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## *Historical periodization, the end of history, and the future of transhumanism*

**Abstract:** This article analyzes the structural analogy between eschatological speculations and the large-scale historical predictions of transhumanist philosophies. Theoretically, it relies on the argument that all substantive philosophies of history are necessarily theological, adding that such narratives are also necessarily teleological, involving an end-of-history thesis. Investigating different types of the latter, it argues that the future of transhumanism stands closest to the “agitated monotony” type as described by Alexis de Tocqueville, which also correlates with the lack of novelty both in the structure of predictions and in their content, which is most obvious in the case of social and political issues, whose handling by transhumanist authors seems hardly more than the extrapolation of present trends to the future.

**Keywords:** transhumanism, progress, futurism, philosophy of history, theology of history, end of history, Joachim of Fiore, Alexis de Tocqueville

### Introduction

The transhumanist versions of human enhancement often – explicitly or implicitly – presuppose some form of historical periodization. Explicit forms include such works as Ray Kurzweil’s *The Singularity Is Near* which divides history into six epochs [Kurzweil 2005] or Byron Reese’s *The Fourth Age* that speaks of four [Reese 2018], making them a stunning parallel to earlier philosophies or even theologies of history. But even when such epochs are not clearly defined, the underlying impulse is to give a general theory of progress from the human (sometimes the prehuman) condition to the transhuman [Esfandiary 2000; Bostrom 2004; More 2010]. Different approaches treat this progress in different ways, especially with regard to the coming age, which is sometimes described as a sort of “end of history” or, at other times, as an end of “pre-history”, the beginning of a “real” one, or a “post-historical” phase, a continuous further movement without end.

In all these cases, however, the core ideas are not altogether new. As this paper shall argue, philosophical and theological speculations about the direction of history, its divisions, its final goal, or its future development have all been present before the so-called “digital age”, and nothing categorically original appeared with the most recent conceptualizations of the historical implications of artificial intelligence. This does not mean that nothing new happened or will ever happen in the theoretical field; it only suggests that we do not yet possess a conceptual framework that is essentially different from the ones we inherited.

At the same time, this lack of conceptual novelty raises serious doubts about the novelty of the whole project of transhumanist enhancement. If no new philosophical concepts of progress occur, if no new concepts of a future society, economics, or politics enter the scene, but all enquiries about them are put aside by some hasty reference to the radical otherness of the coming age, one can rightly suspect that the latter (at least in its present form) is nothing more than an aggrandization, the extrapolation of historical trends to the future. The very fact that most forms of transhumanism are either philosophically individualistic or radically non-personal, envisioning an immersion to some “ocean of consciousness” demonstrates how these are reliant on a basically apolitical and asocial notion of the postmodern condition, ignoring the mediative structures that politics and society provide between the human being and the community.

Again, this is not to say that all transhumanist philosophies completely neglect political and social issues; it only means that their vantage point is that of the individual or that of the whole (which are two sides of the same coin). If there should ever be a transhuman political system or a transhuman society (about which we still learn very little from the works of transhumanist authors), it would be an aggregation of individuals or a derivation of some global unity. Yet this is also not a breathtakingly new idea, but something that has been present since the birth of the grand narratives of history.

To compare the basic types of such grand narratives is the first aim of this paper. It starts with an analytical reconstruction of Joachim of Fiore’s famous scheme of the “three ages” that served as a point of departure for many later substantive philosophies of history (from the Reformation to the Enlightenment and beyond). Since every such philosophy raises the question whether there is an “end of history”, the next section compares the different conceptions of the latter from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his contemporaries to Karl Marx and

Antoin Augustin Cournot, who is sometimes credited with the invention of the term itself. As for more skeptical views, special emphasis is laid on Alexis de Tocqueville's "agitated monotony", the description of an ambiguous era that will neither be "old" nor "new", but an immobile mobility without the prospect of essential change, which is in turn also similar to Friedrich Nietzsche's even more pessimistic account of the age of "the last human being".

Finally, a reconstruction of several transhumanist views on history is offered to establish the analogy with both the theological and the substantive-philosophical method of making historical predictions, and to point out once again the curious lack of innovations in the social, political, or economic thought of transhumanism.

### **I. Joachimism**

Without denying that historical periodization existed before the European Middle Ages, the significance of Joachim of Fiore in this regard is inescapable. The three ages (or *status*) into which the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Calabrian abbot divided salvation history served as a stepping stone for so many later speculations as to make him the most important common denominator of a certain type of trinitarian historiography [Löwith 1949; Lubac 1979; Riedl 2018]. The list of persons thought to have been influenced by Joachim is so wide as to include medieval "revolutionaries" such as Fra Dolcino; Reformation preachers as Thomas Müntzer; Enlightenment philosophers from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing to Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis of Condorcet; counterrevolutionary thinkers from Joseph de Maistre to Pierre-Simon Ballanche; not to mention Hegel, Marx, Auguste Comte, and lesser-known figures who applied a similarly trinitarian concept to their own age as a "Third Empire" or the "Third International".

Although some of these parallels are obvious exaggerations (speaking of humanity's past, present, and future as consecutive epochs does not necessarily make someone a Joachimist), so much seems true that the medieval abbot remains a pivotal figure for any historical thought that seeks "meaning" in history, or, in other words, that views history from "above", discovering a universal law in it, which is only possible from a theological perspective. As Arthur C. Danto famously put it, there is something prophetic in all descriptions of history that claim for themselves this God's eye view:

"It is, I think, instructive to recognize that Marx and Engels, although they were materialists and explicit atheists, were nevertheless inclined

to regard history through essentially theological spectacles, as though they could perceive a divine plan, but not a divine being whose plan it was. Whatever the case, the substantive philosophies of history, insofar as I have correctly characterized them, are clearly concerned with what I shall term prophecy. A prophecy is not merely a statement about the future, for a prediction is a statement about the future. It is a certain kind of statement about the future, and I shall say, pending a further analysis, that it is an historical statement about the future. The prophet is one who speaks about the future in a manner which is appropriate only to the past, or who speaks of the present in the light of a future treated as a fait accompli" [Danto 2007: 9].

Being prophetic in the Joachimic sense at the same time has some other characteristic features. Its novelty in the 12<sup>th</sup> century consisted not simply in the periodization of history, but the temporalization of the Holy Trinity, distinguishing the ages of humanity in parallel with the revelations of the divine persons. The first age, that of the Father was under law (*sub lege*); the second, that of the Son is under grace (*sub gratia*), while the third age of the Holy Spirit (which is still ahead) will be under even greater grace (*sub ampliori gratia*) [Reeves 1976: 1-28]. In other words, history moves from a primitive age, when people did not fully understand the divine plan and therefore had to be governed by formal rules, to a transitory one in which God's grace starts to unfold, until, finally, they become directly connected to God, and gain a full, spiritual unity with Him.

Now, apart from the theological language which might sound strange to today's more secular ears, there are some important details that can be extended to modern philosophies of history for later comparison:

- According to Joachim, history is a linear process. It has a starting point from which it constantly moves in a definite direction. There is no turning back and no decline; even if occasional setbacks occur, these are tribulations to overcome (in Joachim these are the seven persecutions of the faithful) and not proofs against the generally positive pattern of progress.
- Historical time is not homogeneous, it is divided into different epochs which are highly different from each other. The ages of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are also distinguished as different ages of revelation (from the Old Testament to the New Testament, and then to the "Eternal Gospel" which is

written not on paper but in the hearts of men); ages of constantly developing virtues (from Hope to Faith, and then to Charity); or ages of different ways of life (from families to celibacy and finally to a wholly spiritual, contemplative one). Preparation, transition, and fulfillment remain a basically triadic scheme, regardless of the fact that Joachim sometimes used a more detailed periodization [Reeves 1976: 8].

- There is, however, also an intrinsic unity, a historical logic in this process, and that is why, based on the knowledge of previous epochs, predictions can be made about the next one. These predictions are not just mystical speculations, but can be proven mathematically. The argument of Joachim is based on precise calculations about the number of generations in the Old Testament (which was thought to be a correct historical account) and the date of occurrence of certain key persons and events in this history, making it possible to draw conclusions for the future as well.
- This also means that there is a last age to be expected, which – fortunately for the prophet – is neither immediately close nor too far away. Based on the calculations mentioned above, Joachim's disciples took it for granted that after the first 42 generations from Adam to David, and the second 42 generations from David to Jesus, the present age could also not last longer than 42 generations, or, counting with 30 years per generation, 1,260 years. This was also confirmed by several passages in the Bible, namely Revelations 11 that spoke of the 42 months' trampling of the holy city, after which two witnesses would prophesy for another 1,260 days; but also by Revelations 12, in which the woman clothed with the sun would flee into the wilderness for 1260 days. In addition, "three and a half years" is also mentioned in the Old Testament [Daniel 7:25 and 12:7], once again confirming – provided we equate a year with 360 days – that 1260 ( $3.5 \times 360$ ) is the prophetic number. That is why the beginning of the last age was expected in 1260, at least by those who translated Joachim's prophecies into concrete predictions.
- Leaving behind the exegetical mathematics of Joachimism, it should also be noted that the last age will not only be different from anything humanity experienced so far, but also better, transcending all physical limitations, a truly spiritual awakening. The age of the Spirit explicitly refers to this transformation, when people – at least the most advanced among them – will no longer need priests or books, because they communicate with the Spirit itself, understanding the

Eternal Gospel not by traditional learning but by immediate experience. This is not only a new form of cognition, but an unavoidable one. Not a revolution in the traditional sense of the word (it was not Joachim who was a revolutionary, only some of his followers) but the work of a higher-than-human force.

## II. End of history 1: from Hegel to Marx and Cournot

The historical chain of Joachim's influence was practically unbroken from the 12<sup>th</sup> century to modern times [Löwith 1949: 208-213], but among the modern followers of Joachim, none is more important than Hegel. His concept of world history (without mentioning Joachim by name) rests on a similarly trinitarian basis as that of the Calabrian abbot:

“God is thus recognized as Spirit, only when known as the Triune. This new principle is the axis on which the History of the World turns. This is the goal and the starting point of History. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent his Son,” is the statement of the Bible. This means nothing else than that self-consciousness had reached the phases of development, whose resultant constitutes the Idea of Spirit, and had come to feel the necessity of comprehending those phases absolutely” [Hegel 2001: 338].

Hegel, at the same time, is usually associated with a more specific historical concept, that of the “end of history.” Although this is not totally unjustified, it should be noted that Hegel rarely used the exact expression: “The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning” [Hegel 2001: 121]. Some authors even suggest that Hegel never actually wrote about the future and explicitly rejected any sort of prophesying as a non-philosophical enterprise [Dale 2014]. This, on the other hand, only confirms that history as an object of philosophy can only be the history of the past, which makes it easier to understand why so many Hegel interpreters were inspired by him to speak explicitly of the end of history; at least in the sense that no further historical development could be grasped by any rational (either scientific or philosophical) argument.

In this regard, however, Hegel was only one of many authors who wrote on the end of – at least European – history. Roughly at the same time when he started his lectures on the philosophy of world history, Joseph de Maistre wrote about the death of Europe [Maistre 1886: 183], Louis de Bonald on the “end of everything” [Bonald

1988: 105], or François-René de Chateaubriand on the falling apart of European culture which may or may not be followed by its resurrection [Chateaubriand 1900: 554].

Compared to these conservative lamentations, Marx's novelty was that in the Preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* he talked about the end of *prehistory*, suggesting that the "real" history of humanity was yet to come. Primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, and capitalism all belonged to this prehistory, after which socialism and communism would indeed represent a final stage, not to be transcended by any further historical epochs [Marx 1987]. This approach may have been more optimistic, but not essentially different from the standard "end of history" narrative, however. After all, nobody had ever said that nothing would happen after the alleged closure of "history as we knew it", only that its next phase would be completely different – for better or worse – than everything that preceded it.

The appearance of the exact term "the end of history" thus remains obscure. According to some authors, it was the French mathematician and economist Antoin Augustin Cournot who coined it in 1861 [Featherstone 1995: 184], and that is what the Wikipedia entry on the "end of history" also cites as a reference. This statement, however, is also problematic, since Mike Featherstone's work inaccurately quotes another source, which does not speak of the "end of history", but of a "post-historical" period [Kamper 1990: 110]. The latter in turn refers to a third source, Hendrik de Man's *Vermassung und Kulturverfall* [Man 1951: 125], which, however, once again does not quote Cournot's exact text, so we can only suspect that it refers to the French author's *Traité de l'enchaînement des idées fondamentales dans les sciences et dans l'histoire*, which does seem to include a distinction between the historical and post-historical state of humanity, but remains ambiguous all the same:

"We step out from the historical phase in which the vagaries of fate and the actions of personal and moral strength were influential, and we enter one in which the masses become measurable and predictable with pen in hand; in which the exact results of a regular mechanism can be calculated" [Cournot 1861, 2: 344].

The ambiguity lies in the fact that the previous era might be understood as *the* historical one, compared to which the new one is non-historical or post-historical;

but it is also possible to call both eras historical, albeit in two different senses: the former shaped by contingency and individual moral ambitions, the latter by sociological determinations.

Yet, apart from philological subtleties, the scientific predictability of the sociological process does not change the overall pattern of historical prophetism. As we have seen, Joachim of Fiore also used what he considered a reliable mathematical method to predict the future; Hegel spoke from the standpoint of a rationally based philosophy which was the highest form of science; not to mention Marx, who always insisted that his historical materialism was a scientific (empirically and logically rigorous) analysis of social and economic relations. In this regard, Cournot's innovation was only one of methodology and not of substance. The periodization of history into a stage of preparation, a stage of transition, and a stage of ultimate culmination has always been supported by the most fashionable branch of science at the time: be it textual analysis and mathematics, logic and philosophy, or economics and sociology. What nevertheless connects the various forms of historical prophecies and the never exactly formulated theories of the "end of history" is the conviction that the future is calculable, despite the fact that it will be completely different from the past and the present.

### III. End of history 2: Tocqueville and Nietzsche

Not everyone shared this paradoxical view, of course. There were two logically sound ways to get out of the paradox: either to deny that the future was calculable, or to deny that it would be a radically new, never-before-seen state of humanity. Alexis de Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America* raised both possibilities: (1) the textbook cliché is that he treated history as an open-ended process, the outcome of which depended on human decisions, leaving only the march toward equality as a historical determination; (2) but it is also remarkable how he suggested that history would not produce any real novelties in terms of human behavior and social organization. In other words, we may have left the past behind, but the future is nothing but the extrapolation of present tendencies, producing a society that is "agitated and monotonous" at the same time.

"Agitated", because it is in a perpetual flux, in which people and things keep constantly changing; yet "monotonous", because the pattern of changes remains hopelessly uniform. Nothing truly new ever happens, nor do people and generations differ from each other: "only the name of the actors is different; the play is the same" [Tocqueville 2010: 1090]. This experience is not even a particularly



American one: “What I say about America applies, moreover, to nearly all the men of our times. Variety is disappearing from the human species; the same ways of acting, thinking and feeling are found in all the corners of the world” [Tocqueville 2010: 1091].

The evolving temporal and geographical uniformity of the human condition is therefore similar to what others called the “end of history”, but Tocqueville’s account is even more pessimistic, insofar as it is connected to the political, social, and economic determinations of the democratic and capitalist era. The main reason why people become uniform and societies stagnant is that equality (which is the social meaning of democracy in Tocqueville’s vocabulary) leaves no other possibility for the individual to gain importance than to acquire wealth, making capitalism (although it is not a Tocquevillian term) the only logical outcome of democratization. If birth, social class, military virtues, or cultural eminence no longer distinguish people from each other, the only visible distinction remains that of material prosperity; something that in the long run also creates a sort of hierarchy, but it is the only sort of hierarchy that a democratic society will tolerate.

In a political sense, there will also be no “new” arrangements: democratic government is the last one to be expected, regardless of its hindrances. “Great characters” are becoming rarer among politicians, which is not a childhood disease of democracy, but an irresistible tendency toward mediocrity [Tocqueville 2010: 229, 422]; moreover, the tendentially homogeneous, egalitarian democracy generalizes this “debasement of souls” [421]. The language of the press becomes abusive and coarse [297], literature becomes an industry [813], in which the author and the public corrupt each other [844], while the pettiness of everyday life is countered by grandiose and bombastic art forms: “I fear that the works of democratic poets may offer immense and incoherent images, overcharged portraits, bizarre compositions, and that the fantastic beings that have emerged from their mind may sometimes cause the real world to be missed” [844].

In religious life, a similar, simultaneously lofty and base spirituality emerges, that of pantheism. “As conditions become more equal and each man in particular becomes more similar to all the others, weaker and smaller, you get used to no longer envisaging citizens in order to consider only the people; you forget individuals in order to think only about the species” [757]. The democratic mind becomes “so obsessed with the idea of unity”, that he considers even the separation of the world and God too divisive, which is why he tends to unify the entire universe after

the homogenization of society. This, however, is nothing more than the extension of his own pettiness to the cosmos, and that is why “All those who remain enamored of the true grandeur of man must join forces and struggle against it” [758].

It is an unavoidable contradiction of a democratic, capitalist society that it promises individuals to be the decisive agents in politics and economy, while at the same time degrades them to the position of single, ultimately insignificant members of the community. As Nietzsche would write in *Human, All Too Human II*, the democratic man is “raised not as an individual, but as a member of a whole, as an integer of a majority” [Nietzsche 2013: 40].

Moreover, Tocqueville did not regard the democratic era as an accidental derailment, but as a necessary and essentially ahistorical state, an indifferent disregard for both the past and the future: “not only does democracy make each man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants from him”, compared to which it is almost irrelevant that it also separates him from his contemporaries [Tocqueville 2010: 884].

This is where Tocqueville – although such a comparison might sound exaggerated to some – comes closest to being a forerunner of Nietzsche, who, although he fantasized much about the *Übermensch* (which would later make him something of a transhumanist saint), also described the last age of humanity as that of the “last human being”. To make it clear: the last human being is a just as democratic and equal nobody as Tocqueville’s agitated and monotonous individual, who finds no other goal in life than material prosperity, pleasure, health, and an imagined supremacy over others. “One has one’s little pleasure for the day and one’s little pleasure for the night: but one honors health. ‘We invented happiness’ say the last human beings, and they blink” [Nietzsche 2006: 10].

#### **IV. Transhuman periodization and the end of history**

To invent happiness remains indeed the main ambition of transhumanism and human enhancement. Although transhumanistic ideas can be divided into different types (some of them concentrating on super-longevity, others on super-intelligence, and still others on super-wellbeing, the “three supers” [Thomas 2024: 2]) and it is also true that some seek to achieve the former through biotechnological engineering, while others rely on the transfer of human identity to non-biological substrates (the “organic/digital split” [ibid.]), it remains true that the multiple

lineages of transhumanism all share the conviction that human enhancement should lead to the creation of a not only physically or intellectually better, but also happier human condition. This is a philosophical claim, one that involves a complete “life philosophy” [More 2013: 4], a philosophy of morals, culture, and a philosophy of history as well. As for the latter, several points of identity with earlier historical speculations can be detected:

- The concept of progress – as the word implies – is based on a linear (or rather vectorial) concept of time. A cyclical concept would naturally exclude the possibility that anything becomes ultimately better, and even those linear ones that suppose no essential difference between the past and the future (not to mention those that do not exclude decline) would contradict the basic assumptions of progressive histories. As Alexander Thomas put it, “Any investigation that deems the dangers greater than the potential benefits would seem to contravene the transhumanist ideology” [Thomas 2024: 2]. The fact that most transhumanist thinkers do not speak of linear progress but of “exponential growth” is of lesser importance here. Exponentiality only refers to the acceleration of progress and not to any new direction or aim. Moreover, “Moore’s Law”, which is often cited as the proof of exponential growth, was only a short-time prediction in the 1960s about the growing number of transistors on an integrated circuit [Moore 1965] and not a universal law of progress. When someone treats it as the basis of his own teleological view of history [Kurzweil 2000; Kurzweil 2005], it only shows his commitment to a one-way and single-purpose line of progress that is not qualitatively, only quantitatively different from the more ancient conceptions of temporality.
- The theory of progressive transformation also suggests that historical time is not homogenous but can be divided into separate epochs. Ray Kurzweil distinguishes six: (1) Physics and Chemistry; (2) Biology and DNA; (3) Brains; (4) Technology; (5) The Merger of Human Technology with Human Intelligence; (6) The Universe Wakes Up. At a closer look, however, it is obvious that we see a similar triadic pattern as in all former speculations: a prehistory that leads to the appearance of the human being as we know it; a transitory period in which this human being gets mingled with something beyond it; and a final age when not only the human being but the world as such becomes spiritual [Kurzweil 2005: 14-21]. Others like Nick Bostrom also suggest that there was an age of “natural” longing for immortality (from Gilgamesh to the Middle Ages); an age of science and liberty which started to realize these aspirations;

and a future in which humanity – and not only humanity, but also “non-human animals, and any future intellects, modified life forms, or other intelligences to which technological and scientific advance may give rise” – will reach their full potential [Bostrom 2005]. In a more down-to-earth manner, Max More says that prehistory lasted until the publication of Francis Bacon’s *Novum Organum* in 1620, the beginning of scientific thinking (“year zero” of a possible new calendar [More 2010: 138]); after which, in the future, a completely new, transhuman era is to be expected.

- The advent of the transhuman era is also predictable because of the inherent – and remarkably simple – logic of history. “Simple” here refers to the possibility of monocausal explanation: in the case of technological historicism, the key is information. If Joachim reduced history to the unfolding of the Trinity, Hegel to the development of the Spirit, and Marx to material economic conditions, the prophecies of AI rely on a similar reduction of all existence to the processing of information. Information science thus provides us with “epistemological certainty” [Ross 2020] in a historical process which is nothing more than the development of “information networks” [Harari 2024]. This, however, is not a scientific fact, but a meta-scientific prejudice, which is also a necessary one: a methodological precondition of choosing the right method.
- The last age is also just as near as in all other forms of “end of history” narratives. In 1993, Vernon Vinge prophesied that it would be technologically possible to create superhuman intelligence by 2023, after which the human era would shortly end [Vinge 1993: 88]. F. M. Esfandiary suggested that the date of transhuman transition to eternity will be 2030, which is why he changed his name to FM-2030 [Esfandiary 2000]. About the same time, Hans Moravec thought that robots will be the “evolutionary heirs” of humans by the 2040s [Moravec 2000]. Originally, Ray Kurzweil also put the date of reaching singularity to the 2040s, and still maintains that “we will extend our minds many millions-fold by 2045” [Kurzweil 2024: 10]. In other words, the future is imminent, but we still have some time left to prepare ourselves for it (and, with some irreverence, to buy the books of the prophets before we get eliminated by or hybridized into singularity).
- All this suggests that the future age will not only be one among many, something more advanced than what we have experienced throughout history, but literally a time of fulfillment. In this sense, it will represent both a completion

and a radical otherness when compared to the past. Whether one calls it singularity, “intelligence explosion” [Bostrom 2014], or uses the more mystical language of spiritualization [Kurzweil 2005: 389] and human gods [Harari 2017] makes little difference. The sensational wording at the same time betrays a truly theological ambition. The title of Kurzweil’s *The Singularity is Near* not accidentally evokes the Biblical phrase “The Kingdom of God is near”. The strive for eternity, present in many branches of transhumanism, is also often explicitly theological: “If we want eternal life, then we’ll need to rewrite our bug-ridden genetic code and become god-like” [IIEE, 2007]. It is thus somewhat superfluous to “unmask” technological prophecies as magical [Shanahan 2015], religious [Damour 2019] or eschatological visions [Coenen 2014: 38], since the same is in many cases openly acknowledged by their proponents.

## V. The agitated monotony of the last age

Regarding that transhumanism also has a tendency to create its own, new, “religious” institutions (the Church of Perpetual Life, the Turing Church, or the Terasem [Antosca, 2019]), it is even more surprising how concrete political institutions and new political ideas are mostly absent from it. Although some political parties have emerged in the 2010s (see those of Zoltan Istvan in the United States or Giuseppe Vatinno in Italy) none of those gained any serious electoral success [Thomas 2024: 19-20]. As for ideology, most transhumanists are content to place themselves into the Enlightenment tradition of the past few hundred years [Hughes 2004; Bostrom 2005; More 2010; Stolyarov II, 2019]. While different authors emphasize different parts of this tradition, none of these seem to be used in a breathtakingly innovative fashion. As Alexander Thomas points out:

“Indeed, transhumanists are broadly split between two poles: the right-leaning techno-libertarian wing, often associated with Silicon Valley, and the left-leaning techno-progressive faction most notably represented by transhumanist James Hughes. The former generally emphasize the rights of individuals to upgrade themselves, whereas the latter offer more recognition of the societal implications, advocating a politics which fosters responsibility towards humanity at large to ensure transhumanist aims are broadly inclusive” [Thomas 2024: 3].

Declarations about “morphological freedom”, the right of the individual to modify (or not to modify) their body are only the logical postmodern continuation of the modern liberal insistence on self-determination. On the other hand, speaking of

“inclusivity” [More and Vita-More 2013: 1] is just as familiar from the most recent versions of left-wing ideologies. Vague references to “democratic values”, “liberty”, “tolerance”, or “respect for diversity” in Kurzweil’s *Singularity* are also profoundly boring, causing a Tocquevillian feeling of monotony, especially when the author himself admits that such extrapolations from our present social and political conditions are inevitable: “nonbiological intelligence is and will be embedded in our societies and will reflect our values”, or “our application of these greater intellectual powers will be governed by the values of its creators” [Kurzweil 2005]. Which in fact sounds as if the end of history (at least in a political sense) had been reached, while the exact nature of future social institutions remains vague, and political institutions (like forms of government or models of democracy) are barely mentioned at all.

There are, of course, attempts to step out of this narrative. This, however, often means that the need for political innovations is explained away by saying that the coming change will be so radical as to make new social and political conditions unimaginable. Even when something like a political manifesto appears, it is content to make some nebulous claims about replacing the ideologies of left/right division with up/down ones [Esfendiary 1973; Fuller and Lipinska 2014]. What in the meantime remains a constant background to all such talk is – as Tocqueville predicted – the reliance on capitalist economy, to which no alternative seems to exist. The lack of novelty is most clearly visible in this case, which is no miracle, since all modern technologies, including artificial intelligence, are the products of late capitalism, and cannot be separated from its ideological and institutional context.

It is sometimes falsely supposed that transhumanism is a revolutionary ideology. When one realizes that “transhumanist-oriented research projects and think tanks are now attracting billions of dollars in funding, and many transhumanist thinkers are exerting a level of global influence disproportionate to the movement’s size” [Bohan 2018: 271], it also means that these projects, persons, and organizations are interested in the conservation of the political and socio-economic conditions that led to their emergence in the first place. The computer and internet industry is deeply embedded in a culture of wealth-making and consumption that is not entirely different from the one that Tocqueville and others experienced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it is unlikely to go beyond it. What is indeed offered by the example of Big Tech and its leaders (from Elon Musk to Sam Altman) to someone who wants to become prominent in an otherwise egalitarian society is not some grand

utopia but to gain wealth, to which AI is the best – if not only – instrument, as advertisements keep repeating since the launch of ChatGPT.

Therefore, without overstretching the analogy between Tocqueville's agitated monotony and today's bombastically performed conventionalisms, it may be suggested that the best description of the transhumanist era is not as a complete novelty but something more complex and confusing. Democracy, as could be seen, still has no alternative, despite the fact that its problems are just as old as democracy itself (the effects of *Infocracy* discussed by Byung-Chul Han are in fact not the "distortions" of democracy but belong to its very essence). Great characters have been replaced by mediocre ones not only in politics but also among the prophets of AI (unless one thinks that Elon Musk is a genius); hedonism resurfaces in the form of "hedonistic transhumanism" [Thomas 2024: 20], and there is also no sign of a less rude language of the press, or a less petty and at the same time less sensationalist form of art, regardless of the breathtaking progress of computational technology. Which is not something to be surprised at, for quantity can never substitute for quality, but may be worth remembering when speaking of the possible and impossible results of technological advancement.

### Conclusion

My reason to point out the similarity between medieval, modern, and contemporary philosophies of history, especially with regard to the obsession with periodization, was to show how any substantive historical thinking remains captured by the same logic. A sign of transhumanism's improbability to create a thoroughly new world is exactly its incapability to transcend the age-old patterns of "making sense of history", which were often not even philosophical but theological in nature. Sometimes transhumanists themselves note that their project is a continuation of the Enlightenment, which in turn "secularized religious eschatology into a narrative of inevitable human social, scientific, and moral progress" [Hughes, 2010: 10].

This thinking is also inherently connected to end-of-history narratives, and in this case the aim was to highlight that although transhumanist visions of the future stand closer to the classic, theologically-inspired types of futurology, it would in fact be better to treat them as the infinite extensions of the present situation. Curiously, Alexis de Tocqueville foretold not only the socio-economical and political aspects of such a changing changelessness, but also that it would create a seemingly new, but in fact long-known, pantheistic religion. I would only add that it is more like a combination of so-called "secular religions": the myths



of progress [Bouveresse 2023], science [Williams and Robinson 2015], technology [Alexander 2003], dataism [Harari 2017], liberalism [Safranek 2015], democracy [Boia 2002], and most of all, capitalism. Because regardless of whether the dissolution in the great ocean of consciousness will ever occur, the market has already performed the miracle of homogenizing our human minds. At the same time, we have remained hopelessly individualistic, and this is not necessarily a contradiction. This is, rather, what György Csepeli, following Heidegger, calls „planetary idiocy”, the life mode of a mass society composed of self-excited individuals [Csepeli 2020: 199]. Which is just another expression of what Tocqueville called the agitated and monotonous whirlabout of the final age of humanity, or – if you like – Nietzsche’s last human being.

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