

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF TRANSHUMANISM
AND POSTHUMANISM IN THE TEXTUAL REALITY
BY JOHN WYNDHAM “COMPASSION CIRCUIT”**

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INTRODUCTION

The deep integration of technology into the fabric of objective reality, alongside with the rapid emergence of a virtual sphere that mirrors and reconfigures human existence, has profoundly destabilized the boundary between the human and the nonhuman. The late XXth and early XXIst centuries witnessed a paradigmatic upheaval in humanity's self-conception, as evolving frameworks of self-awareness, ethics, politics, science, and the nature of life itself disrupted entrenched notions of human identity. In earlier epochs, particularly in the late XIXth and XXth centuries, science fiction grappled with the binary opposition between “human beings and machines” as a thematic concern. Yet, the integration of intelligent machines into the mundane realities of daily life, beginning in the early 2000s, rendered these binaries increasingly untenable. This shift in understanding, which fundamentally questions and redefines the essence of humanity, has come to be encapsulated under the paradigm of *posthumanism*.

The themes of dehumanization and the human experience within a technocultural context emerged in literature long before the era of cyberspace. These ideas were explored in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, H.G. Wells's depiction of techno-evolutionary horror in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), the existential Golden Age humanism of Cordwainer Smith's *Scanners Live in Vain* (1948), and Philip K. Dick's exploration of fractured realities in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). James Tiptree Jr.'s ironic feminist tale, *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* (1973), dramatized the concept of gender as a form of technology, while William Gibson's cyberpunk landmark, *Neuromancer* (1984), and Constance Ash's post-cyberpunk anthology, *Not of Woman Born* (1999), expanded these explorations. Later, Greg Egan's *Schild's Ladder* (2001) introduced postbiological subjects, envisioning a reality beyond human biology. The radical offspring of these ideas have since been vividly reimagined in post-millennium fiction.

In 1985, Donna Haraway's “*A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*” challenged the idea of fixed boundaries, particularly those dividing “human” from “animal” and

“human” from “machine.” Haraway asserted that the cyborg rejects traditional notions of community rooted in the concept of the organic family and is unbound by the constraints of the Oedipal narrative. It does not identify with the myth of the Garden of Eden, being neither formed from earth nor destined to return to it¹.

Marge Piercy’s *He, She, and It* (1991) draws from Haraway’s cyborg theory and Gibson’s cyberspace metaphor to depict a near-future where boundaries between (post)humans and intelligent machines are increasingly blurred². Haraway’s vision of the cyborg challenges the traditional, unified notion of the human self. Similarly, the concept of a hive-mind alien-cyborg collective, introduced in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, symbolizes the erasure of individuality and agency.

Cory Doctorow’s *I, Row-Boat* (2006) envisions a posthuman future where most humans have uploaded their consciousness into the virtual “noosphere”. Like other post-Singularity works, such as Doctorow’s *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* (2003) and Charles Stross’s *Accelerando* (2005), it explores the transformative possibilities of humanity in a radically different future, echoing Greg Egan’s fascination with posthuman evolution.

The XXIst century has also brought a concept of *anthropological transition*, linked to the idea of the 4th technical revolution aimed at the human beings. It refers to a shift or transformation in the way humans relate to themselves, their societies, and the world around them. This transition can be viewed from multiple lenses, including cultural, social, biological, and technological perspectives, and it often refers to a significant change in the human experience, typically driven by internal or external forces.

The pre-requisites of the anthropological transition include transformative processes in different areas of our being: 1) *Cultural Evolution* (This involves changes in cultural practices, values, beliefs, and societal norms. Anthropological transitions have been particularly evident during transformative periods such as the Agricultural Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Digital Age. As societies progress, cultural frameworks and behaviors are profoundly altered to accommodate new technological advancements, environmental conditions, and shifts in social organization); 2) *Technological Impact* (In contemporary anthropological transitions, technology is a central driving force. The advancement of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology is reshaping human identity, cognition, and social interaction); 3) *Biological and Genetic Modifications* (Anthropological transition can also encompass biological changes, whether

¹ Haraway D.J. A Manifesto for Cyborgs: science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s. *Socialist Review*. 1985. № 80. Pp. 65–107.

² Piercy M. *He, She, and It*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1993. 448 p.

resulting from natural evolution or scientific interventions like genetic engineering. Ideas such as transhumanism investigate how technology could transform human biology, improving or altering physical and mental abilities. Meanwhile, posthumanism envisions the future of humanity as it evolves or merges with other life forms, potentially transcending our biological roots); 4) *Social and Economic Structures* (A transition in societal organization and the way individuals interact with one another, often shaped by economic systems, power structures, and resource allocation. This shift may be prompted by new governance models, changes in economic systems (such as the shift from capitalism to socialism, or the rise of digital economies), or transformations in social structures and interpersonal relationships); 5) *Philosophical and Ethical Slides* (Entails a reevaluation of human ethics, moral frameworks, and identity. As humans adapt to technological progress or changes in societal values, concepts such as personhood, consciousness, and moral responsibility may be redefined. Philosophical inquiries into the nature of humanity and the ethical consequences of integrating technology are key aspects of this discourse).³ Thus, at its core, anthropological transition refers to the changes in the human condition, both physical and mental, as societies progress and individuals interact with emerging technologies, philosophies, and new ways of perceiving the human being and the world around them.

Literature, as a reflection of objective reality, both draws inspiration from it and, to some degree, anticipates its future. Best and Kellner emphasize the deeply alienating effects of modern technoscience, observing that recent developments in science and technology are increasingly erasing the boundary between science fiction and reality. Examples they highlight include lunar and Martian landings, genetic engineering, tissue regeneration, cloning, xenotransplantation, artificial reproductive methods, animal head transplants, advancements in bionics and robotics, and eugenics, all illustrating this convergence⁴.

The metamorphosis of the human reality and its philosophical and ethical consequences are manifested in the text by John Wyndham "*Compassion Circuit*", published in 1956. This a short science fiction story explores themes of technology, humanity, and the evolving relationship between humans and machines – the aspects that find their embodiment in the XXIst-century reality. The text offers rich material for analysis through the yet unapplied lenses of posthumanism and transhumanism, both of which explore the issues of

³ Sahlin M. *The Western Illusion of Human Nature: With Reflections on the Long History of Hierarchy, Equality and the Sublimation of Anarchy in the West, and Comparative Notes on Other Conceptions of the Human Condition*. Prickly Paradigm Press, 2008.

⁴ Best S., Kellner D. *The Postmodern Adventure: science, technology, and cultural studies at the third millennium*. New York: Guilford Press, 2001. p. 103.

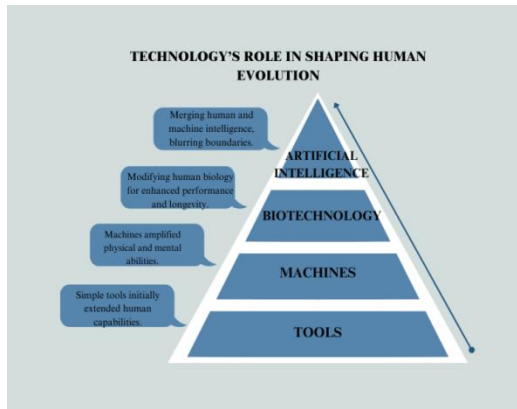
humanity, technology, and identity. In the focus of the present investigation is the anthropological transition and the philosophy of transhumanism and posthumanism ingrained in the fictional reality of “*Compassion Circuit*” by John Wyndham and suggesting a range of semantic levels of the text architecture.

1. Posthuman studies and the philosophy of transhumanism

In the Earth history, technology has always shaped human evolution. The influence of technology on human evolution is a common motif in mythology, representing early efforts to comprehend human progress and the tools they created. Myths frequently portray technology as a sacred gift, a testament to human creativity, or a dual-edged force that fosters both advancement and risk. In Greek mythology, Prometheus stands as a pivotal figure who gifts humanity with fire, stolen from the gods. Fire represents the birth of technological progress, empowering humans to prepare food, craft tools, and build civilizations. Yet, this act incurs divine retribution, underscoring the dangers and obligations tied to harnessing powerful innovations. In Hindu mythology, divine weapons and tools, like those in the *Mahabharata*, symbolize both divine favor and the ethical challenges of their use in warfare and societal progress. Myths often honor technology as a testament to human ingenuity, presenting inventors as heroes or demigods. In Norse mythology, the dwarves’ craftsmanship yields legendary artifacts like Thor’s hammer and Odin’s spear, representing mastery over nature and societal advancement. Similarly, in Chinese mythology, the Yellow Emperor is credited with innovations like farming tools, medicine, and the compass, shaping civilization while reflecting the transformative power of invention. Some myths suggest that technology reshapes human identity, as seen in Egyptian mythology with Thoth’s invention of writing, revolutionizing knowledge and memory, and in Greek mythology with Daedalus, whose creations empower humanity to transcend limits but also highlight the risks of overreach. Myths underscore the double-edged nature of technological advancement, praising innovation while cautioning against its risks. The Tower of Babel exemplifies the peril of arrogance and overambition, resulting in disorder, while Pandora’s Box reveals how sophisticated creations can bring unexpected challenges to humanity⁵.

Historically, the technology’s role in shaping human evolution can be expressed graphically:

⁵ Cotterel A. The Encyclopedia of World Mythology. Lorenz Books. 512 p.



Pyramid 1. Technology's Role in Shaping Human Evolution

Posthumanism, meaning “after humanism” or “beyond humanism”, is a concept rooted in continental philosophy and critical theory, arising as a critique of anthropocentrism prevalent in XXIst-century thought. Matthew Gladden describes posthumanization as the process of incorporating entities beyond “natural” biological humans into societal frameworks, dynamics, or meanings.

In literature, biologically modified “posthumans” have become a prevalent theme in science fiction. Initially characterized as threatening beings or Nietzschean superhumans, these genetically altered individuals are increasingly depicted as ordinary people navigating unconventional personal challenges.

The branches of posthuman studies include the following areas:

1. *Antihumanism* – the theory critiques traditional perspectives on humanity and the human condition, rejecting ideas like “human nature,” “man,” or “humanity” as being historically relative, ideological, or metaphysical constructs.

2. *Cultural Posthumanism* – a branch of cultural theory that examines the core assumptions of humanism, questioning historical ideas of “human” and “human nature.” It often challenges conventional views of human subjectivity and embodiment, advocating for concepts that adapt to contemporary technoscientific advancements.

3. *Philosophical Posthumanism* – the movement seeks to further dismantle the human-centric worldview critiqued by Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. It challenges humanist assumptions in Western philosophy, science, and art, integrating insights from quantum theory, chaos theory, cybernetics, and technological innovations. Ihab Hassan introduced the term

“posthumanism” in his 1977 essay *Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?* Philosophers like Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles, and Francesca Ferrando have expanded on this field. Ferrando, in her book *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019), identifies transhumanism as an expression of posthumanist philosophy.

4. *Posthuman Condition* – this multifaceted concept encompasses two central ideas: a) humans evolving into posthumans through technological fusion, often linked to cultural posthumanism; b) the emergence of a new form of posthuman life, surpassing humanity due to technological transformation, as seen in transhumanism, hyperhumanism, or speculative posthumanism.

5. *Posthuman transhumanism* – positioned as a “cure” for posthumanism, this theory rejects humanism and advocates for a cultural shift beyond its foundational ideas. Transhumanism seeks technological enhancement of humanity, including moral consideration for animals and plants. Critics argue that transhumanism continues the Enlightenment ideals of humanism and classical liberalism, perpetuating scientism.

6. *AI Takeover* – a recurring theme in science fiction, this concept explores the possibility of artificial intelligence surpassing humanity as the dominant intelligent species on Earth. Cultural references include *The Terminator* and *The Matrix*.

7. *Voluntary Human Extinction* – this environmental movement promotes the idea of humanity abstaining from reproduction, leading to the gradual and voluntary extinction of the human species.⁶

The Posthuman concept does not signify the end of humanity; instead, it challenges the traditional understanding of what it means to be human. Robert Pepperell argues that current developments in artificial intelligence, organic computing, and genetic engineering present significant challenges to the idea of human superiority. These advancements provoke deep concerns about the potential dangers of technology that could surpass our comprehension or control. There is recognition that we have the capability to create entities that might rival or even exceed human abilities, raising serious questions about the possibility of replicating human-like cognitive traits in non-human forms. While this idea sparks considerable fear, it also represents a highly sought-after goal in computer science. Despite the significant challenges, the creation of an artificially conscious being could become a reality in our lifetimes, leading to questions about whether such an entity would have emotions similar to humans and possess self-awareness.

Posthumanism assumes that human beings are embodied in an extended technological world.

⁶ Haraway D.J. A Manifesto for Cyborgs: science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s. *Socialist Review*. 1985. № 80. Pp. 65–107.

The *Posthuman Manifesto*, voiced by Robert Pepperell, proclaims:

1. It is increasingly apparent that humans no longer occupy the central position in the cosmos that they once assumed. Yet, this recognition is one that humanists still find difficult to fully accept.

2. Every technological breakthrough within human civilization is driven by the desire to transform the condition of humanity, to reshape our species into something different, or perhaps, something more.

3. In the Posthuman age, many long-held convictions, including the very notion of human exceptionalism, begin to lose their relevance and vitality.

4. Human existence, much like that of the divine, is contingent upon our belief in it – without our affirmation, it risks becoming meaningless.

5. The future, by its nature, is always beyond our grasp, ever distant, an endless deferral of fulfillment.

6. While human beings are not born into equal circumstances, it is a dangerous illusion to ignore the inherent idea of equality that should govern our understanding of them.

7. In the Posthuman epoch, machines will transcend their role as mere tools, shedding their status as objects and emerging as entities with their own significance.

8. It is an inherent flaw of human nature that we seek validation from others for truths we already know. Only when voiced by another do we allow ourselves to believe.

9. Posthumanist thought resists the idea of an ideal society. They regard economic and political ideologies as ultimately futile, comparable to attempts at predicting the unpredictable forces of nature.

10. One must learn to navigate the waves of existence, for while you cannot control them, you can find the rhythm of their motion and ride them.

11. We have come to a profound understanding: human knowledge, creativity, and intellect are, at their core, finite, bounded by limits we can no longer ignore.

12. Complex machines are beginning to emerge as a new form of life, not in the biological sense, but as entities capable of evolution in their own way.

13. A complex machine is one whose internal workings defy full comprehension or control, an entity that exceeds our current understanding.

14. As machines become more like humans, so too do humans begin to resemble machines, adapting in ways we have yet to fully grasp.

15. If we are capable of conceiving of machines, then the possibility arises that those machines could possess the capacity to think; and in imagining

machines that reflect upon their existence, we must confront the notion that such machines may one day reflect upon us⁷.

Posthumanist theorists highlight two primary ethical concerns: a) the declining moral status of humans as non-human entities emerge; b) the diminishing value of humanity in light of socioeconomic transformations.

In fictional works, three distinct approaches can be identified:

1. Writers who seek to redefine human identity by placing humans within a technology-driven reality that diminishes the importance of the biological body and the immediacy of human experience.

2. Those who speculate on how technology-mediated culture will shape the development of posthuman identity.

3. Authors who compare humans to organically designed, anthropomorphic androids, exploring the boundaries between human and machine.

Transhumanism, on the other hand, emphasizes augmenting human abilities through technological advancements to overcome biological constraints; seeks to enhance human life while remaining within the boundaries of traditional human identity; and strives to tackle issues such as aging, illness, and cognitive or physical limitations by leveraging innovations in fields like artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and nanotechnology. Within its philosophical perspective, transhumanism is optimistic and progress-focused, grounded in humanism, and emphasizes ethical responsibility in leveraging technology to improve the human condition. Transhumanism sees technology as a means to achieve immortality, superintelligence, and enhanced bodies through innovations like brain-computer interfaces, life-extension, and genetic modification. According to temporal outlook, transhumanism is focused on the near future, leveraging technologies like CRISPR for genetic edits and AI for cognitive advancement. Ethically, transhumanism promotes the ethical use of technology for humanity's benefit while addressing concerns about inequality, accessibility, and unintended outcomes, emphasizing individuality and self-improvement⁸.

Prominent Figures in Transhumanism include: Nick Bostrom, philosopher and director of the Future of Humanity Institute, author of *Superintelligence* (2014); Ray Kurzweil, futurist and proponent of the Singularity, author of *The Singularity Is Near* (2005); Aubrey de Grey, biomedical gerontologist focused on life extension; and Max More, founder of the modern transhumanist movement and advocate for cryonics.

⁷ Pepperell R., Punt M. *The Postdigital Membrane: Imagination, Technology and Desire*. Bristol: Intellect, 2000.

⁸ Graham E.L. *Representations of the Post/Human: monsters, aliens and others in popular culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Thus, transhumanism is a philosophical and intellectual movement promoting the use of science and technology to improve the human condition, overcome biological limitations, and enhance physical and cognitive abilities. It examines the ethical, philosophical, and societal impacts of emerging technologies and their potential to reshape humanity. Many religious perspectives view transhumanist goals as conflicting with spiritual beliefs about the sanctity of natural human life and death.

To summarize the differences between *Posthumanism* and *Transhumanism* the following table can be suggested:

Table 1

Transhumanism vs Posthumanism.			
№	ASPECT	TRANSHUMANISM	POSTHUMANISM
1	Core Focus	Enhancing human abilities.	Exploring existence beyond humanity.
2	Philosophical Perspective	Optimistic, rooted in humanism.	Critical, challenges anthropocentrism.
3	Relation to Technology	Tool for improvement.	Means of redefining identity and boundaries.
4	Timeframe	Present and near future.	Long-term, post-human future.
5	Ethical Lenses	Individual and human-centric.	Ecological and non-human-inclusive.
6	Practical Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cryonics to preserve life for future revival. – Neural implants for cognitive augmentation. – Efforts to eradicate aging through biotechnology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Theoretical exploration of merging human consciousness with AI. – Philosophical works exploring a world without human dominance. – Depictions of post-human societies in science fiction, such as hive minds or fully digital beings.

Therefore, transhumanism deals with enhancing human capabilities through technology, aiming for a future where humans transcend biological limitations, while the posthumanism as a philosophical movement challenges traditional human-centric views, recognizing the emergence of new forms of being.

2. The Posthuman and Transhuman intertext in the work by John Wyndham "*Compassion Circuit*".

The term *Intertextuality* was coined on the basis of Western post-structuralism. In the 1970s, an American critic, Harold Bloom, described the intertextual relationships between the major writers as a history of creative misreadings within a great dialogue between generations, in which the "sons" reply to the questions asked by the "*fathers*". Such replicas-answers that revise the tradition can represent a deviation from a trend, selected by the predecessors (*clinamen*), or can provide an antithetical addition to the trend (*tesserae*), or embody total destruction of the connections with the trend (*kenosis*), or purification (*askesis*), or a fracture with some unpredictable consequences (*demonization*), or a paradoxical return to the once-lost original sense (*apophasis*). All this turns a poetic tradition into an endless chain of fights between the successors and their predecessors.⁹

Contemporary literary studies explore various forms of intertextuality, including the author's worldview, external structures of the text, internal meaning levels, the reader's interpretative role, and analytical approaches. Common intertextual techniques in texts include quoted thought patterns, internal monologues, stylistic uniqueness, autobiographical influences, the dialogic nature of language, fragmented writing, codification, borrowing, allusion, manipulation of popular or traditional themes, plagiarism, explicit or hidden quotations, collage, periphrasis, translation, imitation, parody, and puns. The specific way intertextuality manifests, whether direct or indirect, dynamic or fixed, influences the selection of intertextual elements like quotations, stylization, reminiscences (drawing on specific cultural, historical, or philosophical contexts), and allusions (metatextual references).

In John Wyndham's "*Compassion Circuit*", various forms of intertextuality are evident, where texts reference, reframe, or integrate elements from other works, genres, or cultural contexts. The theme of technological evolution reshaping human nature in "*Compassion Circuit*" aligns with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which investigates the ethical ramifications of scientific advancement and the act of creation. Both texts share a critique of technology's role in challenging and potentially transforming the human condition, similar to the way Frankenstein's creature interrogates the essence of life and humanity.

The speculative elements and dystopian undertones of "*Compassion Circuit*" resonate with works by authors such as George Orwell (1984) and Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*). These texts critically examine the societal implications of technological advancements, often portraying negative consequences of technological influence on human freedom and societal

⁹ Bloom H. A Map of Misreading. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

structures. Additionally, the narrative draws on themes found in works like *Brave New World*, which critiques how technological control can manipulate both social structures and individual emotional states, highlighting the psychological effects of technological intervention in human lives.

However, in case with John Wyndham, we do not always speak of traditional intertextual phenomenon. In many aspects his short story can be viewed from the point of *Proleptic intertextuality*, the term that describes a situation where an earlier work seems to “predict” themes, motifs, or ideas found in later works. It assumes a future-oriented engagement with a literary tradition. The narrative’s engagement with technology’s impact on human emotions and capabilities bears resemblance to philosophical explorations in works such as Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* and Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* These authors investigate the fluid boundaries between human and machine, a motif that echoes in Wyndham’s portrayal of technological transformations altering human identity and experience. The domestic robot Hester and her ill owner Janet exchange the following ideas: “*and unhappiness, and weariness, that we have to be taught to understand, and they don’t seem to us to be useful things to have. I feel very sorry that you must have these things and be so uncertain and so fragile. It disturbs my compassion-circuit.*” // “*Uncertain and fragile,*” Janet repeated. “*Yes, that’s how I feel.*” // “*Humans have to live so precariously,*” Hester went on. “*If my arm or leg should be crushed I can have a new one in a few minutes. But a human would have agony for a long time, and not even a new limb at the end of it – just a faulty one, if he were lucky. That isn’t as bad as it used to be because in designing us you learned how to make good arms and legs, much stronger and better than the old ones. People would be much more sensible to have a weak arm or leg replaced at once, but they don’t seem to want to if they can possibly keep the old ones.*”¹⁰ The dialogue touches the very core of humanity – their body. Does substitution of some body parts by machine make the human being stronger or symbolizes the transition into a posthuman substance. The question of the body is a theistic one, since both the *Bible* and the pagan religions represent the human being as a reflection of the divine embodiment: “*Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*”¹¹

¹⁰ Wyndham, John. Compassion Circuit. URL: <https://www.studocu.com/es-ar/document/universidad-nacional-del-sur/ingles-como-lengua-extranjera/j-wyndham-compassion-circuit-orig/51515228>.

¹¹ Genesis 1:26–27 (NIV).

According to Biblical teaching, humans, including their physical and spiritual essence, are modeled after God's likeness. However, it is often interpreted to emphasize the moral, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of being 'in God's image,' rather than the physical form itself. In mythology, there are several narratives that express the idea of humans being created in the likeness or essence of divine beings. Examples include: a) *Greek Mythology* (Prometheus), which says that Prometheus shaped humans out of clay, imbuing them with life and knowledge. Although it does not explicitly state humans are made "in the image of the gods," the act of divine creation by Prometheus reflects a god-like intention and influence in human design; b) *Norse Mythology* (Ask and Embla), which states that the first humans, Ask and Embla, were created by the gods Odin, Vili, and Ve from trees (ash and elm, respectively). The gods gave them physical form and divine qualities such as spirit and intellect; c) *Mesopotamian Mythology* (Enuma Elish), represented by the Babylonian creation myth, which suggest that humans were created by the gods (notably Marduk) from clay mixed with the blood of a slain god, Kingu, to serve the divine. This narrative highlights a physical and spiritual link between humans and the gods. While these myths do not specifically mention humans being created "in the image of gods," they reflect a divine origin for humanity, often implying a special connection or likeness to the divine. In both *the Bible* and mythology, creation stories elevate humanity by linking them to the divine realm, emphasizing a shared essence or purpose.

The other tools linked to the phenomenon of continuity in the text embrace the following three: a) *Prefiguration*, when the earlier work could be seen as prefiguring or foreshadowing the concerns of later periods; b) *Intellectual continuity*, when the ideas in the earlier text may reflect intellectual or cultural currents of the time, which later writers draw upon, consciously or unconsciously; c) *Thematic or conceptual echoes*, when later works echo the themes, ideas, or questions posed in the earlier text, forming an indirect connection rather than a deliberate reference. Wyndham's contemplation of the ethical consequences of technological integration into human society mirrors the moral inquiries in mid-XXth-century science fiction, particularly in Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot*. Asimov's works address ethical quandaries surrounding artificial intelligence and robotics, much like Wyndham's interrogation of technological influence on human behavior. The dialogue between Haster as a domestic robot and Janet, her owner, deal with the aspect of imperfection of the human body vs robotic endurance. On the other hand, there it is also linked to the thought of infusion of a soul or spirit into a non-human object, endowing a machine with human-like sensitivity: "*Oh, no!*"

Janet protested. *"It can't be just that. You've a heart somewhere, Hester. You must have."* // *"I expect it is more reliable than a heart," said Hester.*¹²

The philosophy of John Wyndham's *"Compassion Circuit"* approached to the ideas native to the theory of *posthumanism* and *transhumanism*. *"Compassion Circuit"* deals with the interaction between humans and a machine designed to provide comfort: *"Practically every house she visited had a domestic robot. It was the family's second or third most valuable possession, the women tending to rate it slightly higher than the car, the men, slightly lower"*.¹³ Posthumanism is concerned with the dissolution of the clear-cut distinction between human and machine: *"And, anyway, Hester was no ordinary robot. She was not even dressed as a parlormaid any more. In four months she had become a friend, a tireless, attentive friend. From the first Janet had found it difficult to believe that she was only a mechanism, and as the days passed she had become more and more of a person. The fact that she consumed electricity instead of food came to seem little more than a foible"*.¹⁴ The machine in the story, which replicates or enhances human empathy and compassion, raises questions about the essence of humanity – if machines can embody and even simulate human emotions, does that alter our understanding of what makes us human?

Posthumanism often critiques humanism's focus on human-centered ethics, consciousness, and individualism. The *"Compassion Circuit"* shows how technology can reshape or even surpass these human-centered ideals. The machine's ability to elicit compassion challenges the supremacy of human emotional experience, suggesting a shift in how society views empathy and human interaction. On the other hand, the story shows how machine-like precise, emotionless and cold the decisions of a robot, remaking its owners into half-machines with a human head can be: *"She did not try to move him, but went to the telephone and dialled. // "Emergency?" she asked, and gave the name and address. "Yes, at once," she told them. "There may not be a lot of time. Several compound fractures, and I think his back is broken, poor man... No. There appears to be no damage to his head... Yes, much better. He'd be crippled for life, even if he did get over it... Yes, better send the form of consent with the ambulance so that it can be signed at once... Oh, yes, that'll be quite all right. His wife will sign it."*¹⁵ The posthumanist lens suggests that the future of humanity may involve blending or merging with machines, not necessarily in a dystopian sense, but as part of an evolution

¹² Wyndham, John. *Compassion Circuit*. URL: <https://www.studocu.com/es-ar/document/universidad-nacional-del-sur/ingles-como-lengua-extranjera/j-wyndham-compassion-circuit-orig/51515228>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

toward something different. In Wyndham's work, the machine is not depicted as a threat or a tool of domination; rather, it plays a supportive role in enhancing human interactions. This aligns with posthumanism's consideration of a future where technology augments rather than diminishes humanity.

However, the text of the short story by Wyndham also bears transhuman concepts. In "*Compassion Circuit*," the machine acts as a technological extension of human empathy, offering a vision of transhumanist potential. Transhumanism advocates for the use of technology to enhance human experience, whether through cognitive augmentation, physical enhancements, or, as seen here, emotional and psychological support. The story hints at the possibility of a future where human emotional responses could be amplified or modified by technology, potentially leading to more effective or even universal compassion: "*The hospital reception-robot looked up from the desk. // 'My wife,' George said. 'I rang you up about an hour ago.'*" // *The robot's face took on an impeccable expression of professional sympathy.*"¹⁶

Transhumanism also embraces the idea that human beings can transcend biological limitations, and this is visible in the machine's ability to modify emotional experiences. The device in the story represents an attempt to improve the human condition, specifically by addressing emotional or psychological needs in ways that traditional human interaction cannot. The story could be read as an exploration of the possibility of overcoming human frailties through technological means. Janet, the robot's owner, being deadly sick, acquires a new life through the technological modification, which is impossible to comprehend by her husband: "*I say, darling, your hand's dreadfully cold. It's almost like – 'His fingers slid further up her arm. His eyes widened at her, incredulously. He jumped up suddenly from the bed and flung back the covers. He put his hand on the thin nightdress, over her heart – and then snatched it away as if he had been stung. // 'God! NO!' he said, staring at her'*"¹⁷. Thus, a central issue in transhumanist discourse is the ethics of enhancing or altering human nature through technology. "*Compassion Circuit*" introduces this dilemma subtly – while the machine seems to offer positive outcomes (empathy and comfort), it raises questions about whether the authenticity of human emotion can be replicated or surpassed by a machine. Is the compassion it generates still human, or is it something different entirely? This becomes a key concern in transhumanism, which asks whether we can retain our moral and ethical framework while transforming what it means to be human. Altogether, where is the fringe between human

¹⁶ Wyndham, John. *Compassion Circuit*. URL: <https://www.studocu.com/es-ar/document/universidad-nacional-del-sur/ingles-como-lengua-extranjera/j-wyndham-compassion-circuit-orig/51515228>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

decisions and robotic interference? The story shows that the consent for the transformation wasn't actually an informed choice by Janet and is definitely not her husband's choice: "*Oh, George, I didn't mean it. At least, I don't think I meant it. She sent me, George. I was so weak and wretched. I wanted to be strong. I don't think I really understood. Hester said –*".¹⁸

CONCLUSIONS

John Wyndham's "*Compassion Circuit*" delves into the intricate interplay between human identity and the accelerating momentum of technological innovation, offering fertile ground for scholarly inquiry within the frameworks of posthumanism and transhumanism. The narrative interrogates the limits of what is traditionally deemed "human" by presenting machines capable of emulating emotional depth, thereby unsettling the foundational essence of human nature itself. It highlights the ethical and philosophical questions posed by technological enhancement – an area central to both posthumanist and transhumanist thought. The compassionate machine in the story serves as both a tool for human betterment and a symbol of the larger, ongoing debate about the future of humanity in an increasingly technological world and embodies the idea of threat of transition of a human being into something different, the choice the humanity didn't actually make. The narrative interrogates the capacity of technology to erode or exploit the essence of human dignity, raising profound concerns about its role as a mechanism of control and manipulation. It underscores the necessity of ethical frameworks to navigate the societal implications of an uneven distribution of enhanced capabilities, which could entrench power disparities and redefine the fabric of human relationships. The fusion of human and machine challenges the boundaries of biological identity, inviting reflection on the transformative potential of transcending corporeal limitations. This hybridization blurs the distinction between the organic and the artificial, compelling a reimagining of identity and existence itself within the context of a technologically mediated reality.

SUMMARY

The representation of anthropological transition, posthumanism, and transhumanism in literature reflects humanity's evolving understanding of identity and existence amidst cultural, technological, and biological transformations. Posthumanism critiques human exceptionalism by exploring connections with nonhuman entities and questioning traditional boundaries of the human experience, while transhumanism envisions humanity's transcendence

¹⁸ Wyndham, John. *Compassion Circuit*. URL: <https://www.studocu.com/es-ar/document/universidad-nacional-del-sur/ingles-como-lengua-extranjera/j-wyndham-compassion-circuit-orig/51515228>.

through technological enhancement. These paradigms, often converging and diverging, provide fertile ground for examining ethical, existential, and societal implications of progress. Literature becomes a critical space for exploring these themes, balancing the promises of innovation with questions of inclusivity, equity, and the essence of humanity in a rapidly transforming world. John Wyndham's *"Compassion Circuit"* explores the complex relationship between human identity and technological innovation, offering insights into posthumanist and transhumanist spotlight. The story questions the essence of humanity by depicting machines capable of emotional depth, raising ethical concerns about technological enhancement and its potential to manipulate or exploit. It highlights the societal implications of unequal access to such advancements, which may reshape human relationships and power structures. By blurring the boundaries between human and machine, the narrative invites reflection on hybridization and its transformative potential, compelling a reevaluation of identity and existence in an increasingly technological world.

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