch (1995 [1954]).

Bloch claims that human experience is marked by lack and longing which gives rise to a utopian impulse. This utopian impulse manifests itself in the tendency to long for and imagine alternative ways of being. According to Bloch, everything that reaches a transformed existence

can be considered as having a utopian aspect (Levitas, 2003b). The content of the utopian longing is in the attempt to realize a transformed existence. Utopia is then understood as "the expression of the desire for a better way of being or of living" (Levitas, 2010, p. 540). Humans always live beyond themselves in a quest for something better and in that sense humans are utopological beings (Levitas, 2003b). This universal need for transcendence is what Bloch has called *The Principle of Hope*, which refers to the utopian impulse that is an intrinsic part of what it means to be human (Levitas, 2003b).

It might seem that Plessner's understanding of the utopia is similar to Bloch's (Bloch, 1995 [1954]). Both Plessner and Bloch understand the utopian to be an intrinsic part of the human, which manifests itself in (utopian) dreams of a better life (Kellner, 2010; Levitas, 2003a). In Bloch's work this is expressed in the Principle of Hope, as I have elaborated on before. For Bloch, we humans exist as the possibility of becoming something fundamentally and irreducibly new, and venturing beyond what we are is what we do because of who we are (Gunn, 1987). Our possibilities are our utopias and the utopian function is intrinsic to human life. For Bloch these possible utopias range from fairy tales, myths, popular culture, literature, theater to all forms of art political and social utopias philosophy and religion, all of these he regards as manifestations of the Principle of Hope (Kellner, 2010).

Plessner on the other hand has a more demarcated idea of what he considers utopian in his utopian standpoint. Here Plessner's understanding of utopia deviates from Bloch and Levitas definition. Plessner points out that an utopian standpoint must concern what humans ultimately want; a finality, the ground of themselves, of the world or the Definitivum. All these things neither nature nor culture can provide. Ultimately what this Definitivum refers to is the ultimate bond, order, the place of life and death, security, reconciliation of fate and understanding of reality. In sum, a homeland, where our constitutive homelessness, and with that human eccentricity is lifted.

Plessner's claim that humans cannot exist other than as utopian beings, is based on the eccentric positionality. Because it is through the manifestation of the eccentric positionality that humans realize that the balances which they have constructed themselves do not hold. We have seen that the awareness of this failing gives rise to the awareness of the constitutive homelessness of the human being, and that this in turn gives rise to the utopian standpoint. The utopian standpoint is not further grounded by Plessner, rather it is an existential claim he makes. Existential claims as these cannot be proven, but we can try to highlight the idea underneath it. Plessner has pointed out, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, that humans do not develop towards some goal. He argued that being human is a continuous becoming. For Plessner thus humans constantly change. This idea of constant changes is crucial and while the utopian standpoint is an existential claim which cannot be proven, we can show that indeed things constantly change. For instance, think of how our body cells are continuously changing and with that how we constantly change ourselves. Taking this continuous change as given, the human desire to construct himself a home (a place to stand) is never to be

reached, because a place to stand entails no change and therefore is impossible. This is why Plessner claims that this desire for a home that comes with being human is an utopian desire, which he calls the utopian standpoint.

Bloch claims, building on Marxist thought, that humans already are on the course towards the utopia of the homeland (Gunn, 1987). For Bloch, the homeland is not as in More's *Utopia* located elsewhere in space, or as in Augustine's *The City of God* - or broader in Christian thought - placed in an other-worldly beyond. Bloch's homeland lies in the future towards which humans are always already aimed. The realization of this utopia, which lies ahead of us is the final goal of humanity. This final goal is to be understood as a future of non-alienated existence, where humans are no longer alienated from themselves, from others and from nature (and thus find a home) (Gunn, 1987). This specific part of Bloch, the idea that humans are on the course towards the homeland is a manifestation of what Plessner describes as the utopian standpoint. It is an attempt at finding the ultimate ground, of which Plessner has claimed that it is unattainable. This shows that while Bloch and Plessner do share the idea of the human as a utopian being their understanding of what this utopian impulse might lead to is very different.

3.8. Conclusion

Positionality plays a key role in Plessner's anthropology. He understands positionality as an aspect of the relation of an object with its environment. I showed how for animate objects the relation with their environment is indirect, meaning that the relation is mediated by their center. While this relationship is indirect it seems direct because the animal itself is at the center of the mediation, they live their lives from a frontal perspective. Humans not only live their live from a frontal perspective but also have a way of distancing themselves from this frontality. This distancing from the frontal perspective allows humans to step out of their center and move beyond this centrist perspective. Humans not only experience life but also experiences their experiences. This is what Plessner refers to as eccentric positionality.

Subsequently I showed how this eccentric positionality leads to the awareness of the brokenness of mankind and that according to Plessner this brokenness cannot be cured. Nevertheless, humans still try to construct a balance. This drive, Plessner argues, follows from the eccentric positionality, while such constructed balances might hold for a while they never provide a definite answer. The realization that these constructed balances do not lastingly hold results in the search for the ultimate counter weight of the human imbalance, which Plessner also calls the Definitivum, the ultimate ground or the being that rests in itself. This is what Plessner calls the utopian standpoint.

Also I have discussed Plessner's utopian standpoint in relation to Bloch's understanding of utopia. I showed how both Plessner and Bloch think that the utopian is an intrinsic part of the human but while for Bloch the utopian is a quite broad concept for Plessner the utopian must

address what human finally want, it must aim to provide the ultimate ground that abolishes the constitutive homelessness of the human being.

Plessner's claim that humans cannot exist other than as utopian beings, is based on the eccentric positionality. Because it is through the manifestation of the eccentric positionality that humans realize that the balances which they have constructed themselves do not hold. We have seen that the awareness of this failing gives rise to the awareness of the constitutive homelessness of the human being, and that this in turn gives rise to the utopian standpoint.

Bloch claims, building on Marxist thought, that humans already are on the course towards the utopia of the homeland (Gunn, 1987). For Bloch, the homeland lies in the future towards which humans are always already aimed. The realization of this utopia, which lies ahead of us is the final goal of humanity. This idea that humans are on the course towards the homeland is a manifestation of what Plessner describes as the utopian standpoint. It is an attempt at finding the ultimate ground, of which Plessner has claimed that it is unattainable.

Up until now we have discussed transhumanist and posthumanist conceptualizations of the posthuman and we have discussed Plessner's law of the utopian standpoint. With this work being done we can move on to the final chapter where the research question of this thesis will be answered.

4. The utopian standpoint and the Posthuman

"The inhuman is not bound to any specific era, but a possibility which is inherent to human life: the possibility to negate itself"

(Plessner cited in de Mul, 2014b, p. 20)

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapters the transhumanist and posthumanist conceptualizations of the posthuman and Plessner's law of the utopian standpoint have been discussed. Building on these discussions an answer at the research question can be formulated. In order to do so I will first argue that both the posthumanist and transhumanist conceptualizations of the posthuman, can indeed be understood as manifestations of the utopian standpoint as put forward by Plessner. Subsequently I will discuss in more detail the posthumanist and the transhumanist conceptualizations of the posthuman.

4.2. The posthuman and the utopian standpoint

An evaluation of the conceptualizations of the posthuman based on Plessner's utopian standpoint must consider this utopian standpoint as a starting point. In the previous chapter Plessner's philosophical anthropology has been elaborated on and subsequently his understanding of the utopian standpoint is discussed in detail. It has been pointed out that following Plessner's framework the human being is necessarily a utopian being. The utopian in the human reveals itself in the desire of humans to find themselves an ultimate ground on which to stand. This desire is an utopian desire since that what it is after, the ultimate ground or the homeland cannot be found.

Given the idea that the utopian standpoint for Plessner is the manifestation of the desire for the ultimate ground. These manifestations can be recognized by the requirements that are provided by Plessner. To be utopian in Plessner' s framework the specific manifestation of the utopian standpoint must function as an attempt at realizing the ultimate ground, that what humans ultimately want, which as we have seen in the previous chapter includes; the ultimate bond, order, the place of life and death, security, reconciliation of fate, understanding of reality and a homeland. This tells us that a utopia in line with Plessner's understanding must not just provide a homeland, but that this homeland must be a broad and an all-inclusive framework that provides an understanding of reality, one which does justice to all the items listed above. I pointed out in the previous chapter that this can be summarized as that utopia must present a comprehensive and cohesive idea of the meaning of life in all its facets.

In order to evaluate both the posthumanist and the transhumanist conceptualization of the posthuman, we must show how these conceptualizations can be understood as

manifestations of the utopian standpoint. First the posthumanist position will be discussed followed by the transhumanist position.

Posthumanism

In chapter two I have described the posthumanists as a movement that criticizes humanist anthropocentrism and aims to decenter the human. Posthumanists claim that humans have never been as human as humanism has claimed. The idea of one humanity based on universal values and an essential human nature has in reality always excluded some humans that did not fit the universalist ideal. Therefore posthumanists claim the human should be reconceptualized in order to bring about a more just and inclusive world. In such a reconceptualization there are no essential differences between humans and animals and humans and machines, these boundaries instead are blurred.

In my discussion of posthumanist conceptualizations of the posthuman I have mentioned Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) as an example. I pointed out that Haraway intended her manifesto as a liberating vision from the oppression of traditional hierarchies. The utopian sketch of a world where rigid boundaries between genders are not present is intended to question gender roles in society and not as a utopian dream of a postgendered world (Miah, 2008a). Haraway's cyborg must then be understood as a utopian perspective that aims to catalyze social change in order to promote inclusivity and justice.

In the previous chapter I pointed out that for both Bloch and Plessner the utopian is an intrinsic part of what it means to be human. Bloch argued that this manifests itself in a tendency to long for and imagine alternative ways of being, which he called the Principle of Hope. Such manifestations include myths, fairy tales, popular culture, literature, theater to all forms of art political and social utopias, philosophy and religion. The contributions of Haraway and also contributions by other posthumanists can be understood as manifestations of the Principle of Hope because it displays a longing for alternative ways of living and being.

Whereas the posthumanists conceptualization of the posthuman can be understood as manifestations of Bloch's principle of hope, it can also be linked to Plessner's framework, though in a somewhat different fashion. Previously I have elaborated on the concept of utopia as it is understood in Plessner's anthropological framework. I showed that for Plessner the utopian standpoint is revealed in an attempt at the realization of a homeland, an ultimate ground, any such attempt should according to Plessner provide an all-inclusive understanding of reality. Posthumanist contributions can be understood as such an attempt. For instance, in criticizing humanism they criticize the traditional hierarchical understanding of reality and in their attempt to decenter the human and promote a more just and inclusive world they do convey a new understanding of reality. To be more precise, this new understanding of reality is the stepping stone for such a more just and inclusive world to be realized. In such a world

there are no clear demarcations between animal and human, between human and machine and with that they aim to establish a new order of things. This world seems to be their homeland.

For Bloch the utopian is the expression of the desire for a better way of being. Posthumanist contributions that use utopian perspectives in order to question the status quo can be understood as utopian from this perspective. However, Bloch claims that the realization of the utopia itself is the final goal of humanity as I have pointed out in the previous chapter. Not only is this precisely what Plessner refers to as the utopian standpoint but also some posthumanists stress that their work should not be understood this way, for instance Haraway (1985) and Hayles (1999). At the same time other posthumanists might aim at the realization of the posthuman which is a manifestation of the utopian standpoint.

Transhumanism

In chapter two the transhumanist position has been described on the basis of four themes. I showed that the transhumanists presented a compelling future and that this future is in reach if only humanity takes control over its own future course through the use of technology. This transhumanist conceptualization of the posthuman can be understood as a manifestation of the utopian standpoint if it can be understood as an attempt at an ultimate ground, a homeland, as described in the introduction of this chapter.

At several times in this thesis I have described the posthuman world as it is portrayed by transhumanists. For instance when discussing how some portray the posthuman as a godlike being in 'the New kingdom' (Moravec, 1988) and how others envision the posthuman as experiencing an all pervasive happiness (Pearce, 1995) and unimaginable pleasures (Bostrom, 2008b). The transhumanists tell us that this posthuman life is in front of us if only we use the technologies to take control over human evolution and whereas Bostrom accompanies his arguments with promises of a life beyond imagination, Moravec promises us omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence and possibly immortality (Moravec, 1988).

In their descriptions they implicitly convey a certain meaning or goal of life, which is to proceed on the path to posthumanity. Max More, another transhumanist claims that it is in human nature not to stagnate, but to move forward. Because to halt the move forward would be a betrayal of the dynamic of life, rather humanity must progress into a "posthuman stage we can barely glimpse" (Hauskeller, 2009). According to Stock being human is to be struggling for control over human evolution (2003).

Considering this, life is meaningful in the sense that it is lived meaningful if it contributes to the next step on this path which will eventually lead to the realization of the future posthuman. Transhumanist conceptualizations of the posthuman portray the posthuman as living life to the fullest. Whereas Plessner argues that an attempt at the homeland must

provide the ultimate bond, reconciliation with fate, an understanding of reality, the place of life and death and the order of things, in transhumanist contributions this converges in the realization of the posthuman. For instance the transhumanists not so much propose a reconciliation with fate rather they promote a revolt against fate and direct us the way to overcome fate through becoming posthuman. With becoming posthuman we become responsible for our own future, our own fate, possibly as immortals. Transhumanists present the human as a being whose essence it is to trespass boundaries and reinvent themselves because they are not restrained by any natural boundaries. The posthuman is then not just feasible but rather the natural goal of a course humanity has been on since its very existence.

The transhumanist conceptualization of the posthuman can thus be seen as a manifestation of the utopian standpoint and with that as an attempt at solving the constitutive homelessness of the human being. Understood as a manifestation of the utopian standpoint, the posthuman that transhumanists aim for is just an attempt at providing an ultimate ground. The posthuman is then not the goal of a path humanity has been on since its very existence and that gets closer with every step in technological developments, but rather emphasizes that transhumanist are still humans. Meaning that they are aware of their constitutive homelessness and are on a quest for an ultimate ground, a very human thing to do.

 In his article "Digitally Mediated (Dis)embodiment"(2003) de Mul claims that for some technology has taken over the role of religion as the promise for the ultimate ground. At the same time Plessner claims that the eccentric positionality cannot be overcome, at least not without becoming other than human. Because in Plessner's framework the eccentric positionality is the essential structure that sets humans apart from other creatures. Also Plessner's framework shows that humans already stand beyond themselves. Similar to animals, humans have a frontal perspective on the world, the centrist position. That what sets humans apart is their eccentric position which Plessner has called the ability to experience one's experiences. In Plessner's framework eccentricity is understood as a setting a step outside the center and reflect upon living life from the center. Whereas transhumanists aim to move beyond the human, for Plessner any further development beyond the eccentric positionality is impossible. Because the human has already reached a position behind himself with the realization of his eccentricity (de Mul, 2003).

While Plessner does not elaborate further on going beyond the human we can build on his framework to elaborate on this idea. Building on Plessner's framework, we can argue that moving beyond the human entails overcoming the eccentric positionality, because for Plessner the eccentric positionality is the essential structure that separates the human from other creatures. Therefore we can argue that becoming posthuman entails becoming other than human which means that one cannot speak of human qualities and posthuman qualities in a similar manner. Becoming posthuman entails also that the yardstick along which our human qualities are measured will also change. This is pointed out in more detail by Aydin (2017) when he points out that transhumanists foresee a radical transformation of the human

through technology and that at the same time assume that the criteria to determine what is normal and what is enhanced are themselves not affected by technology but instead are fixed. This is in line with what Plessner means when he says that the world brings his own weight, meaning that a changed world also changes our perspective on the world. In the same article Aydin argues that radical transformations do change the yardstick with which normalcy and enhancement are measured and that therefore simply implying that this is not the case with the transhumanists posthuman is unintelligible (Aydin, 2017).

In Plessner's answer to the question what it means to be human there is a contradiction between on the one hand the awareness of constitutive homelessness and the urge to find a constitutive ground or home and on the other hand the claim that such a constitutive ground can never be found. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the constitutive homelessness causes humans to search for an ultimate ground, a homeland. Which is ultimately a desire to lift the burden of the eccentricity. At the same time however, finding such a home makes that humans are no longer interested in this very home. Humans then in fact are caught or absorbed in a continuing search for a home which they will never find, and even recognizing this brings us no solution. According to Plessner it is precisely this continuing search that is what makes us humans.

To understand the logic behind this we must go back to the eccentric positionality. In the previous chapter I have pointed out that it is the eccentric positionality that causes the constitutive homelessness of humankind. As positioned eccentrically, the human simultaneously stands in the sphere of reality and outside it. From an eccentric positionality humans reflect on reality and with that reality is being objectified and through this becomes separated from reality. This means that, the human being as posited in reality experiences life from a frontal perspective (similar to the animal, as pointed out in the previous chapter) and as posited outside reality the human being reflects on his experiences and with that the experienced reality becomes separated from reality. This separation leads to objectification and as a result a whole horizon of possibilities of what otherwise could have been has yawned open. While these are two different perspectives this does not mean that humans live life from these perspectives at separate times. Most often humans switch between these positions all the time.

Finding a home, in Plessner's sense, entails the abolition of the eccentric positionality. For Plessner the abolition of the eccentric position is impossible and in that sense, remains a utopia. Nevertheless, humans can be no other than utopian beings and in that sense humans keep on creating new utopias which they wish will bring them their home. The transhumanist conceptualization can be understood as such an attempt at creating a utopia and therefore it can be understood as a manifestation of the utopian standpoint.

The paradox that the transhumanists present us here is that if they succeed in their desire "to become fully what [we] are now only in hope and potential" (Bostrom, 2008b) they will reach

the opposite of what they are after. They aim for a "[l]ife that is truly humane" (Bostrom, 2008b) but if they succeed they will reach a world without human life at all.

4.3. The tragic and the utopian standpoint

In the second chapter I shortly discussed Gregory Stock, who presented the human as a being whose very essence it is to cross boundaries and run the course to perfection and godliness. The road to the posthuman era is not just feasible but it is the course humanity has been on since its very start, because as he pointed out it is natural for humans to steal fire from the gods (Hauskeller, 2012a; Stock, 2003). The reason that I bring this up is that to a certain extend it resembles an image evoked by de Mul's reinterpretation of Plessner's utopian standpoint.

De Mul points out that Plessner's utopian standpoint can be understood as a warning that is more pressing today than ever. It warns us, he argues, about the contribution of technology to (post) human well-being (de Mul, 2014b). The aim to technically modify the eccentric positionality, which is inherent to the human life, will according to transhumanists make us experience pleasures currently beyond our imagination, or even gods. De Mul claims that it also might be the case that the exact opposite is achieved and that the constant attempts to create a balance using enhancement technologies to overcome this alienating eccentricity might also intensify the alienation (de Mul, 2014b).

The resemblance with Stock here is that de Mul also sees that the human being is caught up in ceaseless action, trying to create a balance, to overcome his alienation. However, whereas Stock and other transhumanists dream of an enjoyable future where this alienation will be overcome and humans can live as gods, de Mul warns that the only thing that might be overcome is not human alienation but rather the human species (de Mul, 2014b). Because as de Mul points out, eventually living things die and he states; "perhaps it is the destiny of mankind to be the first species that will out of freedom and out of ontic necessity create its own evolutionary successors" (de Mul, 2014b, p. 473). In the previous section I have made a similar argument based on Plessner. The creation of our own evolutionary successors would display both human grandness and dreadfulness at once, and in that sense de Mul states this would not be a utopian standpoint but rather it would be a tragic standpoint (de Mul, 2014a).

In de Mul's account the tragic is informed from Greek mythological thought. In his Book *De Domesticatie Van Het Noodlot* (2007), de Mul discusses the myths of the tragic heroes Oedipus and Prometheus. What both stories share is the tragic element. The tragic is found in the tension between freedom and necessity, this ambiguity is according to Grene part of human's eccentric positionality (Grene, 1966, p. 274). De Mul argues that a tragic event is one when someone acts willingly, but at the same time is forced to act. For instance, Oedipus killed his father and married his mother, the tragedy here is that he came to his actions because he was unaware that they were his parents. If he would have known he would have acted differently (de Mul, 2007). De Mul sees a parallel here between the human desire to find a home and

overcome the eccentric positionality and the myth of Oedipus. The transhumanists hope to achieve truly humane life but they might as well cause the very extinction of the human species. De Mul foresees a manifestation of this Greek tragedy when humans out of freedom and of ontic necessity aim to reach utopia but by doing so actuate their own extinction (de Mul, 2014a).

In his account Plessner refers to the homelessness of humanity which cannot be resolved, any attempt at homecoming remains an utopia. Plessner's use of the concepts of homelessness and homecoming mirrors the use of these concepts in Jewish thought. In Jewish thought these concepts are connected to the Thora and other Mishnaic tractates (Eisen, 1986). Arnold Eisen presents an account on homelessness and homecoming from a Jewish perspective. He distinguishes between metaphysical and political homelessness and metaphysical and political homecoming. The link between the metaphysical and the political is established in Genesis. Originally home is a garden at the center of things where life is lived in proximity to God, which is an idea after the garden of Eden as presented in Genesis. Homelessness or exile is estrangement and distance from the center. The metaphysical home is the garden of Eden which ended with the Fall when Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden of Eden. In Deuteronomy the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) are promised a renewed homeland, however they are not to reach it, but their descendants will.

Eisen claims that by having no real home, the patriarchs are a figure of the universal human condition of existential homelessness. Neither the homelessness of the patriarchs nor the homelessness of contemporary humans can be resolved by a mere return to a political home, or a sovereign state as for instance the state of Israel (Eisen, 1986). In a non-Messianic world the Biblical promise of a homeland cannot be fulfilled, and therefore the homeland as promised in Deuteronomy remains a political home and not a metaphysical home.

Plessner's use of the concepts of homelessness and homecoming shows a parallel with the metaphysical interpretation of homelessness and homecoming. Although Plessner does not refer to something as the Fall as being the reason for the constitutive homelessness of human beings, he does argue that this is an existential feature of the human being. Also, he claims that humans cannot find themselves a homeland, and that attempts to create such will always fail. Such an attempt to create a homeland refers to the political understanding of homecoming of the Jewish tradition and similar to the Jewish tradition Plessner argues that this cannot provide a true homeland. This shows that there is also another parallel here. Any attempt at the homeland, in Plessner's account the ultimate ground and in Eisen's account the metaphysical homecoming, does not get beyond a human construct that does not hold or in Eisen's account a political homecoming. In both Plessner's account and in the Jewish tradition finding a true homeland is in the domain of the metaphysical and religion. It appears that the metaphysical and the political and the ultimate ground and the human constructed balance do operate at different levels and that humans cannot reach into the level of the metaphysical and the ultimate ground.

The tragic standpoint and the utopian standpoint seem to a large extent similar, however de Mul focuses on evolution, by stating that technological driven attempts to become posthuman might also lead to the extinction of mankind, which shows how his notion of the tragic allows for the possibility to overcome the eccentric positionality. Plessner, on the other hand focusing on the 'utopianess' of finding a homeland connects back to the impossibility to overcome the eccentric positionality, and with that connects the utopian standpoint to the whole of his account. For Plessner a true homeland can only be found in the Definitivum, or the leap of faith whereas for de Mul religious hopes as such have been dismissed as unfulfilled dreams. This shows that for Plessner there can be hope for a home while for de Mul there is nothing to be done. Plessner understands the human as a being who can never lift the burden of the eccentric positionality, or in Plessner's words, come home. De Mul, however, argues based on his tragic standpoint that by aiming for utopia humans might actuate their own extinction (de Mul, 2007). For transhumanists this is the opposite of what they want which is why de Mul's notion of the tragic standpoint is striking. In chapter two I have pointed out that transhumanist have a human centered worldview. They do not wish to overcome the human, rather they want to decorate him with unlimited powers. Most posthumanists do not aim for the posthuman in this literal sense, rather they strive for a conceptual renewal. At the same time there might be more radical posthumanists that do aim to move beyond the human. Plessner does not address human extinction but he does state that the inhuman is not bound to a specific era. Rather, he argues, the inhuman is the possibility inherent to human life, the possibility to negate oneself. With this statement Plessner warns that ignoring what we are might lead to an inhumane world. Since Plessner has argued that we humans are eccentric beings, this implies we should not ignore our eccentric positionality.

4.4. Conclusion

This thesis started with the question whether the posthuman is a goal that can be realized. In order to answer this question I have elaborated on the posthuman and distinguished between transhumanist and posthumanist conceptualizations of the posthuman. I have discussed transhumanism based on four topics that are shared by most transhumanists. These are, its humanist foundation, its aim to take control over human evolution, technology as its liberating force and its promising outlook. I portrayed how transhumanists emphasize a human centered world view, how they portray posthuman life as a promising future, where live is experienced in ways beyond imagination. Followingly I have discussed the posthumanists position. Whereas transhumanists emphasize a human centered worldview, posthumanists aim to decenter the human. The posthumanist positions has been elaborated on based on this aim to decenter the human and the idea to reject clear-cut boundaries.

In the following chapter I have elaborated on Plessner's framework. I have discussed the eccentric positionality and how this gives rise to the utopian standpoint. Also I pointed out that Plessner's shares with Bloch the understanding of the human being as an utopian being,

while at the same time they differ in their understanding of utopia. For Bloch any expression of the desire for a different way of being can be understood as utopian. Also Bloch even holds that the realization of utopia is the ultimate goal of humanity. This position, the idea that utopia can be realized, is what Plessner refers to as the utopian standpoint. For Plessner the utopian standpoint is a manifestation of the awareness of the constitutive homelessness. Constitutive homelessness is a product of man's eccentric positionality. Through the eccentric positionality humans are aware of their homelessness and make attempts to restore the balance. However, Plessner points out humans never succeed in restoring the balance, which in turn gives rise to the search for the ultimate counterweight to the human imbalance. The utopian standpoint is a manifestation of the search for the ultimate counterweight. According to Plessner such a utopian standpoint must provide what neither nature nor culture can provide. Which is that what humans ultimately want, the ultimate bond, order of things, the place of life and death, security, reconciliation of fate and understanding of reality, a homeland. In other words, what humans ultimately want is an understanding of the world in which all facets of live, as mentioned above, have their place.

The question whether the posthuman is a goal that can be realized must be answered for both the posthumanist and transhumanist conceptualization of the posthuman. As I have pointed out before, most posthumanists do not aim at the realization of utopia, rather utopian perspectives are used to question the status quo. Also for most posthumanists, the posthuman is not a real physical construct that is to replace the human at some point, rather the concept of the human is replaced by the concept of the posthuman. It seems such a goal could be realized, however, after a while it will appear that we were not as posthumanist as posthumanism has claimed, because after all posthumanism is just like humanism a human construct. Such a human construct could also be understood as a human construct that provides a balance for a while but is not able to provide a lasting ground.

Evaluating the question whether the posthuman is a goal that can be realized considering the transhumanist conceptualization of the posthuman, it appears that the posthuman is different from the human and while this indeed also is what transhumanists are after it also means that in becoming posthuman the yardstick by which their qualities will be measured will also be different. This means that posthuman promises that are made to us to encourage us to become posthuman are uncertain because we do not know how posthumans will value their qualities.

At the same time the images of posthuman life do tell us something else. In these portrayals of posthuman life it appears that transhumanist aim to sustain the human but grand him with unlimited powers and possibilities. Here it becomes clear that what transhumanists are after is not so much the posthuman but rather a dream of unlimited power. It is then truly tragic that when transhumanists claim they aim for a life that is truly humane that if they succeed hey will reach a world without human life at all.

The central question in this thesis has been whether the posthuman is a goal that can be realized. Here I have pointed out that the transhumanist posthuman can indeed be understood as a manifestation of the utopian standpoint and with that as an attempt at creating the ultimate ground. The posthuman is then not a goal that can be realized but rather a very human expression of the impossibility of finding a home. However, this homeland cannot be realized because any attempt at its realization does not get beyond a human constructed balance that does not hold. Therefore, Plessner argues the idea that this ultimately will bring about the realization of utopia is a false believe in progress.

Furthermore transhumanists portray the posthuman as living life to the fullest thanks to technology. They understand the human in line with Pico della Mirandola as a being whose essence it is to trespass boundaries and with every crossing of a boundary the posthuman is approached. But in fact overcoming one boundary immediately calls for another (Aydin & Verbeek, 2015) and does not necessarily bring the posthuman any closer. Besides I have shown that becoming posthuman will change the very way we understand our qualities. Therefore it can be argued that the transhumanist conceptualization of the posthuman lacks content in other words it is not clear how developments in technologies will lead to the realization of the posthuman.

Without content the posthuman is a hollow phrase that does not provide convincing evidence that humans will gain anything in the process rather they might even lose what is dearest to them, after all they aim to sustain the human and that is precisely what might be lost in the process.

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