

## Misunderstandings around Posthumanism. Lost in Translation? Metahumanism and Jaime del Val's Metahuman Futures Manifesto

Evi Sampanikou<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

*Posthumanism is still a largely debated new field of contemporary philosophy that mainly aims at broadening the Humanist perspective. Academics, researchers, scientists, and artists are constantly transforming and evolving theories and arguments, around the existing streams of Posthumanist thought, Critical Posthumanism, Transhumanism, and Metahumanism, discussing whether they can finally integrate or follow completely different paths towards completely new directions. This paper, written for the 1st Metahuman Futures Forum (Lesvos 2022) will focus on Metahumanism and Jaime del Val's "Metahuman Futures Manifesto" (2022) mainly as an open dialogue with Critical Posthumanism.*

**Keywords:** *Critical Posthumanism; Metahumanism; Manifesto*

### **Introduction**

When discussing Posthumanism nowadays what we do understand is that from many aspects it is still a largely debated new field of contemporary philosophy aiming at amplifying the Humanist perspective to the point where it becomes highly inclusive, thus embracing and recognizing the rights of not only humans but of all forms of life and nature and also versions of artificial "life" or artificial intelligence amongst others. The existing streams of Posthumanist thought, Critical Posthumanism, Transhumanism, and Metahumanism, keep undergoing their own evolution and their own transformations that may even lead to a final integration, especially when Transhumanism gradually turns to accept the political context of Critical Posthumanism under the influence of scholars like James Hughes (2021, 89-113), Stefan Sorgner (2021, 5-11, 171-184; 2020, 9-13), or Francesca Ferrando (2022, 85-90) discussing and criticizing all its contradictory issues and arguments. But could finally all Posthumanist trends become one at an international level? And should this be desirable at all from the aspect of politics? It might reveal colonial views. But such a type of "nostalgia" is not included in the central scope of this paper.

To achieve a degree of unification, however, we need to explore the linguistic root and the philosophical context attributed to each separate trend, in parallel with their ideological evolution in terms of Political Philosophy or Sociology. Translation really matters.

All the above prove in a way that the whole thing makes more sense if we focus on translation issues as they are very important for the international comprehension of every trend. As it appears to be,

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<sup>1</sup> Evi (Evangelia) D. Sampanikou, Department of Cultural Technology and Communication, University of the Aegean, Greece.  
E-Mail: [esampa@aegean.gr](mailto:esampa@aegean.gr).



a series of misunderstandings on Meta- Post- and Transhumanism are first related to language itself and consequently to culture. How can we conceive the Greek term “Meta” and its relation to “Post” in Western and Non-Western cultures? Why “Meta” can describe a broader sense of existence that engulfs “Nature” in comparison to “Post” that engulfs “Culture” and consequently all the pre-existing philosophies? Are we lost in Translation or do we just need to develop new vocabularies to face the problems of a new globalized humanity on a “not quite new” planet? The questions raised can be numerous.

Is Posthumanism really a new theory? And, to what extent has it been misunderstood? What is the social impact of its content? Is it a neo-capitalist, neo-colonial theory, or a new revolution? Nothing can be generalized. Especially when we still need to discuss what is and what is *not* Posthumanism, what is its relation to Humanism, and what can be the impact of the translation of the term in several languages as the name can most of the times describe the content. We always need to go back to examining and re-examining the early influences of Posthumanism and how it was shaped during the previous decades.

### **Post- Trans- Meta- translated...**

As it appears to be, a series of misunderstandings on Meta- Post- and Transhumanism are first related to language itself and consequently to culture. How can we conceive the Greek term ‘Meta’ and its relation to “Post” in Western and Non-Western cultures, especially when in Modern Greek Post- is translated as *Μετα-* (Meta-)? Is the contemporary notion of Meta- what makes a big part of the Greek academy indifferent or even hostile to all Posthumanism, as on the occasion of Postmodernism before that? To use a familiar example, why do conservative scholars in Greece try to impose the term *μεταανθρωπισμός* for Posthumanism thus implying “after the humans” or after the contemporary notion of “humanism” in Greek that is similar to “no care and compassion for other human beings”, a synonym to “inhumanism”? Why are they using the completely useless term *διανθρωπισμός* for Transhumanism when *δια-* means “through”, for example, penetrating someone, or at least “going through something”, like an idea of cutting the idea of *άνθρωπος* in two pieces?

Attempting one relational description for each term, I would argue that on the occasion of Metahumanism the Greek “Meta-” can describe a broader sense of existence that engulfs ‘Nature’ in comparison to the prefix “Post-” in Posthumanism and Critical Posthumanism that (as on the occasion of Postmodernism) engulfs “Culture” and consequently all the pre-existing philosophies. We cannot be lost in Translation if we develop new vocabularies to face the linguistic issues of a new globalized humanity on a rather old planet. A look at the pedigrees of Posthumanism, Transhumanism, and Metahumanism could be quite convincing.

### **Pedigrees of Meta-, Post-, and Transhumanism**

Posthumanism has in fact ancient origins. Posthumanistic considerations were present initially in the Pre-Socratic Ionian Philosophy, later during the late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance period when St Francis’s (1181/82–1226) non-anthropocentric thought embracing the natural environment and animals appear, while seeds of Posthumanistic thought have marked the development of Western philosophy from the late 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sampanikou & Stasienco 2021, 17). The ideological identity is very important in Posthumanism as it deals with a series of different sociopolitical interpretations of the relationship between humans and technology (Sampanikou & Stasienco 2021, 13). According to the above, Transhumanism and Metahumanism do not exactly appear to follow the same route.



Transhumanism has been defined as a liberal theory, dealing with biotechnology and the building of an improved human race. Transhumanists have mainly put forward perspectives concerning technological issues which represent radical challenges to traditional judgments about human-promoting enhancement technologies. However, this is still quite vague. Technologies emerge every day, challenges keep appearing and identity problems always exist for humanity that has not taken any advantage yet of promised future mechanics for an improved human race, from anti-aging techniques to immortality or mind-uploading, making it difficult for us to imagine the potential consequences. From such a perspective, the focus is always on “the human” and the self, excluding social interaction, interspecies communication, and interaction with the natural environment, which is an anthropocentric pre-industrial or early industrial approach in some terms. No interaction with history, philosophy, or culture, as in most cases, Transhumanists are utilitarian technologists rather than philosophers: “It is indeed the case that many transhumanists do not have a humanities background. They are more closely related to a linear way of thinking, the reliance on scientific data and a utilitarian ethics” (Sorgner 2022, 23).

Metahumanism, on the other hand, is dealing with the very core of a philosophical/political existence of beings, on the occasion of art through “amorphogenesis” and “proprioception” and several forms of artistic experimentations with technology (metaformances, microdances) (Sampanikou & Stasienco 2021, 13). From a philosophical point of view Metahumanism is characterized by the implication of both symbiosis and mutation, by the emphasis on relation and variation as Del Val and Sorgner have so clearly stated in the 2010 Metahuman Manifesto (Sampanikou 2017, 9-11), views that Del Val has developed and elaborated on the final form of his Metahuman Futures Manifesto that was updated during the 1<sup>st</sup> Metahuman Forum Assembly (MFF 2022 Lesvos Assembly-Chorus, 2022). The Assembly also brought back the discussions on translation and a new Greek term was successfully introduced by Jaime del Val: *Συμμετανθρωπισμός* (Symmetanthropismos) that added a “plus” (*συν*) to the notion of “meta” mainly pointing at the *symbiotic* values in Nature and the universally ecological ethics of Metahumanism as well as on the respect of all existing life forms.

According to Jaime del Val, Metahumanism clearly opposes Transhumanism:

When openness and variation get reduced domination appears and evolution gets blocked. Renaissance perspective culminated a millennia long process of reduction of sensori-motor plasticity, which underlies algorithmic control today, and constitutes a planetary-scale field of algorithmic movements and reduction underlying the current extinction process, where impoverished body = impoverished planet, and where compulsory heterosexuality (massive species multiplication), sedentary culture (massive production-consumption), and human exceptionalism are leading us and the planet to an extinction cycle. How to revert the currently dominant Trash-human Unhacenment into a Metahuman flourishing? By regaining the joys of moving-sensing-feeling! (Del Val, 2022)

Therefore Metahumanism, shaped by Del Val and Sorgner in the 2010 ‘A Metahumanist Manifesto’ (Sampanikou 2017, 9-11) and greatly developed by Del Val and the Assembly in the 2022 ‘Metahuman Futures Manifesto’ is more closely related to Critical Posthumanism, despite Sorgner’s view that it “bears relational traces to all of the other movements” (Sorgner 2022, 21). However, I agree with Sorgner’s remark in exactly the same text and page (Sorgner 2022, 21) on the strong connections of Metahumanism to Heraclitus and Nietzsche. Moreover, what was originally defined as ‘Posthumanism’ tended —from the beginning— to be the democratic alter ego of both

Transhumanism and Humanism. This is why I would underline that Critical Posthumanism is now becoming the very field of a gradual integration among a specific “Darwinian” evolutionary path of Transhumanism, Metahumanism, and the original notion of Posthumanism, an evolving but firm ground, wide open to the new philosophical concepts about a less anthropocentric, less racist, more ethical and more clearly politicized future.

Metahumanism can also be this firm but also developing ground with an emphasis however on the “natural” being and the notion of continuous movement as a form of unifying “the natural plus the cultural” arguments drawing a line from Anaximander and Heraclitus to Spinoza’s notion of being ethical in nature and Deleuze, Darwin, and Nietzsche (Sampanikou & Stasienco 2021, 17-26). It could be another interpretation of what Jaime del Val refers to, that is the notion of metabodies as processes of becoming completely bypassing the concepts of nature and culture, paying attention to the degrees of alignment and closure. This is a shift that has taken place during the last few years, at a series of international conferences under the general title Beyond Humanism Conferences (from 2009 to nowadays), the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Online Beyond Humanism Forums (2020 and 2021) and also the newly introduced Metahuman Futures Forums (2022 and 2023) where Critical Posthumanism has been developed in parallel with Metahumanism.

In a presentation of his recent book, *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* (2021), Stefan Sorgner explains:

The proper interaction of gene and digital technologies can significantly improve the quality of our lives [...] it stands in a long tradition of what we have always been doing. We have always used technologies to increase our chances of living good lives. We turned into human beings by integrating technologies in our lives...However, we need to develop a proper democratic use of emerging technologies such that personal flourishing can be promoted (Sorgner, 2021).<sup>2</sup>

According to the above, both Metahumanism and Critical Posthumanism are streams of thought with a strong concern about non-human beings and the planet, a concern best expressed by Haraway (2021):

Companion animals can be horses, dogs, cats, or a range of other beings willing to make the leap to the biosociality of service dogs, family members, or team members in cross-species sports. Generally speaking, one does not eat one’s companion animals (nor get eaten by them); and one has a hard time shaking colonialist, ethnocentric, ahistorical attitudes toward those who do (eat or get eaten). (Sampanikou & Stasienco, 2021, 161)

### **Jaime del Val and the Metahuman Futures Manifesto**

The new manifesto by Jaime Del Val is the “decisive moment” of Metahumanism.<sup>3</sup> Developed twelve years after the first Metahuman Manifesto by Del Val and Sorgner (2010) it contains the core of the transformation of Metahumanism to an open theory of natural philosophy through the re-estimation of the body and movement. The text was discussed in a small assembly of scholars in the 2022 MFF and received a revised form.<sup>4</sup> I will attempt to refer specifically to each one of its ten articles/paragraphs.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2021/11/04/we-have-always-been-cyborgs>

<sup>3</sup> Term coined by Henri Cartier-Bresson for his method of photography.

<sup>4</sup> See the Metahuman Futures Manifesto in this issue.



In the first article, Del Val analyzes and condemns the concept and content of “Humanity,” a term bearing the *superior* connotation of humans as a distinct species having the right to enslave and lead to the extinction of all other species and of course themselves. Del Val also raises the issue of the overmultiplication of humans considering it crucial for the “eco social collapse.” “Human Supremacism” turns this into a major issue against the well-being of the planet, as all disasters (climate change or the pandemic) are related to this notion of supremacism. My argument is mainly based not on supremacy but on numbers as the expansion of population is not similar in all parts of the world and it could start a rather dangerous discussion.

In his second article, Del Val defines the human expansion period in the last 10,000 years adding a new hypothesis: it is not only the overpopulation but also farming and agricultural practices. The “Neolithic revolution”, the term used in Archaeology for defining the origin point of agriculture and farming is criticized by Del Val as the origin of extinction in ways that are discussed in the next articles. The Neolithic revolution is the far ancestor of capitalism, industrialization, and much later digitization. Archaeologists would agree with the idea that agriculture and farming have also been the origin of ownership, power, pollution, and animal sacrifice. I agree that this thousands-of-years-long exploitation of the planet is, according to Del Val, “destabilizing the terrestrial ecosystem and its climate” and we need to put forth other possibilities. In his book *Affluence Without Abundance* the anthropologist James Suzman (2019) underlines the different approaches to the earth’s products between farmers and hunter–gatherer populations in Africa:

Farming communities across Africa think about the environments very differently from hunter-gatherers...A farmer’s job is to persuade his land to conjure up reliable harvests of yams, wheat, or any of the thousand species that have been carefully selected by his ancestors over generations. But to do so requires that the farmer engage with and think about a landscape in a way that a hunter-gatherer doesn’t. whereas a hunter-gatherer finds something, the farmer must produce it. To the hunter–gatherer an environment is autonomously productive...For a farmer, however, a landscape left to its own devices is only potentially productive (Suzmann, 2019, 104-105).

Suzman *does not* exclude hunting from gathering as a gathering-focused behavior is not met in any of the African tribes that actually continue a prehistoric way of living as archaeologists also have concluded. The archaeological evidence is plentiful. Peter Rowley-Conwy offers us an overview of Sahlins’ OAS (Original Affluent Society) and underlines Binford’s division in *foragers* and *collectors* (Rowley-Conwy, 2009, 40-41) before unfolding his own four-fold typology (*Ibid*, 42) and addressing theories on the notion of complexity that grows by the gradual leaving of the hunter-gatherer stage.<sup>5</sup> Population control should have been a priority to hunter-gatherers and Rowley-Conwy even discusses allusions of possible *infanticide* (*Ibid*, 47) while he clearly favors the *adaptational* theories against the *progressivist* ones:

“Most hunter-gatherers who became farmers have done so as the result of stimuli from agricultural neighbours. Hunter-gatherers with no agricultural neighbours originated agriculture very rarely, perhaps only three or four times - empirical evidence for the low likelihood of such an event occurring... In 10,000 years, agriculture and its outcomes have come to dominate the world. Agricultural economies, despite catastrophes and reversals,

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<sup>5</sup> A term first coined in 1968 by Sahlins (1968, 85) to describe hunter-gatherers and presume their “low standard of living”. The volume in which the specific chapter was included bore the characteristic name *Man the Hunter* contradicted another volume’s title Frances Dahlberg’s (1983) *Woman the Gatherer*. The discussion on stereotypes and archaeology is not supposed to take place here.

can usually be intensified: new animals can be domesticated, ploughs can be made more effective, locally adapted crops such as oats can be added, animals can provide traction and other secondary products, transport and redistribution systems can be improved, pests controlled, industrial fertilisers produced, and crops genetically modified. Hunter-gatherer economies were not like this.” (*Ibid*, 64)

Finally, Rowley-Conwy concludes that: “From this perspective the flexibility, mobility and social equality of the Original Affluent Society may be the most remarkable and specialised social form that humans have ever evolved. It has no claim to be the original human condition” (*Ibid*, 65). According to Suzman, farming is a bargain that involves work and also some luck, while hunter-gatherers preserve the feeling of a “parent” earth that provides for all (2019, 105). Apart from the fact that this feeling should very quickly have led to the formation of religion, Suzmann remarks that in later times both populations tend to pollute, with an emphasis on farming practices and especially after the recent development of tourism (Suzmann 2019, 107-108).

The third article deals with the collapse of the human organism and body-mind health due to human attachment to mechanized systems (from transportation to daily chores) leading the human body to atrophy (we are weaker than our ancestors) and our minds to a relation of dependence from algorithms. This article has been an apocalypse to me realizing my own deficiencies without ‘machines’ remembering the eighties’ anarchist motto: “your civilization comes to an end when electricity goes off.”<sup>6</sup> “Regaining and reinventing the moving body away from all dominant ontologies” is what Jaime del Val proposes in the third article (MFF 2022 Lesvos Assembly-Chorus, 2022). I couldn’t agree more. The core meaning of this article lies in the following quotation however:

We propose a Metahuman turn: a radical movement philosophy and pragmatics that accounts for the endless modes of life-fostering intelligence in non-humans and non-dominant humans of *life as symbiosis and variation* based on quantum fluctuation [...] a metahuman mutation of the atrophied dominant species in order to relearn to move with the world and not against it, embracing indeterminacy, mutual aid, empathy, and care.” (MFF 2022 Lesvos Assembly-Chorus, 2022)

The notions of *symbiosis* and *variation*, as well as the notion of *care*, are to me the most appealing terms that could ever be found in *A Metahuman Futures Manifesto*.

While the fourth article is a polemic against “conservative fanatics of all types, nationalists, fascists, religious and others, including transhumanists”, the fifth article concentrates on a crucial message: what can be done with overpopulation? Recognizing it as inseparable from the colonization problem leading humans to a final self-extinction, Jaime del Val suggests that “We need a discussion that exposes the complexity of the problem and of the possible necessary responses to it”, thus, bringing up the debate of the obligatory reproduction in specific cultural contexts with strong beliefs to family values and the need for the nation to grow and the oppression of human beings especially women to offer their bodies for reproductive exploitation against their own will. *Antinatalism* is what emerges from this article, mainly as it is expressed in one of the most recent works of Benatar who defends anti-natalism on a general basis of existential (and partly political) ethics according to which those who are born are supposed to cause major harm to other human and non-human animals (Benatar 2015, 35-37, 55) and the environment, e.g. polluting it by consumption (Benatar 2015, 48).

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<sup>6</sup> A phrase often appearing as graffiti on the walls of Athens in the eighties and nineties.



It also mainly involves environmental ethics and the way Hedberg (2020, 3) approaches the overpopulation problem and its overwhelming impact on the environment.

Del Val suggests a reconsideration of the above, “exposing the need to change the human programme of multiplication to one of care for each other and the Earth, and promoting new modes of kinship, including queer and transspecies kinships” (MFF 2022 Lesvos Assembly-Chorus, 2022). The content of article six lies in the introduction of planetary rights instead of human rights and a decent living for the whole ecosystem, while the seventh article focuses on “individual autonomy” and a “non-paternalistic relational ethics”. These two articles are important for re-discussing human ethics under a new inclusive view for ecosystems, not only for societies.

Article eight is returning to the issue of farming as one of the “biggest killing machines” and an industry of pollution. In this article Del Val meets Nietzsche and his reference to the worst crime ever, “the crime against the Earth”. The article brings forth another discussion, the discussion on veganism that is openly implied here and is a basic part of Jaime del Val’s personal attitude in life. I believe that veganism has been on the table for years as a new practice of reconciliation to nature and terms should definitely be discussed as possibilities and adaptation abilities for humans. I believe that two are the main factors for such a choice: respect for animal life (Haraway 2021, 161) and a new approach to animal genocide; however, it cannot be imposed on all humans because it would be considered to be an authoritarian method of respecting any life as it cannot be imposed to all animals, the carnivorous ones for example. This is a discussion that could probably lead us to authors like Martinetti (2019) and his wonderful work, *The Soul of the Animals*, originally included in his 1926 book *Saggi e discorsi*, which set the initial question of whether the step from the anthropocentric paradigm towards a new concept of otherness could ever be enough.

For Martinetti, “In Cartesian school the automation of animals turned into a form of dogma which practically led to indifference towards their abuse” (2019, 46). Also, “When we refer to the life of the psyche of the animals, the first word we end up with is ‘instinct’. Human life is (or should be directed from *logos* (λόγος)” (*Ibid*, 68) Martinetti strongly believes in “animal intelligence” as an inclusive concept for all human and non-human animals: “...if we put the question ‘does the animal bear intelligence?’ we should definitely answer ‘without any doubt’. Intelligence starts with the dawn of the animal life.” (*Ibid*, 89)<sup>7</sup>

The ninth article is for once more discussing *symbiosis* that tends to be a central term in Jaime del Val’s theory. Del Val underlines the need for all to “invent new symbiotic ways of living, perhaps as renewal of gatherer cultures, learning from all non-humans and their architectures, moving with the flows of the Earth and not against them” (MFF 2022 Lesvos Assembly-Chorus, 2022).

The article describes a rising trend in contemporary architecture to consider the architectural ways of non-human animals (like birds, spiders, or beavers) as harmonically adapted to ecosystems and also a rising trend in contemporary Archaeology and Anthropology to think about gatherer societies in terms of a better living on the planet. It is also related to a reconsideration of “work” as an enslaving process imposed on humans and the need to think about freedom and leisure (Suzman 2020, 14-16).

Strategy and the politics of openness and joy are the main focus of the final tenth article. Strategies for “an unprecedented transformation, a general disalignment, a planetary regeneration, and also an unprecedented fight” in Del Val’s own words, by activating “systemic resistances against all systemic

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<sup>7</sup>All the excerpts are according to the translated Greek publication.

reduction in all manner and scale, including intervention in institutional and traditional politics as well as new experiential politics movement”.

Del Val’s new *Manifesto* is offered as a *pharmakon* to the planet, part of a new pharmacology of existence harmonized with Ionian (Markopoulou 2022, 34-35) and contemporary philosophy that stresses the responsibility of the university towards this new form of education as a *pharmakon* of the “noetic soul” (Stiegler 2015/17, 30), a *pharmakon* against human stupidity (Stiegler 2015/17, 33).

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