

# Image of Men in Posthumanism and Transhumanism of Information Society

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**Abstract:** Protecting human health and understanding the effects of information society on humans implicates a reference model of the essentials and “normal” functions of human beings. Such models are simply called “images of men” (“Menschenbilder”). In this paper, common concepts of men are mentioned and it is outlined that an image of men is a paradoxical construct. Especially Homo deficiens (Gehlen) and the natural artificiality (Plessner) are the roots of technophilia of humans that is one important driver of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The other main driver is the efficiency-oriented modern society that provides such tools. One field is neuropsychiatry where monitoring of the mental and brain state for diagnosis and therapeutic modification by chemical and electrical tools is developing very fast. On the other hand, ICT already has some negative health implications in respect of internet addiction or digital dementia. These aspects of ICT society are discussed regarding the question of change of humans and of change of their image.

**Keywords:** Homo informaticus; image of men; neuropsychiatry

## 1. Image of Men

An *image of men* is partially a paradoxical concept as it is constructed by humans about humans. Additionally, cultural factors (political issues, economic interests, religious concepts) influence the classification of humans. Also such generalizations have a dubious and *biased empirical basis* as, for instance, we don't know enough details about the approximate 7 billion humans on earth. Therefore, images of men are only culture- and region-bound *hypotheses*. Nevertheless, images of men were constructed since Aristoteles who ingeniously had a three-dimensional (bio-psycho-social) conception: the *zoon politicon* as a social animal and *zoon logon echon* as a reflective animal, but with the common denominator “animal” or so to say “living system”. In middle age in Europe, religious images of men defined men as a hybrid with potential properties of animals and partially of god. In the 20th century, philosophical anthropology was constituted by E. Husserl (phenomenology), M. Heidegger (fundamental ontology), H. Plessner (e.g. “natural artificiality”) and A. Gehlen (“Mängelwesen”; Homo deficiens). The “Mängelwesen” seems most appropriate as most human properties – strength, speed, vision, audition etc. – can be surpassed by other animals and of course by machines (e.g. chess playing). After the war, philosophically oriented psychoanalysts like E. Fromm described humans as extremely aggressive and destructive animals. At present, empirical science has a high power to define the essentials of humans: homo economicus (HE; utility maximizer), homo reciprocans (HR; s. E. Fehr), homo neurobiologicus (HNB; men are nothing more than their brain), homo geneticus (HG; men are determined by their genes) etc. (s. University of Vienna<sup>1</sup>) These images are a typing of humans that should characterize essential behavioural determinants. They are called “as-if” models, indicating the awareness of the methodological restrictions mentioned above. They also focus on men as such and neglect the fact that men are always embedded in an environment consisting of other persons, social rules, cultural values and technological devices and settings. Therefore humans are not only a product of their genes and brains but also of their psychosocial and sociocultural environment that shapes their

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.vcc.univie.ac.at/der-homo-oecologicus/>



thinking, mood and actions. But how much present change in each of these dimensions can be integrated into this traditional image of men?

## 2. Information society

In trying to characterize our present *societal configuration* as an information society some relativism is needed: our society can also be characterized as a materialistic, accelerating, hypercomplex etc. society. However, it has all of these – in part traditional - features! Considering here the impact of present technology-driven *information society* on humans it is understandable that the formerly mentioned concepts of men have to be revisited: for instance, HNB as a reductive image of men suggests that neuropharmacological brain enhancement but also electrical neurotechnologies that influence *brain electricity* by surface electrodes or by implanted deep brain electrodes as they are used in treatments (Neurology, Psychiatry) can improve the mental capabilities of humans (“electroceuticals”). Also implantations of stem cells in patients with Parkinson’s disease are another gateway to new neurotechnologies, so that sooner or later everybody could use such biotechnologies, and before all such. These developments correspond with extreme positions in philosophical anthropology and philosophy of mind that compared humans with machines using the knowledge of contemporary physiology and assuming the reducibility of humans to a chemical machine, similar as HG and HNB do it today as it was mentioned before.

But also in any firm, the *quality management* intends standardization of human behaviour and algorithmization of decisions that results in procedures that can be formalized and then performed by machines, even in medical context (e.g. QM in hospitals). And finally, it has to be accepted that HE is underlying all interpersonal and institutional interactions in present society, even in health care context. The question arises then: How specific is “rationality” and “self-reflectiveness” and “empathy” for humans if for instance thinking and decision making can be modulated significantly by electrical direct current? Who is man in an age of hybridization of humans in Bio-Cyber Society? And: If machines can do better, why shouldn’t we subordinate our intelligence to machines? Are humans that use these technologies the same personalities as before? Are these technologies “good” because they are developed in context of medicine or is medicine – especially *neuropsychiatry* - the focus and source of dehumanization? How can we control this process? Is ICT-ethics enough? And: Why do we use all these technologies and are nearly craving for them?

## 3. Image of men and ethics of information society

Ethical attempts to control cyber-systemic society neglect the image of man: It is not discussed much, if specific *technophilia of humans* is grounded in specific human features as they were worked out by A. Gehlen (*Homo deficiens*). Also the anthropological concept of H. Plessner (natural artificiality) and other concepts are not discussed: *Homo ludens* that likes to play with artifacts and *Homo faber* who likes to work in can explain in conjunction with *Homo insufficiens* that *homo informaticus* arises on an individual level as well as on a collective/societal level.

## 4. Consequences

The cyber-systemic transition of mankind is driven by dispositions that are predominant in humans that are used by techno-economic superstructures for their intrinsic benefits. The result could be a posthumanistic machine-driven society that consists of humans with integrated ICT-hardware and software. Especially Neuro-Medicine is a field where new machines are applied for “healing” neuropsychiatric deficiencies but they probably change human personality and they facilitate everyday use (e.g. neuroenhancement). Therefore they also challenge and even change traditional image of man. Medicine induces a “good” image for these technologies. This trend obviously cannot be stopped. However, even if automatons control our world we can form institutions to establish and defend human rights against robots, which becomes difficult in case of “hybrids”. For instance, in treatment context we could demand “empathic” robots. Maybe such initiatives are similar to a self-organized animal protection movement because machines will not necessarily respect humans: drones that are programmed to kill special humans can run out of control.

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