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What is Bioconservatism? Arendt, Habermas, and Fukuyama

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ABSTRACT

In light of the new developments in biotechnologies in recent years and their potentialities for human enhancement, the traditional division between conservative and progressive thinking has acquired new nuances. This article offers a historical examination of *bioconservatism*—the specific kind of conservatism that has developed in response to these technologies, the aim of which is to resist their potential future adverse effects. I differentiate between two types of bioconservatism: the one based on a defense of the anthropological openness of human beings and the conditions that make ethical existence possible (Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas), and the other based on a more traditionally conservative defense of human nature (Francis Fukuyama). By proposing a more concise definition of bioconservatism, this article deepens our understanding of the new conservative responses to the accelerating rate of biotechnological developments and the rise of the intellectual movements of transhumanism and posthumanism.

KEYWORDS

Technology; bioconservatism; conservatism; transhumanism; posthumanism

Introduction

Conservatism has always characterized itself as a reaction to the political left.[1] Whether one dates the origins of conservatism as a specific political movement to the French Revolution,[2] or aims to offer a more nuanced account that emphasizes the underlying continuities within pre- and post-revolutionary conservative thought,[3] it is generally recognized that there is no such thing as a fixed or unchanging form of conservative politics: its nature changes as a result of concrete political situations.[4] This of course in no way suggests that it is useless to enumerate some of the basic traits of conservative thought. Like all political movements and schools of thought, conservatism combines continuity with change that reflects the shifting nature of our political landscapes.[5]

Over the past few decades, a novel strand of conservatism has emerged within academic discussions: *bioconservatism*.[6] Bioconservatism generally refers to a rather dispersed intellectual movement that opposes the idea that human nature should be manipulated by the new biotechnologies. If one takes the reactionary nature of conservatism seriously, then one may legitimately presume that bioconservatism is also

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a specific kind of reaction—a response to novel historical developments and, as such, also a further development of earlier conservative thinking. As a way of thinking and criticizing current forms of technological development and ideas of progress, bioconservatism is inextricably connected to what are today called the philosophies of transhumanism and posthumanism.[7]

One effect of the ever accelerating rate of technological advancement has been the debate between transhumanists and bioconservatives.[8] Several well-known authors have defended the position that human biomodification—as exemplified by genetic engineering and human cloning—poses unforeseeable problems not only for philosophical anthropology but for the major questions concerning society and politics more generally. Among others, several leading thinkers have treated this issue in detail, including Jürgen Habermas in *The Future of Human Nature*, Francis Fukuyama in *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, and Michael J. Sandel in *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*.

Even this short list of names characterizes the heterogeneity of this emerging intellectual movement that combines a major left-wing intellectual like Habermas with a more conservatively oriented thinker like Fukuyama. This internal heterogeneity has been thoroughly documented in previous research. For instance, Nick Bostrom describes it as follows: "People drawn to bioconservatism come from groups that traditionally have had little in common. Right-wing religious conservatives and left-wing environmentalists and anti-globalists have found common causes, for example in their opposition to the genetic modification of humans."[9] In a similar vein, Fukuyama also emphasizes that those who share "moral concerns" about the development of transhumanism constitute a "heterogeneous group," ranging from right-wing Christians defending the sanctity of life to leftists opposed to eugenics.[10]

The purpose of this article is to offer a more concise definition of "bioconservatism" as an emerging intellectual movement. I first provide a historical overview of bioconservatism in recent political theory and philosophy. In doing so, my goal is to understand how and why bioconservatism first emerged as a specific attitude during the second part of the twentieth century, and then continued to develop into a more clearly articulated philosophical position in the early decades of the twenty-first century. In doing so, my purpose is to remedy a specific lack in the existing literature. Despite the growing literature on transhumanism and posthumanism, as well as on genealogies of technological development, there is surprisingly little scholarly literature aimed at defining the specifically "bioconservative" position that arises as a counter-reaction to transhumanism and posthumanism.

Secondly, on the basis of this historical analysis, my aim is to offer a clearer theoretical definition of what bioconservatism entails as a political concept, by focusing on the way this notion changes the dynamics of traditional conservative political thought. To this end, I espouse the following thesis: With the accelerating development of technology—and of the various forms of biotechnology in particular—conservative thinking is confronted by distinctively novel issues on several different frontiers. I argue that the historical development of bioconservatism discloses the gradual attempt to conceptualize and to come to terms with a new biological frontier that marks the intrusion of biotechnology into such realms and forms of life which have thus far been perceived as

central and immutable presuppositions of Western thought. These developments challenge, in particular, the presupposition concerning the universality of human nature.

My ultimate aim is thus to clarify in which way "the politics of biotechnology does not fall into familiar political categories," as Fukuyama notes (*OPF*, 211). To demonstrate the changing nature of conservative thought in its confrontation with the biotechnological revolution, I focus on two thinkers who never identified with conservatism—Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas—both of whom, I argue, offer a novel kind of "bioconservatism." There is an especially interesting continuity between the work of Arendt and Habermas, based on a plea for a communicative vision of politics, anchored on an understanding of human limitations that define what Arendt called "the human condition." This recovery of a "bioconservative" tradition aims to demonstrate in which ways this intellectual trend departs—and, indeed, does so radically—from "traditional" conservatism. In order to contrast Arendt's and Habermas's ideas with a more traditionally grounded vision of bioconservatism, I will compare their positions with those of Fukuyama, whose thought relies on a defense of human nature as the basis of human rights and open societies.

I begin with a historically contextualized examination of Arendt's thought and argue that her political theory of human plurality may be interpreted as an early example of "bioconservatism." I then analyze Habermas's critical reflections on the prospects of liberal eugenics at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Drawing on these analyses, and contrasting Arendt's and Habermas's positions with Fukuyama's, I conclude with reflections on the way in which conservative thought has developed and continues to evolve in response to new technological developments.

Hannah Arendt on Technology

One of the first to utilize the concept of transhumanism was the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley, the brother of Aldous Huxley who was known for his dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932).[11] Huxley's essay collection *New Bottles for New Wine*, published in 1957, opens with an essay entitled "Transhumanism," in which he proposes that we are witnessing the birth of new kind of "cosmic self-awareness." For the first time in history, the human being will become the "managing director of the biggest business of all, the business of evolution." When humans can determine the direction of evolution, everything boils down to achieving the fullest "realization of man's possibilities." Huxley claims that what is at stake is the improvement of the "quality of people, not mere quantity," which is itself a reflection of a fight for "our species as a whole."[12] The essay ends with the following, often-cited statement:

> The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way—but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps transhumanism will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature.[13]

This transcending of the past is described by Huxley as the "real destiny" of mankind.[14] His position represents a sort of a prehistory of "transhumanism" in its more elaborate, current forms.[15] Instead of answering questions of fundamental philosophical importance in detail, Huxley avoids them through his generalizing statements. What does it mean for

the "human species" to "transcend itself"? Why should this be inevitable and nothing less than our "real destiny"? What does "progress" mean in the context of biotechnological interventions? And if human beings now take control of their own evolution as if they were managing "the biggest business of all," does this not transform the very concept of evolution into something entirely different than before?

Already during the latter part of the twentieth century conservative thought developed a specific undercurrent that became more and more critical of the ideas of biomodification and alteration of human nature, as sketched by Huxley and others. In what follows, I examine a historically contemporary and theoretically nuanced counter-position to Huxley's arguments (and to those of other early transhumanists). I propose that Arendt's political theory offers a fruitful framework for parsing the age of transhumanism and its potential threats to action and to natality, or in Arendt's words, "the capacity of beginning something anew."[16] While Arendt's analysis of modern technology has been examined from a broad variety of perspectives,[17] I argue that it provides an interesting example of a peculiar kind of "bioconservatism,"[18] which was later more fully developed by Jürgen Habermas. I discuss Arendt's understanding of the modern entanglement of the human organism and technology by focusing on her *Denktagebuch* [Thought Diary] and on her lesser-known texts concerning technological development. Together these texts offer an interesting exploration of the "modern technization (*Technisierung*) of the *Dasein*,"[19] as Arendt once described it.

Arendt's reflections on technology take their bearings from her attempt to think "what we are doing when we are active," as she notes in *Vita Activa* (1960).[20] In aiming to offer "a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears" (*HC*, 5) Arendt's political theory develops as a response to the development of nuclear weapons, the progress of modern technology, as well as her genealogical analyses of the withering of action and natality in the modern era.[21] As she notes, modern human beings, born as "earth-bound creatures," had begun "to act as though … [they] were dwellers of the universe." This modern earth-alienation was apparent in the launch of Sputnik 1 and in the development of such technologies that might potentially free human beings from their so-called "imprisonment to the earth." This desire to escape the human condition was similarly manifested in the scientific attempt to make life "artificial" by creating it in "the test tube." The scientific creation of a "future man," whose nature would no longer be "given" but rather "made" by human beings themselves, posed a political problem of "the first order" (*HC*, 1–3). Even if such potentialities were still a matter of a distant future, Arendt argued that we should take seriously the "threat to freedom arising from scientific 'progress' in the control of the human mind … in such sciences as biochemistry, brain surgery, psychology, social engineering, behavioral science, and others."[22]

These technological developments had a specific history. In a series of illuminating notes in her *Denktagebuch*, Arendt proposes a "schematical" description of four historical phases (a division which is also operative in *The Human Condition*). In the first stage, human beings produce items or objects from naturally given materials. Tools are produced to serve production and manufacturing. Human life as a biological given remains largely untouched by these developments. In the second stage, human beings begin to utilize and harness natural forces, such as wind and water, which increasingly replace mere physical effort. Arendt names this harnessing as the "first

invasion of nature into the realm of human life." The third stage is defined by the invention of the steam engine and the combustion engine, by which she is clearly referring to the technological revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The ensuing industrial age is defined by an "imitation" of natural forces that leads to the new situation in which human production and human products become increasingly defined by human-manufactured "natural" forces. The fourth and last stage is defined by atomic fragmentation—an apex of the accelerating general electrification of the world as such. At this stage, natural forces are no longer harnessed but rather "let loose"; they are no longer manufactured or utilized in the same sense as in preceding technologies: "The elements themselves invade the human lifeworld." In this final stage, human history, the process of "making-oneself-at-home-and-establishing-oneself-on-earth" inverts the existing relationship between human life and the elements of the earth: humans now unleash processes that resemble natural forces but which are no longer controlled by the very agents who created them (*DT*, 479–80). This is the contemporary technological stage against which Arendt develops her theory of the *vita activa* in *The Human Condition*.

Despite their illustrative nature, these historical characterizations leave crucial questions unanswered. To what extent is the modern technological era defined by an unforeseen accelerating development of technology and by the growth of technological reach into novel spheres of life? In another entry in *Denktagebuch*, Arendt specifies her diagnosis. What characterizes modernity is the increasingly "artificial" nature of those very human spaces that define communal human existence, the space of politics in particular, the distinct space that always lies "between" human beings:

> When we began to understand nature, it immediately became clear, that we are also able to make nature … the realm of the in-between between the human being and nature, which with Montesquieu still stood under the laws of nature as a part of the natural order of things, has since become "universal," that is "unnatural." It no longer stands under the sway of naturally given conditions of the earth. (*DT*, 536–37)

With this growing technologization "the human begins to consume its self-made thing-world, and therewith itself becomes unconditioned" (*DT*, 487). However, it is important to emphasize that Arendt has no preconceptions concerning an earlier historical stage that would have somehow been *fully* devoid of technology à la Rousseau. On the contrary, in *The Human Condition* she emphasizes that the relationship between human existence and technology has always been fundamentally reciprocal, an idea that is later developed in greater detail by Bernard Stiegler. She states: "The human condition comprehends more than the conditions under which life has been given to man. Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence" (*HC*, 9).[23]

Arendt argues that the last of the four historical stages is specifically utopian in a novel sense. "Utopia is the form in which scientific thinking invades politics. For this reason it is so destructive" (*DT*, 591). While political thought, in the Arendtian sense, always concerns the shared world of human beings in the present, scientific thought aims to establish a realm of in-between that will be realized in the future, and the temporalities of political thought and judgment stand in contrast to the "utopian" future-orientation of philosophy and science. However, and this is crucial, Arendt does not envision modern technological

or scientific thinking as utopian in the sense that it would strive toward a *static* utopian state of any kind; rather, the utopian character lies precisely in the fact that modern science lets loose uncontrolled, unforeseeable, and continuously changing *processes*.[24]

While action and work were activities that sought to create thing-worldly permanence in the sense of creating a historical space of appearance for action, with the modern technologization of the world "the human being lets loose an automatic consummation-process" (*DT*, 487).[25] The modern era as such is characterized by what Arendt calls "process-thinking" (*DT*, 469, 473, 487–88).[26] In her *Denktagebuch*, she analyzes this process-progress in relation to one of her favorite parables from Franz Kafka:

> The Archimedean point: Kafka: "He had found the Archimedean point, however he had used it against himself, it seems that he was allowed to find this point only under this condition." This is exactly what we are currently doing in the natural sciences. The Archimedean point lies outside of the earth; if it is used by the inhabitants of earth, it may only be directed against them; it is only under the condition that the inhabitants of earth may look away from their own prosperity and adversity, that this point may be discovered. (*DT*, 564)

From Arendt's perspective, this technological and scientific attitude constitutes a distinctly modern *evasion* of politics—an evasion that claims to discover a solution to every imaginable problem in technology instead of in action.[27] Yet this evasion is but an illusion that can "never be reached" in an absolute form (*TWB*, 418). Although Arendt also saw the positive sides of automation and technological development, she remained highly critical of the idea that there was such a thing as the progress of mankind or of human nature as such: "A progress of—not of the world we move in, but—mankind or man himself is, properly speaking, an idiotic notion. Who decides about the progressive character of the progress?" (*DT*, 543).

Arendt understood her political thought as a complex defense of such political-social conditions that enable human beings to be *free* in political terms—a critique that has been too often taken to be but a reactionary defense of the ancient polis.[28] What Arendt aimed to do was not to offer a naively romantic description of politics by drawing on ancient sources, but rather to criticize the typically modern belief in unlimited progress through her phenomenological analysis and historical genealogy of the *vita activa*. From Arendt's perspective, the concept of progress necessarily has its limits, both in the factual sense as well as in an ethical sense:

> Quite apart from the question of what we *should* discover and *should* make and what we should perhaps better leave undone, there will certainly appear at some time the limit of what we *can* discover and *can* make. In other words, what I am pleading for here is a new realization of the factually existing limitations of human beings. (*TWB*, 417).

Arendt of course realized that these "limits" are not clearly drawn and that they may be "transcended up to a point," as they always have been in the futuristic imaginations of philosophy, theology, and scientific thought (*TWB*, 417). While Habermas's later thought is primarily concerned with the ethical aspects of these issues—which itself of course reflects the more recent developments of biotechnology—Arendt's defense of the human condition draws its resources from the historical reflections on technological development analyzed above.

Writing in 1969, she notes that the factual limits of scientific progress "have already begun to make themselves felt in our scientific enterprise as well as our technicalization of

the world." To illustrate this, Arendt offers three examples. First, she refers to the human ability to construct an atomic weapon that has the power to destroy all organic life, a device that clearly discloses "an absolute limit to human power." Second, she mentions the human ability to let loose technological processes that may spin out of human control.[29] Third, she mentions the issue of space exploration, which is itself limited by the human lifespan: even with the velocity of light, the human ability to travel across the universe would be infinitely small, a limitation that would not change much even if the average lifespan would be doubled with future technological advances (*TWB*, 417).

These reflections obviously also have their normative side. As Arendt points out, in the midst of the great "space race" of the Cold War, it would perhaps be wiser to spend the money wasted on space exploration on such issues as "the conquest of poverty, and the like" (*TWB*, 413). It is also in this normative sense that Arendt makes her "plea" for the realization of the limits of the pursuit of science that concern the human condition as a whole. Criticizing the contemporary belief in unlimited progress, she pleads for a different attitude and worldview in relation to technology and progress:

> It would be geocentric in the sense that the earth and not the universe is the center and the home of mortal man; and it would be anthropomorphic in the sense that man would count his own mortality among the elementary conditions under which his scientific effort, his search for truth and his technical enterprises, the building of his own world, are possible at all. (*TWB*, 418)

But what are the main reasons for Arendt's "plea" for the realization of the human limits, both in its "anthropomorphic" and "geocentric" aspects? It needs to be stressed that Arendt's case is by no means that of a technophobe. In fact, Arendt perceived the major liberating potential in the development of automation and the ensuing gradual liberation from the givenness of "labor"—perhaps a surprising fact for those who are only familiar with some of her reflections on the "social question."[30] Arendt's reflections on technology center on a distinction between such developments that concern the world of human beings, and as such provide the historical conditions for the appearance of human "whoness," and the developments that presume to enhance human nature or mankind itself, thus touching upon human "whatness"—something that she saw as distinctly non-political. But there is no question that the whole reflective tone of *The Human Condition* follows on from the rather pessimistic consideration of "our newest experiences and our most recent fears" (*HC*, 5). In a Heideggerian vein, Arendt was also concerned about the potentially destructive effects of the modern technical gaze, or what Heidegger referred to as the *Gestell*: the technological-scientific way of perceiving and framing everything, including nature and human beings themselves, as nothing but raw material that could be molded and perhaps even bred.[31] She writes:

> Recent political history is full of examples indicating that the term "human material" is no harmless metaphor and the same is true for a whole host of modern scientific experiments in social engineering, biochemistry, brain surgery, etc., all of which tend to treat and change human material like other matter. This mechanistic approach is typical of the modern age. (*HC*, 188, n. 15)

With technology, moreover, politics becomes "total" in a novel fashion: "Contemporary politics is concerned with the naked existence of us all."[32] Citing the physicist Werner Heisenberg, Arendt elaborates on how politics might reach the most fundamental

spheres of givenness in a new manner: "All our pride in what we can do will disappear into some kind of mutation of the human race; the whole of technology, seen from this point, in fact no longer appears 'as the result of a conscious human effort to extend man's material powers, but rather as a largescale biological process'." Thus in the current era we have already come "perilously close to this point" that might lower the "stature of man" to an unforeseen point, perhaps even destroying it as such.[33] Potentially even action itself might thus reach a novel "natural" limit, that of unleashing "artificial" processes that have taken on a seeming necessity of biological processes. All of these concerns are at the heart of her critique against the metaphor of the Archimedean point to illustrate how the scientific worldview is based on an unarticulated notion of "progress."

Arendt's main concern is raised by the question of the very historicity of our existence as human individuals.[34] If it is true that the human being is a kind of "vessel" that carries history (also in the form of an anticipated future) within itself, to paraphrase Ernst Jünger,[35] how would human existence change with such prospects as the radical prolongment of life or even immortality? Here Arendt's counter-position to early technological thinking as well as more contemporary transhumanism is evident, for as Eduardo R. Cruz provocatively notes, "the idea that what characterizes humans is their historicity seems to be something completely ignored by transhumanists."[36]

As demonstrated above, Arendt's defense of the "geocentric" and "anthropomorphic" nature of the human condition also included a plea for the realization of human mortality. Ever since Plato defined philosophy in the *Phaedo* as the art of practicing for death, of knowing how to die, philosophy has had an immanent connection with human mortality. This connection reaches all the way to modern Existentialism and to Heidegger's analytics of the *Dasein*'s being-towards-death as its most fundamental possibility.[37] As Arendt notes, it is conceivable that with a change in the condition of mortality, the whole tradition of philosophy could lose its meaning as *our* history. Taking up the highly speculative question of the potentiality of altering or perhaps even overcoming the condition of mortality, she offers the following reflections:

> The greatest and most dreadful danger for human thought is that that which has been thought will one day be fully done away with through the discovery of some thus far unknown matter of fact. Let us take as an example that it would one day become possible to make human beings immortal, then everything that has been thought, which was kindled by death, along with its profundity, would become simply ridiculous—this [which has been thought] was [then] not based on the Socratic not-knowing, but rather on a mistake that could be corrected. It would be fully possible to state that this price for the abolition of death is too high. (*DT*, 591; cf. 149)[38]

What Arendt aims to say here is that our very humanity is defined by mortality, not only in some factual-technical way, but rather in the sense that human existence is defined by its historicity—the received traditions, the fundamental openness of metaphysical questioning, and what she refers to as the Socratic not-knowing. From this point of view, immortality would not be an "improvement" of human nature—for against what could such an "improvement" even be measured?—but would rather abolish the very historical and existential conditions of humanity as such.

What Arendt, and later Habermas, aim to question with their reflections on technology and progress, are precisely these fundamental questions that are often taken for granted by transhumanists.[39] If the condition of mortality, used again here as an example, would

somehow change, what would happen to what Hans Ruin describes as "the basic socio-ontological predicament *that humans live not only with the living but also with the dead*," for "there is a peculiar *being with* the dead that determines human existence down to its basic condition and sense of self?" Would this mortuary culture and the relationship we have (had) with the dead—which until now has in a variety of different ways reflected our "shared finitude," our "shared vulnerability," and "nonsustainability" as limited beings—transform itself and perhaps even cease to be "a decisive dimension of culture"?[40] Would we come to realize, as Max Weber noted early on, that in the modern "disenchanted world" death itself would become but a "meaningless occurrence?"[41]

When Arendt notes that mortality is the central concept of metaphysics, what she is claiming is that in the last instance, all philosophical concepts are meaningful precisely because we are mortal beings (HC, 9). With this emphasis, she agreed with Heidegger's analytics of the *Dasein*—analytics that, however, failed to account for the fundamental importance of plurality and action.[42] In any case, much like Heidegger, Arendt too was convinced that without human mortality, human life would become meaningless as history. Habermas, as I show in the following section, presents many of these concerns from a more clearly articulated contemporary standpoint.

Habermas on Biotechnology

As Max More and Natasha Vita-More have noted, while the transhumanists of the late 1980s and early 1990s were still primarily interested in exploring and supporting new forms of technological transformation, by the dawn of the new millennium, the feasibility of "nano-bio-info-cogno-technologies" (NBIC) became a more widely accepted possibility. With this change, the focus of transhumanist philosophy also shifted to the potential harms and regulation of these biotechnologies.[43] While the criticism of technology and progress has always been the nodal point of bioconservative thought, this shift was also apparent in changes in bioconservative positions. Thus, by the early twenty-first century a more nuanced critical vision of the biotechnological revolution began to emerge in contradistinction to the different visions supported by transhumanists.

In my discussion of this shift, I focus on the works of three thinkers—Habermas's, *The Future of Human Nature*, Sandel's *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*, and Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*—which exemplify how bioconservative discourse took on a more systematic form. Of the three, it is Habermas who provides the most philosophically articulate definition of the issues at hand, and in doing so, his work appears as a further development of Arendt's political theory, from which he explicitly takes inspiration (*FHN*, 58–60).

For Habermas the starting point in the early twenty-first century debate on biotechnologies is the new awareness of an emerging situation in which the realm of what had hitherto been "given" to human beings moves toward "the realm of artifacts and their production." In other words, the difference between the organically given and the technological-artificial becomes increasingly blurred (*FHN*, 12, 22).[44] At the center of this debate stands the difference between medically intended therapeutical interventions and ones intended for human enhancement (*FHN*, viii, 19; *CAP*, 5–10; *OPF*). To what extent is it possible to draw a line between enhancements that aim to "improve" human nature and those that have a distinctly "medical" or "curative" purpose? How can one distinguish

between questions of biology, philosophy, and politics in a situation in which all of these issues become entangled in a novel manner? For once human action reaches into such spheres of life that have hitherto been taken for granted as the equally valid preconditions for human life and for the political freedom of individuals, what will happen to fundamental notions such as equality and human rights?

Habermas is primarily interested in how potential technological developments may alter our "self-understanding as responsible agents" (*FHN*, 12). It is crucial to note that much of the contemporary bioconservative discourse is future-oriented and speculative, or to cite Habermas, it remains caught in a "perspective of a future present" (*FHN*, vii), since many of the biotechnologies it aims to confront are either only available in rudimentary form or remain hypothetical. Contemporary bioconservative thought thus aims to respond to a set of issues in a situation in which our moral self-understanding threatens to be overridden by unforeseeably rapid technological change (*CAP*, 9).

As noted earlier, there is a curious similarity between Arendt's defense of the "human condition" and Habermas's theoretical venture to "guarantee the *conditions* under which the practical self-understanding of modernity may be *preserved*" (*FHN*, 26). What distinguishes Habermas's account from those of Fukuyama, Sandel, and others, is his nuanced philosophical articulation of the questions concerning human agency and freedom in an increasingly technological present. Instead of relying on such notions as "the giftedness of life" or the "mystery of birth," as Sandel does (*CAP*, 27, 46, 91), Habermas approaches this issue by articulating how the "normative regulation of interpersonal relations" relies on a "relational symmetry" between human beings as morally responsible agents (*FHN*, 33). The issue for him is: How will the development of the biological sciences and biotechnology, which might expand the realm of human agency and freedom into such areas of life that were previously perceived as preconditions of this relational symmetry, affect our nature as moral actors?

Habermas's account begins with a definition and explicit defense of the *post-metaphysical* human condition that serves as the precondition of any *open* society based on mutual rights.[45] In terms of the history of philosophy, he argues that the first thinker to articulate this post-metaphysical condition was Søren Kierkegaard, whose philosophy operates under a plurality of pseudonyms, each representing a distinct existential choice and way of life. Kierkegaard's thinking reflects the birth of a postmodern and post-metaphysical society consisting of "a pluralism of worldviews" (*FHN*, 11). Drawing on this historical background, Habermas's reflections on the question of biotechnology are grounded on a neo-Kantian distinction between ethics and morality.[46] For Habermas, ethical discourses concern all those eternally different and culturally contingent forms of life factually present in the world, as exemplified by Kierkegaard's philosophy of subjectivities as existentially lived truths. Moral discourses, on the other hand, touch upon those fundamental questions that are equally valid for all human beings. However, as Habermas argues, the new issues posed by biotechnology demonstrate that even universal moral questions actually depend on what he describes as species-ethics, or as Habermas himself defines the matter, on the "a priori *ethical self-understanding of the species*, which is shared by all moral persons." (*FHN*, 40).

Habermas takes for granted that we have already entered a post-metaphysical era in which the plurality of *ethical* lives is an inescapable fact: for it is not only Kierkegaard's philosophy, but also Nietzsche's death of God and the disappearance

of the great narratives of the West, as later described by Jean-François Lyotard, that are all theoretical variations on the modern pluralization of forms-of-life.[47] However, according to Habermas, this plurality sustains itself and depends on a certain *ethical* understanding of humanity that is taken as an unquestioned given: the post-metaphysical plurality of forms-of-life relies on an *ethics* of the species, an ethics of universal humanity. Or as he puts it, our ethical attitude to "prepersonal human life" touches upon "those intuitive self-descriptions that guide our identification *as human beings*"—they concern "man, who—in his anthropological universality—is everywhere the same" (*FHN*, 39).

This distinguishes Habermas's (and Arendt's) approach from Fukuyama's approach. While Habermas, in an Arendtian vein, analyzes the forms of interpersonal recognition that depend on certain presuppositions about human universality (or ethics)—that is, our ability to self-identify as human beings despite our ways of life that are always in flux, thereby changing the ways in which human nature *appears* as an endless variety (which is also highlighted by Arendt)[48]—Fukuyama approaches this issue from a naturalistic perspective. Thus, although both Fukuyama and Habermas express grave concerns regarding the potential ripple-effects of biotechnology, for Fukuyama the central matter is distinctively biological, for he defines human nature as "the sum of the behavior and characteristics that are typical of the human species, arising from genetic rather than environmental factors." It is in this sense that Fukuyama speaks of a certain "factor X" defining humanity as such that we might lose, perhaps even without noticing it ourselves, with the revolution induced by biotechnology (*OPF*, 13, 130, 149–51; cf. 101–2). As Habermas states in *The Future of Human Nature*, his analysis of interpersonal dynamics is not directed at a specific historical point at which the vision of "human nature" would become violated in an unforeseen manner: "the argument doesn't proceed on the assumption that the technicization of 'inner nature' constitutes something like a transgression of natural boundaries" (*FHN*, 87).

In contrast to Fukuyama's position, Habermas is concerned with the normative issues that touch upon our ethical self-understanding as human beings—a concern that is distinctly political, or in Arendtian terms, one that remains focused on the human in-between of politics. What Habermas aims to bring to light is that with novel technological advances, we might be entering an era in which the unity of our ethical self-understanding as a species could be endangered: the development of biotechnologies not only challenges our particular ethical choices and ways of life, but the ethical preconditions on which these choices have been understood since the dawn of modernity.

Habermas approaches this issue from a variety of inextricably entangled yet different perspectives. First, there is the *juridical and normative* aspect: the normative regulation of interpersonal relations that offers "a porous shell protecting a vulnerable body and the person incorporated in this body, from the contingencies they are exposed to." It is only in such a context that human subjectivity may flourish, for only it guarantees a "stabilized" framework of "undamaged relations of mutual recognition." Human autonomy can only be reached in a state in which bodily vulnerability is not questioned and in which social independence is guaranteed; these form the basic presuppositions for the development and maintenance of "personal identity" (*FHN*, 33, 34). Furthermore, Habermas's reflections are grounded in a *genealogically* oriented approach, which also carries an Arendtian

phenomenological vein. As Arendt noted in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the function of laws is to establish boundaries within which action and human freedom become possible. Laws not only stabilize human action and provide a stable realm for its appearance, but also provide subjects with certain, shared preconditions under which human equality may flourish.[49]

Third, the broader background of these reflections of both Arendt and Habermas is the history of racial eugenics, in particular in its genocidal Nazi variant. However, Habermas's point is not to make straw man comparisons between the newest biotechnologies and Nazi eugenics, but rather to problematize the relationship between *liberalism* and the very different notion of human enhancement that may also be based on liberal principles.[50] Yet despite recognizing the possibility of the reappearance of racist eugenics in some form, neither Arendt's nor Habermas's reflections on the threats of biotechnology should be read as directly responding to the shadow of the Nazi past.[51] The main targets of Habermas's reflections are in fact the contemporary notions of progress and development in relation to technology, and his critique only gains its specific value in the contemporary liberal democratic context that supports the plurality of worldviews and forms-of-life, which, in turn, makes the whole distinction between morality and ethics sustainable.

Instead of the hierarchical state eugenics of the Nazi state, the possibility of liberal eugenics may well be based on the liberal idea of individual *freedom*, on the idea that in a liberal society everyone has the right to pursue their own way of life and freedom to the best of their ability (*FHN*, 60–61).[52] In Habermas's view, the prospect of liberal eugenics could potentially create an entirely unprecedented situation in terms of both interpersonal and intergenerational relations (*FHN*, 63). Or as he asks: "Would not the first human being to determine, at his own discretion, the natural essence of another human being at the same time destroy the equal freedoms that exist among persons of equal birth in order to ensure their difference?" (*FHN*, 115).

On the one hand, the so-called designer babies might be confronted with unforeseen restrictions on their life choices, and, on the other, human beings would potentially gain the ability to determine and/or to limit another human being's freedom. The central problem for Habermas is the way in which, to cite Nicholas Agar, "the path of radical enhancement for some humans significantly threatens the interests of other humans."[53] Or as Fukuyama formulates the same issue in utilitarian terms: "Are there circumstances in which individual choices regarding biotechnology may entail negative externalities and thus lead to society as a whole being worse off?" (*OPF*, 93).

According to Habermas, such technological enhancements would create an "interpersonal relationship for which there is no precedent" by altering the fundamental reciprocity between human beings that has been a self-evident given before the development of such technologies. In light of such potential effects that would last for generations, genetic modification may also pose more long-lasting ripple-effects: "Intergenerational relations lose the naturalness, which so far has been a part of the taken-for-granted background of our self-understanding as a species"; this is the threat that may only be confronted my "moralizing" human nature, by bringing the question of biotechnology—which is a matter of species-ethics for Habermas—into the public realm of debate. In historical terms, our diverging understandings of freedom have depended on the presupposition that human beings are the "undivided authors of their life," at least in genetic terms (*FHN*, 63–64, 72, 67).

Habermas's fundamental concern with biotechnology thus refines the Arendtian concern for human historicity. What will happen to human freedom and subjectivity in a world in which a future generation might be able to justify its own supposed superiority with a crossing of a certain "Rubicon" that would lead to unexpected consequences? What will happen to subjective autonomy in a situation in which this very autonomy would no longer be defined by "equal birth," but rather by second- and third-party intentions: would this not threaten the "minimal ethical self-understanding of the species" in its thus-far presupposed anthropological universality? (*FHN*, 71, 72, 40).[54]

Or, to paraphrase Arendt's terminology: What would happen in a situation in which individuals or groups might suddenly attain the capability of unleashing such "unpredictable" and "irreversible" actions that no longer touch upon that "web of human relationships," but rather the preconditions through which our conceptualizations of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* have been intelligible at all (*HC*, 183–84, 204, 230, 233, 324)? If all human action until now has been determined by the correspondence between their initial irreversibility and non-foreseeability and the human capacities of forgiving and promising (*HC*, 236–47)—thus healing at least in part what Arendt called the "frailty of human affairs" (*HC*, 188–92)—actions that would alter the conditions of human life would pose a threat to human historicity and intersubjectivity as such. From Arendt's perspective, they would replace the hopes of political action with a promise of "jumping over our own shadows" by promising not to change the world between human beings, but our very *nature*—our very "whatness" instead of our appearing "whoness" (*HC*, 10).

Drawing on this Arendtian background, Habermas emphasizes in *The Future of Human Nature* that these prospects are "at present purely theoretical." His arguments are grounded in the idea that "human dignity," the notion that grounds our understanding of equality, depends on a "relational symmetry" of a plurality of self-identifications between individuals. The question then remains: How to restrict potential future biotechnological interventions to ones that are guided by "the logic of healing" and of the "prevention of evil" rather than by a "narcissistic indulgence of our own preferences"? (*FHN*, 43, 33, 52, 20).[55] Here Habermas invokes the idea of a "right to an unmanipulated genetic heritage," which he distinguishes from the regulation of abortion, for while the first touches on the ethics-of-the-species as such, the second is a distinctively personal-ethical question, depending on the purely relativistic worldviews of the persons involved (*FHN*, 22, 27, 22–23).

As Habermas recognizes, deontological theories after Kant have not offered arguments as to why we should be moral at all. But if it is true that moral insights are only effective if they are embedded in a wider horizon of common species-ethics, as Habermas maintains, then with the development of biotechnologies the question of human universality concerns us in a novel manner. In attempting to defend this universalistic understanding of ethics, Habermas then invokes two *intuitive* (or "ethical") arguments against biotechnological manipulations: first, the human "revulsion" against the prospect of creating a "chimera" through genetic engineering should itself be taken as an argument against such actions; and second, the more particular "disgust" human beings feel toward research that involves the "destruction of embryos" for the sake of supposedly benefiting human life and progress. This involves an "instrumentalization [that is] incompatible with the clinical attitude," which within its proper limits, instead of instrumentalizing life, always "individualizes" particular human existence (*FHN*, 4, 25, 70).

The negative foil for Habermas's argument lies in the infamous concept of a life unworthy of living, as developed by Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche in *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens* (1920)—a work that would later be used to legitimize the Nazi eugenics program. While these intuitive arguments don't appear to be too convincing, Habermas aims to demonstrate the dangers that could potentially arise when one starts distinguishing "between life worth living and not worth living"—the inevitable question biotechnology forces us to confront (*FHN*, 19, 69, 19).

Ultimately, what Habermas is pleading for is not only a particular way of understanding the connection between interpersonal relationships, biotechnology and other technological possibilities, but also for a postsecular "democratic common sense" that should constitute every "*many-voiced* public." Just as the question of the potential regulation of biotechnologies is essentially a *global* question, the very possibility of achieving an effective regulation of such technologies itself depends on the existence of a postsecular society, which in turn, is very far from being a globally existing fact. For Habermas, every free society depends on both a relational symmetry between single individuals in the ethical sense, *and* on the existence of democratic institutions that are capable of realizing and sustaining a plurality of ethical lives. It is in this context that he argues, perhaps rather problematically, for a specific role "the Western world" could play on the global stage: "The mode for nondestructive secularization is translation. This is what the Western world, as the worldwide secularizing force, may learn from its own history" (*FHN*, 109, 114).[56] In short, for Habermas, the future existence of modern liberal democratic societies will depend not only on the (ethical) equality of their subjects, but also on global political institutions and broader developments.

But what kind of "bioconservatism" are Habermas and Arendt actually defending, and can we even legitimately refer to these positions as "conservative"? How do their diverging and yet interestingly interconnected ways of analyzing and understanding the communicative and factual presuppositions of the human condition reflect the changing nature of conservatism as such? Can there be a tradition of "bioconservatism," which for traditional conservatives would not amount in its factual, social, and political consequences, to anything like conservatism at all?

Conclusion: What's Conservative about Bioconservatism?

It has often been noted that the accelerating development of modern technology challenges us by creating an ever-growing gulf between the realms of thought and practice, which Ernst Cassirer analyzed in his well-known essay "Form and Technology" already in 1930.[57] One can confront this in various ways. Bernard Stiegler, for example, tackles it in philosophical-historical terms, by analyzing how the "speed of technical evolution" has caused entirely novel "ruptures in temporalization" as well as new "processes of deterritorialization"—both of which require nothing less than a "new consideration of technicity," which Stiegler himself aimed to offer in his works.[58]

This problem has also been confronted by a "bioconservative" tradition that seeks to confront the "moral vertigo" caused by recent technological developments, to cite Sandel (*CAP*, 9). To be sure, neither Arendt nor Habermas would accept the label of *conservative* as a legitimate description of their work. Although one might discover

conservative aspects in Arendt's thought, her consistent insistence on thinking without banisters as well as her highly idiosyncratic self-identification with the traditions of republicanism and of council-democracy clearly demonstrate that such a label is at best one-sided.[59] As for Habermas, his legacy is anything but conservative. His influence in postwar Germany as the leading intellectual of a new generation of the Frankfurt School, who recognized the legitimacy of the new German liberal-democratic state and argued for its revolution from within, is evident to anyone familiar with his astonishingly broad oeuvre.[60]

What I have been suggesting is something different: The specific kind of bioconservatism one finds in the works of Arendt and of Habermas has fairly little to do with the traditional themes of conservative thought. Their various historically grounded analyses of the human condition are not targeted at maintaining supposedly "traditional" hierarchies, nor do they take a stance on metaphysical questions such as human nature or God. The work of both is strictly agnostic and avoids any kind of religious argumentation. Interestingly, all of this has been acknowledged by Habermas himself, who noted in 2011—in response to a comment by Ian Hacking—that while it was inconceivable that he could be described as "conservative" in any political sense, he would "happily" accept the description of being "bioconservative."[61]

The often-highlighted heterogeneity of bioconservatism as an emerging intellectual movement necessarily follows on from its aim to confront entirely novel technological questions. Arendt herself once noted that the traditional categorization of conservatism and leftism/progressivism could no longer offer "any kind of illumination" to the "real questions of this century."[62] And while this might perhaps be an exaggeration regarding the development of technology, Arendt was onto something essential: The questions Arendt and Habermas posed each in their own way were: how should we respond to the profound historical changes brought upon us by (bio)technology? In what way could and should the post-metaphysical human condition be preserved in a situation in which the very fundaments of ethical relationality might be put into question in an entirely novel manner though technological interventions?

Unlike the position taken by many conservative thinkers, the work of both Arendt and Habermas revolves around the notion of a *fundamental anthropological openness*—an idea also variously theorized by several German philosophical anthropologists such as Helmuth Plessner, Arnold Gehlen, and Max Scheler, among others.[63] On the fundamental "openness" of human nature, Arendt offered the following reflections in her *Denktagebuch*:

> What is so hard to realize is that the human being has no "nature," although he may only live under natural conditions. . . . The human being is a "universal" being under the conditions of an earth-bound nature, to the extent that he *lives*. . . . The essence of the human being is unrecognizable for us and the word "universal" only shows one standpoint, which the human being may obtain, it does not characterize, and it does not define [him]. So: To the question: But who are *we*? there is quite simply no answer. (*DT*, 537)

In fact, Arendt's work is a radical critique of what she calls the "tyrannical logic" of the Western philosophical tradition, grounded on a metaphysical image of human nature (as rational-political in the received Aristotelian sense), and its inability to reflect on human beings in their *plurality* and on the fundamental openness of

human nature in its "never-ending spontaneity" (*DT*, 65; cf. 66, 94).[64] Her political theory offers a complex defense of such conditions in which the fundamental openness of human nature, grounded on natality—the human ability to create something new and unprecedented—may be conserved. From Arendt's and Habermas's perspective, there is no such thing as human "nature," but there are conditions that make it possible for human beings to live freely among each other, to realize their "natures" by and through appearing in public.

Habermas, as noted earlier, confronts the novel questions regarding the prospect of biotechnologies and liberal eugenics from this critically Arendtian perspective. How will our understanding as moral agents change once technological advances reach areas that have previously formed the unquestioned presuppositions of our understanding of human universality? As Habermas notes, "the closer scientific findings approach our bodily existence, the more disconcerting they seem for our self-understanding" (*FHN*, 106).[65] What scientific advances threaten to blur, and perhaps even to justify in a certain sense, is the self-subsumption of one's self and identity "under scientific descriptions." By saying this Habermas does not aim to deny the obvious fact that a robust democratic common sense must always be informed by the sciences (*FHN*, 106, 105). What he is referring to is the potential invasion of scientific facts into the public realm in a manner that would destabilize the ethical presuppositions that enable many-voiced societies to function.

What I have tried to demonstrate in this article is that, if it is indeed true, as Ray Kurzweil noted over twenty years ago, that "the primary political and philosophical issue of the next century will be the definition of who we are,"[66] then this notion bears a direct connection to the way the meanings of conservatism and its opposing political and social movements are also changing. The future of biotechnology forces us to offer novel definitions of human "nature" in a variety of ways, including philosophical, political, normative, and juridical. And if there are typical dispositions in the different political ideologies and worldviews, as Karl Mannheim argued in relation to conservatism,[67] how will the confrontation with novel biological frontiers alter our understanding of these dispositions? To cite Michael Oakeshott's famous definition of the conservative disposition, if to be conservative is to "prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the unbounded, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss"—how will this attitude change when confronted with the birth of biotechnology?[68]

Fukuyama's answer is clear. Very much in line with traditional conservative thinking, he argues that the "moral order comes from within human nature itself and is not something that has to be imposed on human nature by culture" (*OPF*, 156). If for Fukuyama the problem with the biotechnological revolution lies precisely in the threat that at some point in the future we would "no longer have a clear idea of what a human being is" (*OPF*, 218; cf. 13, 101), those who most eagerly encourage us to "share the exciting posthuman wave,"[69] support this movement precisely because this blurring of lines between biology, technology, and nature could free us from the burdens of our traditions, mainly our anthropocentrism and other related conceptual presuppositions.[70]

The central arguments of both Arendt and Habermas become more concrete when contrasted with the core arguments in the contemporary posthumanist and

transhumanist literature, as well as with the more biologically based critique of bioconservatives such as Fukuyama's. What does it actually mean when Fukuyama speaks of a "clear idea" of human nature or when a transhumanist like Max More claims that with technology one could "improve" the human being or human "nature"?

As seen from the post-metaphysical perspective of Arendt and Habermas, such use of the concepts of human nature and progress are profoundly misleading. Although both agree that there is no such thing as an immutable human essence that would by itself constitute the problem and/or the solution to the issue,[71] ethical human existence, to use Habermasian terminology, is grounded on certain metaphysical presuppositions concerning the universality of human abilities. Similarly, for both Arendt and Habermas, the very concept of "progress" is completely misleading in such a context, for it not only presupposes our ability to measure progress in an entirely unprecedented situation, but simultaneously also takes for granted the concept of human nature. What both Arendt and Habermas (and also Fukuyama, seeing things in an entirely different way) would also question radically is what More calls the "optimistic flavor" of transhumanist thinking, namely the idea that human beings would be able to "actively create the future we desire."[72]

Thus, in confronting the biological frontier, one can distinguish between two entirely different kinds of bioconservative approaches: those relying on the categories and concepts of traditional conservative thought, drawing on naturalistic and often also on religious argumentation, as elaborated by Fukuyama, and those that aim to defend the post-metaphysical condition without relying on essentialist definitions of human nature, as elaborated by Arendt and Habermas. In contrast to much of the conservative tradition that relies on naturalistic argumentation concerning these issues, the kind of bioconservatism one finds in the late works of Arendt and in Habermas's critique of technology relies on a universalistic conception of *ethics* that draws on a genealogical understanding of human capabilities.[73] In presupposing the ethical dimension of a universal human nature, this phenomenologically attuned way of understanding the issues at hand does not rely on a reductionist argument regarding "the unity or the continuity of human nature" as maintained by Fukuyama (*OPF*, 172).

While Susanna Lindberg suggests that the whole notion of "conservatism" would be misleading in the context of new biotechnologies,[74] I propose that the rise of bioconservatism itself demonstrates the changing nature of such conceptual and political polarities as conservatism and progressivism. Thus, bioconservatism can be approached from different perspectives, either from the post-metaphysical approach of Arendt and Habermas, or from the more biologically defined and traditionally conservative perspective represented by Fukuyama. Perhaps one could paraphrase Kierkegaard to illustrate this plurality of emerging perspectives in confronting potential technological threats.[75] Here the exception (the perspective of Arendt and Habermas) may indeed explain the universal and disclose everything more clearly than the universal (the more traditionally oriented bioconservatism of Fukuyama), for it is this exception that discloses something essential about the way in which the changing reality of technological development forces us to rethink some of our most fundamental political concepts and dualisms.

Notes

1. Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, 20, 55.
2. E.g., Ibid., 19–21; Mannheim, *Konservatismus*, 51–52.
3. Muller, "What Is Conservative Social and Political Thought," 24–25.
4. Mannheim, *Konservatismus*, 47, 103, 138; Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, 24.
5. Muller, "What Is Conservative Social and Political Thought," 4; Mannheim, *Konservatismus*, 103.
6. For historical contextualizations, see Bostrom, "History of Transhumanist Thought"; Bostrom, "In Defence of Posthuman Dignity"; Miah, "A Critical History of Posthumanism"; Burdett, "Contextualizing a Christian Perspective"; Grumett, "Transformation and the End of Enhancement."
7. For a useful conceptual map, see Ferrando, "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism"; and Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism*.
8. Cf. Cole-Turner, *Transcendence*; Bardziński, "Between Bioconservatism and Transhumanism."
9. Bostrom, "History of Transhumanist Thought," 18.
10. Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future*, 183. Hereafter abbreviated as *OPF* with page numbers cited in the text.
11. Julian Huxley was of course by no means the only intellectual analyzing these new trends; cf. Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 49–53; Kojéve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 158–62; Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik*.
12. Huxley, "Transhumanism," 13, 14, 16–17. The theory of the active (and later, evolutional) improvement of populations as controllable and statistical entities was first developed by Thomas Malthus in *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). It was Michel Foucault who introduced a new concept of power to describe the shift from sovereign power and disciplinary power toward what he called "biopower" in his books and lectures *History of Sexuality, Society Must Be Defended*, and *Security, Territory, Population*. Huxley's reference to "business" might be interpreted as more than metaphorical, for bioconservatism can also be seen as a reaction to the development of neoliberalism, which Foucault connected with the development of biopolitics in *The Birth of Biopolitics*. For further developments of these issues, see for instance Slobodian, *Globalists*.
13. Huxley, "Transhumanism," 17.
14. Ibid.
15. Cf. More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," 8–9.
16. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 9. Hereafter abbreviated ad *HC* with page numbers cited in the text.
17. See, for instance, Yaqoob, "The Archimedean Point"; Simbirski, "Cybernetic Muse'; Suuronen, "Resisting Biopolitics."
18. On Arendt and transhumanism, see Cruz, "Transhumanism and the Fate of Natality"; Berkowitz, "Singularity and the Human Condition."
19. Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, 485. Hereafter abbreviated as *DT* with page numbers cited in the text.
20. Cf., Arendt, "*Vita Activa*," 14; Arendt, *HC*, 5. On the differences between the German and English versions of the latter, see Knott, *Unlearning With Hannah Arendt*.
21. From the immense available literature, see Benhabib, *Reluctant Modernism*.
22. Arendt, *Thinking Without a Banister*, 102. Hereafter abbreviated as *TWB* with page numbers cited in the text.
23. For Stiegler's famous reflections, see *Technics and Time*.
24. This argument is also interesting in light of contemporary discussions. In "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," More argues that critics tend to falsify transhumanism by describing it as an ideology striving toward a static utopia, although in reality transhumanism is "a process of perpetual progress, not a static state" (14). However, at least for Arendt, and later for Habermas, it is precisely this supposed perpetual progress that constitutes the central problem.

25. Jacques Ellul had already theorized this possibility in his well-known work *La Technique ou l'Enjeu du siècle* (1954).
26. For a detailed analysis, see Hyvönen, "Invisible Streams."
27. As noted by Cruz in "Transhumanism and the Fate of Natality," 923.
28. E.g., Pitkin, *Attack of the Blob*.
29. On the issue of singularity and Arendt, see Berkowitz, "Singularity and the Human Condition."
30. E.g., Pitkin, *Attack of the Blob*. For newer studies that emphasize the many-sidedness of Arendt's reflections on technology, see note 17.
31. Heidegger, "Die Frage nach der Technik."
32. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 145.
33. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 274.
34. However, Arendt does on occasion mention other dystopian possibilities, such as in *Crises of the Republic* the threat of robot soldiers that might, for the first time in human history, create a government based solely on violence (149).
35. Jünger, *Politische Publizistik*, 123–24.
36. Cruz, "Transhumanism and the Fate of Natality," 924.
37. On this continuity, see Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 12–16; Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, 169–71.
38. Arendt writes these words after reading Kafka's "Forschungen eines Hundes" ("Investigations of a Dog"). This possibility is also theorized by Fukuyama in *Our Posthuman Future*, 71.
39. Habermas, *Future of Human Nature*, 35–36. Hereafter abbreviated as *FHN* with page numbers cited in the text.
40. Ruin, *Being with the Dead*, 3, 60, 40.
41. Weber cited in Ruin, *Being with the Dead*, 84–85.
42. On Arendt and Heidegger, cf. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*; Benhabib, *Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*.
43. More and Vita-More, *The Transhumanist Reader*, 291.
44. Cf. Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection*, 5. Hereafter abbreviated as *CAP* with page numbers cited in the text.
45. As shown later in more detail, here Habermas and Arendt clearly disagree with Fukuyama's plea in *Our Posthuman Future* for a "return to the pre-Kantian tradition that grounds rights and morality in nature" (112).
46. Habermas notes that his account draws on "a distinction between a Kantian theory of justice and a Kierkegaardian ethics of subjectivity" (*FHN*, vii). On the complex distinction between moral and ethical discourses in Habermas's work, see Lohmann, "Moral and Ethical Discourses".
47. Habermas analyzes this condition in detail already in *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (*The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*) (1988).
48. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 347.
49. Ibid., 465.
50. On liberal eugenics and its reliance on state neutrality (as distinguished from Nazi eugenics), see, for instance, Agar, "Liberal Eugenics."
51. Habermas's book was also provoked by a speech by Peter Sloterdijk: see Rocca "Sloterdijk, Habermas y Heidegger."
52. See also Fukuyama, *OPF*, 159.
53. Agar, *Humanity's End*, 152.
54. See also Fukuyama, *OPF*, 82–83. Sandel, while criticizing Habermas nevertheless ends up arguing in a somewhat similar manner that eugenic parenting would be wrong because it "entrenches a certain stance toward the world" (*CAP*, 83).
55. Fukuyama, in a similar vein, writes of a "false banner of liberty" (*OPF*, 218).
56. This point is elaborated in more detail in Habermas's monumental historical work, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (*This Too is a History of Philosophy*).
57. Cassirer, "Form and Technology," 16.

58. Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 17.
59. See especially Muldoon, "Origins of Hannah Arendt's Council System"; Lederman, *Hannah Arendt and Participatory Democracy*.
60. For historical context, see Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*.
61. Habermas cited in Müller-Doohm, *Habermas*, 411.
62. Arendt, *Thinking Without a Banister*, 470, 3. On another occasion she refers to this dualistic framework as "hopelessly obsolete" (198).
63. For an overview, see Fischer, *Philosophische Anthropologie*.
64. Arendt notes in her *Denktagebuch*: "The Western logic that reigns as thinking and reason is tyrannical 'by definition'." Here Arendt is referring to what she calls the "affinity between philosophers and tyrants since Plato" (*DT*, 45)—an affinity that she will also later perceive in Heidegger. This is interesting because Arendt's thinking is often taken to be a "defense" of Western civilization. See, for instance, Moses, "*Das römische Gespräch* in a New Key."
65. See also Fukuyama, *OPF*, 106.
66. Kurzweil, *Age of Spiritual Machines*, 2.
67. Mannheim, *Konservatismus*.
68. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 408.
69. Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism*, x.
70. This was already the (ironically) framed disposition of Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs" that reverberates clearly in the current discussions of transhumanism and posthumanism, of which the latter indeed celebrates the "overcoming of any strict dichotomy" and the overcoming of all "hierarchical legacies" (Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism*, 6, 22).
71. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 456; cf. 347.
72. More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," 15, 13, 10.
73. On the important influence of Hans Jonas on Habermas's bioconservative thought, see Incoronato, "Future of Human Nature in a Post-human World." Unlike this study, Incoronato argues that both Jonas and Habermas remain essentialist in their conceptualization of human nature.
74. Lindberg, *From Technological Humanity*, 20.
75. Cf. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 227.

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