

Science Fiction about Intelligent Life in Cosmic Space. Posthuman Perspective

Roman Sapeńko

Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, Professor,
Institute of Philosophy at the University of Zielona Góra
(Zielona Góra, Poland)

E-mail: R.Sapenko@ifil.uz.zgora.pl
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9663-3640>

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The article shows how the latest reflection within philosophical posthumanism can be applied to the analysis of science fiction works. The concepts of Francesca Fernando and Rosi Braidotti serve as a theoretical basis here, allowing us to look differently at the possible spectrum of life forms in cosmic space and the consequences of human and posthuman encounters with them. The post-humanist perspective seems to offer the possibility of looking at the future exploration of space and the encounter with extraterrestrial civilizations in a balanced and anti-dystopian way.

Keywords: posthumanism, transhumanism, science fiction, intelligent life, organic/non-organic life

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Introduction

The problem of contact humans with intelligent civilizations from space is not only of interest to science fiction authors but has always been a main and hot topic for science. Recently, for example, British scientists, for the question of whether we are the only ones in space, have been claimed that our cosmic neighborhood is swarming with other, intelligent forms. According to them, there are more than thirty cosmic civilizations capable of communication in the Milky Way galaxy (Westby & Conselice, 2020). Another researcher, physicist Michio Kaku, during an AMA (Ask Me Anything) session, stated that aliens are technologically advanced enough to come to Earth, but they would be dissatisfied with what we have achieved so far (Kaku, 2018). Through a NASA grant, two US research institutions have announced the start of a search for signs of life in space by attempting to detect the so-called techno signatures or technological traces of extraterrestrial civilizations. Steven Dick also writes about the discussions on extraterrestrial civilizations and the consequences for

human beings of this meeting in his famous work (Dick, 2014). In discussing the perspective of posthuman philosophy, we used the idea of “philosophical untranslatability” represented in the recent philosophical anthropology studies (Rudenko & Sobolevskiy, 2020).

Philosophical posthumanism and the problem of intelligent life

Giordano Bruno, who was burned at stake in Rome in 1600, was also thinking about the possibility of intelligent beings existing outside the Earth. And besides, his “sins” also included the doctrine of the multiplicity of inhabited worlds. This issue is as old as the world — as Gindilis Mironovich writes — because, in one form or another, philosophical and scientific thought considered it at all stages of development, starting from the deepest of antiquity. Today it has developed into the SETI program — the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (Mironovich, 2001: 138). How he goes on to write, from a philosophical point of view, the important question is whether highly developed civilizations can pose a threat to humanity. Historical experience teaches us that the interaction of civilizations on Earth usually took place according to a scenario in which the stronger tried to subdue the weaker. Can this scenario come true for further cosmic civilizations?

It seems that such a perspective has prevailed still. For example, this is evidenced by the position taken at the last congress on Russian cosmonautics, which, like a lens, showed the classic motives of an anthropocentric approach to the cosmic space and its role in human life. In this perspective, space exploration is the most important element in the development of civilization on Earth. It brings both obvious current benefits and as a basis for discoveries and wonderful projects, revealing the broad possibilities for the development of human civilization and, in particular, the self-fulfillment of a person (Kuvshinov, 2020: 5-8). Against this background, the vision of Mironovich at the turn of the century was like a cry in the wilderness. In response, he calls for the development of an entirely different paradigm of cooperation, as a historical principle of “technical-humanitarian balance, according to which, the greater the power of production and combat technologies, the more perfect containment mechanisms are needed to preserve society” (Mironovich, 2001: 145-146). If one were to extrapolate these ideas, one could find here the prophecy of posthumanism.

The leading theorist of posthumanism, Francesco Ferrando, does not doubt that man, in a sense, has always been in space, so the question “should people go into space” should be considered rhetorical. She recalls the story of the cosmic rivalry, which was another part of the “Cold War.” As she writes, people have already been in space since a series of successful launches following the space race between the Soviet Union and the USA in the 1950s and 1960s (Ferrando, 2016: 141).

Of course, suppose we are talking about a meeting of other cosmic civilizations. In that case, there is not only a problem concerning the technologies of the future on both sides of these meeting civilizations but a more fundamental issue, that is, what one means by an intelligent form of life. After all, the man not only means about “listening to each other (with extraterrestrial being).” He always wanted to be in space, to explore it, and above all to interact with other intelligence. Of course, apart from the question of the ability/inability of the human species to travel in space due to biological conditions. Already at this initial stage, the human being proves to be less adapted than robots and other AI machines. This may fundamentally undermine the sense of not only the discussion but also the practical intentions. However, as Francesca Ferrando writes, it is rather leading to deconstruct the essentialist concept of man, which will allow an open ontological framework for various

forms of existence in space (Ferrando, 2016: 141-142). To remain with the position we have taken so far is a well-known dystopian scenario. For example, Ricardo Campa and others write about such a version related to the competition for cosmic natural resources between man and hostile to him AI (in the form of the notorious Singularity) (Campa et al., 2019).

That is why reflection within the so-called philosophical posthumanism current deconstructs the existing (anthropocentric) center of discourse, enabling a multifocal approach and promoting a dynamic openness that takes into account the multiplicity of perspectives (Ferrando, 2019: 118).

This makes it possible to answer the question about intelligent forms of life, but already in a completely different configuration, related to the development of advanced technologies, automatization, and AI. A particularly comprehensive answer can be found in a recent work published under *Philosophical Posthumanism* by Francesca Ferrando. The comprehensive vision proposed by Ferrando is not only very topical and conclusive in the scientific sense, but it is also read as if the aim here is to provide an exhaustive theoretical interpretation for the whole of science fiction creativity. Readers and authors can find answers to most of the questions here.

About the problem of the definition of life, Ferrando states that both the biological domain and ancient beliefs, such as animism, do not consider a permanent division between what can be considered animate and what can be considered inanimate, which becomes particularly complicated due to appears, as a result of the development of advanced computer technologies, of the problem of so-called “artificial life,” which within the frame of the philosophy of posthumanism should be considered as part of posthuman life (Ferrando, 2019: 109). Of course, when this artificial life is legitimized, there is always the fear about the possible ontological primacy of the new form over the old. However, as Ferrando claims, from the point of view of philosophical posthumanism, granting the artificial life of equal rights in the kingdom of the whole spectrum of life in the posthuman world is unlikely to lead to that situation. Therefore, this does not mean accepting a vision of a dystopian future in which ‘nature’ will be replaced by artificial replicas.

However, as Milan Cirkovic, for example, says, although most transhumanists/post-humanists consider the nature of future civilization to be postbiological, they are not willing to abandon the biological motivations underlying any conscious action known to man, including to it a post-biological entity. This approach leads to specific technological optimism. As he writes, most, if not all, technological optimists are enthusiastic supporters not only of all naturalistic, but especially of the neo-Darwinian, evolutionary approaches to the origins of humanity, and even of the sociobiological origins of human culture and technological civilization. The situation seems, according to him, to be as follows: if we agree that specific biological motivations/ instincts were a decisive factor in the biological (human) phase of the history of our species, it would be reasonable to say that after the transition to the posthuman phase, the old biological impulses and motivations will become largely irrelevant. Paradoxically, it is rare for techno-optimists/transhumanists to see things that way. It is generally agreed that posthumanism will enable the same Darwinian goals and tasks to be achieved faster and better. They will be simply some new means to the old goals. Cirkovic, on the other hand, recognizes that this view is old-fashioned, illogical, and ultimately untenable. Rejecting it may shed new light on issues in the field of future studies of advanced extraterrestrial civilizations and ongoing SETI projects (Cirkovic, 2008: 247).

After all, the question is fundamental — why do these post-humanist, postbiological, extraterrestrial agencies/subjects function and work, what ‘pushes’ them forward.

For Milan M. Cirkovic, it is not important what forms of posthumans life will be present in the next stage, be it ‘uploaded’ people or ‘robots’, etc., because finally, they all fit into a simplified scenario of an inherently complex and heterogeneous evolutionary process. The following issue emerges in the context of ATC (Advanced Technological Civilizations): such traditional biological imperatives as survival to childbearing age, to leave as many and healthy offspring as possible, infant protection, various forms of biologically conditioned social structures — all this will become marginal, if at all not disappear, as an important motivation/stimulus/determinant for individuals and groups. In this perspective, there is no place for genetic inheritance, which is an inter-generational transmission, no threatening environment that exerts selection pressure, no need to preserve biologically conditioned sexual differences, no biotic competition, no selection of relatives, no ecological constraints (the environment is digital), no minimal viable population (Cirkovic, 2008: 251).

For the latest post-humanist reflection, such an approach is a classic expression of traditional hegemonic anthropocentric discourse.

For the first time, the issue of the one-sidedness of the previous concept of life was raised by Rosi Braidotti, who stress that it is necessary to finally put an end to the perception of life through the prism of the bios category, i.e., the strictly anthropocentric and political category, and to give priority to understanding life as a zoe, as something vitalistic, productive and prehuman (Braidotti, 2019). In the humanist paradigm to date, Zoe has been excluded from the sacred area of the “I” and is experienced as something alien. The concept of bios/Zoe has allowed Braidotia to create a new framework for the approach to life.

Marietta Radomska writes, “Braidotti’s proposal is some kind of “symbiotic,” requiring the “dissolution” of the previous subjectivity to be able to consolidate it anew — but this time as a nomadic network of mutual correlations and connections, putting the generative power to Zoe — Life” (Radomska, 2010: 72). Braidotti rejects anthropocentrism and leads to dismantling the category of nature. According to it, the division into nature and artifacts is destructive. Hybridization is normal, and the human perspective to date was based on the Bios. The perspective of Zoe — an impersonal, inhuman life — should be taken. Zoe’s discourse transcends the boundaries of what is organic/mechanical and allows for the recognition of the acting of non-human subjects. It is closely related to the construction of the subject as a relational entity, whose fundamental attribute is the ability to create connections, not reflectiveness or reasonableness.

Rosi Braidotti defines post-humanistic theory as a process ontology that challenges the traditional identification of subjectivity as the rational consciousness, thus opposing its reduction to some objective and linear construct. The nomadic vision of the human cognitive subject as a time continuum and collective assembly avoids the dualistic frame and shows it as forming a bond with various others and subsequently blending in with the technologically mediated planetary environment. The result of combining what is human with what is technological is a transversal alliance, a new kind of ecosophical unity resembling the symbiotic relationship between the animal and its planetary environment (Braidotti, 2014: 317-318).

Braidotti states that “we can all gain if we realize that the place of Beings, once known as the “other” for anthropocentric and humanistic “Man,” is occupied by postanthropocentric, transversally and structurally unrelated embodied non-human entities” (Braidotti, 2014: 209). This seems that it was the prelude for Ferrando’s subsequent vision of the subject as the part of “artificial life.”

Francesca Ferrando goes further and, based on philosophical posthumanism, which deconstructs the anthropocentric hegemony of identity formed on the bios paradigm, builds post-humanist anthropology. She states that it gives us an open platform for various life projects, both earthly and interstellar. She writes about it: “Following these reflections, we can conclude that the strict boundary established in the Western hegemonic tradition between organic/inorganic, biological/artificial and physical/virtual faces a radical challenge not only from different cultures and different time perspectives but more generally, through ongoing changes in areas such as artificial intelligence, including robotics and virtual reality” (Ferrando, 2019: 113).

The post-humanist approach is fundamental to developing that epistemology that analyses future civilizations and existence (terrestrial and extraterrestrial) in the context of new technologies to avoid the mistake of opposing technology man.

This position makes it impossible for people to transform a robot into a new symbolic other and avoid falling into the dualistic paradigm that historically characterized Western hegemonic positions, articulated in contrast to those of man/woman, white/black, man/machine, and me/other. In hypothetical cases of AI taking power, the adoption of posthumanism, postanthropocentric, and post-dualistic social practices will also prevent dualism and ultimately even discrimination against people by advanced AI. A careful reflection on the interaction between species takes the discourse into the interior of a symbiotic paradigm, not a dualistic one. The difference becomes an evolutionary feature of existence; this realization has not only scientific value but also social and political usefulness. The integral epistemological approach of philosophical posthumanism can allow humans and robots to fully develop their combined potentials, ultimately facilitating a truly inter-species expedition to existential exploration (Ferrando, 2019: 113).

Francesca Ferrando’s proposal in this context is all the more important because it incorporates the two usual futuristic or fictional visions — utopian/ optimistic and dystopian/ pessimistic. Of course, it is difficult to speak of a strictly objective point of view here, because these visions, after all, are our human visions, and only real contact with extraterrestrial intelligent life will verify scientific and artistic extrapolations. In any case, this is consistent with the vision of philosophical posthumanism itself, which says the following: “Philosophical Posthumanism invites us to proceed in relational and multilayered ways, in a post-dualistic, post-hierarchical praxis which sets a suitable way of departure to approach existence beyond the boundaries of humanism and anthropocentrism” (Ferrando, 2019: 19). One could say that the framework for meeting and theorizing these issues is still our point of view.

Forms of intelligent life in science fiction

In popular culture, the issue of human contact with extraterrestrial intelligent beings has always been between fantastic/fantasticality and futurology, as Stanisław Lem, for example, said. According to Lem, the most valuable is the kind of science fiction that is based on current and scientifically accessible empiricism. Such fantasy, although fictional, is cognitively valuable, is then close to futurology (Lem, 2009).

Of course, the perception of these beings has been burdened from the very beginning with the anthropomorphic/anthropomorphic dichotomy. Initially, alien intelligent beings are shown by reference to humans and are usually specific modifications of the human race. Edgar Rice Burroughs presented such a vision in the series about Barsoom (a vision of Mars as a dying civilization). In his series of adventures of Captain John Carter on Mars, we deal with various forms of humanoid intelligent beings (green race, red race, people-plants, “black

pirates race”) (Barsoom, 1911-1941). *The First Man in the Moon*, 1901 by Herbert George Wells, is the first novel showing anti-anthropomorphic intelligent beings from space, where we are dealing with an insect-like creature, with goggles and thorns on its head (Wells, 1901; Seed, 2018: 40-42). Another famous novel, *The War of the Worlds*, published for the first time in 1898, shows an inhuman race and apocalyptic vision of man’s future. The author presents the Martian’s invasion of the Earth; people from the invaders’ perspective are nothing but ordinary food.

Eminent Russian writers Ivan Yefremov and the Arkady and Boris Strugatsky brothers also had different views on these issues. Ivan Yefremov could not imagine that intelligent beings from outer space were not anthropomorphic. He was one of the active defenders of the anthropomorphism of aliens. He wrote that there could be no early maturation of intelligent life in lower forms such as mold, fungi, plants, crabs, let alone the thinking ocean. He believed in the possibility of semantic information exchange between cosmic civilizations. That is why he strongly criticized the inability of two spacecraft to represent different intelligent races to communicate (Murray Leinster’s novel *First Contact*, 1945) (Seed, 2018: 54). Whereas the brothers Strugatsky, unlike Ivan Yefremov, often refer in their works to non-anthropomorphic civilizations (the non-humanoid extraterrestrial civilization from the novel *Space Mowgli* (1971), the ‘wanderers’ are not very similar to people, etc.) (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 1971). Most probably because it was difficult for them to say anything concrete about possible life forms and types of mind in the universe (Tenyakova, 2007: 122-124).

Another intelligent cosmic civilization popularised by the series *Star Trek: Enterprise* is the Borg race. As Lynette Russell and Nathan Wolski write, “The Borg stands beyond reason, communication, and understanding. They are presented to us and experienced by the crew of the *Enterprise* as irrational beings” (Russell & Wolski, 2012). Initially, the Borg are represented both as completely homogenous and as different from the Federation. The Borg are a race of enhanced humanoids transformed by cybernetic devices, functioning both inside and outside their bodies. Ultimately they turn out to be the most inhuman race that had met by the crew of *Star Trek*.

The humanoid body is like an empty shell on which technological modifications are made; what matters is not the body’s integrity but its technological functionality. It does not matter whether the body is the body of a human, Klingon, Vulcan, or another alien. All humanoid beings are potential resources for the Borg collective, which is becoming a “multiracial mass.” Visible transformations, such as the introduction of tubes and the addition of artificial limbs and eye prostheses, define the Borg race as non-human. Each Borg unit is connected by a subspace communication network that constitutes a homogenous synthesized whole — a unity, a Borg collective. Although the Borg unit is a separate physical entity, it is not capable of individual self-determination. Free will, self-determination, and choice are erased from the “mentalities” of Borg assimilated members of other races. The Borg are presented and experienced as something completely different, beyond the sphere of experience even known to the *Enterprise* crew. A Borg ship is unlike anything they have encountered before. It shows no signs of a command center, crew quarters, or even crew. Scanning the ship for life signs is fruitless because the Borg does not register as a living vessel in the classical, humanistic, biological sense of the word. The Borg collective is a unified whole, not a collection of individual minds. Multiplicity is unity. Each Borg is the same as the others. They are all completely homogenous (Russell & Wolski, 2012).

An exciting example of an unintentional creation of cosmic civilizations as if tailored to a post-humanist model (but without an optimistic message) is provided by the book by the

Polish author titled *Głębia* (Deep) (Podlewski, 2015- 2018; space opera in 4 volumes). An author has presented all possible forms of intelligent inorganic and organic life. All forms of intelligent life, organic and non-organic, proposed by the author, fit perfectly into the framework proposed by philosophical posthumanism.

Initially, we have humanity, which lives in a certain symbiosis with Others/Xeno in a political organization called The Galactic Empire. However, the question of Xeno is not entirely resolved, because there are still problems with ‘familiar’ aliens and the new ones, because the Empire has still problems with communication with them. The Galactic Empire has existed in something like an idealistic permanent Xenological Programme. However, in the following attempt to contact further aliens/Pilgrims on the planet Ether, an indeterminate transgressive intelligent entity was emerged (Antenate, Plague). That existence comprehended that the unification of people with aliens would only be possible if humans become mentally similar to aliens, which would mean the end of human civilization. The first war between People, Aliens, and Machines (artificial intelligence created by humans) and the Plague, started when the Plague took over part of the Empire’s army and threatened its extinction. The war ended with the success of the combined forces that destroyed a transgressive being called the Plague. However, as a result of the perturbation, emerged a war between the Aliens (until now humans friends) and the Humans and Machines. Finally, the aliens were driven out. Then has started the war between humans and Machines, which have organized themselves in integrative Unity — a transgressive Artificial Intelligence that advanced itself thanks to humans during the war with Plague. It is then that Unity uses the cosmic weapon — for the total burning out constellations of stars. The Galaxy Burnt out is precisely the remnant of the Milky Way, irretrievably ravaged during the historic war with the Machines. However, this Firing starts to live its life.

Against this background, the author, referring to the classic themes of adventure, interstellar travel, battles, and skirmishes, presents the reader with an interesting story of Grunwald Myrdal, one of the last people not contaminated by biotechnological improvements. The universe of the novel seems to be a model universe of posthuman philosophy. Here we have a spectrum of intelligent forms of organic and inorganic/ artificial life. The first species are people who seem to fulfill the postulate of transhumanism (Vita-More, 2006). In the novel, the human race is the main object of the author’s writing. There are the Humans + Tech-Personal (i.e., implemented to human fetuses through nano-injection, biotechnological chip). As it was said, genetically pure people no longer exist. We find a slightly similar situation in Stanisław Lem’s novel *Return from the Stars*.

The group of living intelligent forms includes other races presented in the novel. The collection is a spiritualist, transgressive sect. They want to develop the human spirit and psyche. The collection aims to free man from the body and function as a collective being, a mental entity. According to them, the body is only a cocoon for the spirit. To achieve this goal, they undergo gene-transformation. Another race is STRIPS — an acronym from Simultaneous Technique of Posthuman Intellect Development (in Polish). These creatures think they are machines, they identify themselves with them. They think that the world is a simulation, so death is simply the end of the simulation. They can be classified as another version of a transhumanistic project. This race dreams to embody itself in metal — in a machine. Their mentality is like computer programs. They profess the principle of technical salvation. Pilgrims — an alien species of the close type, that is, capable of communication. This species has been researched within the framework of the Empire’s Xenological Programme. Pilgrims’ representatives used a language based on crackling sounds; some of the detected

semantic forms intuitively fit into the simple forms of the Empire's praxis; because they were contacting with another Xeno races, the Xeno was considered by the Thinkers of the Empire to be a race focused on diplomacy. They traveled the Galaxy on live ships and knew little about their home planet. The Elohim is a human race that seeks to join with aliens/ Pilgrims. They worshiped mythical aliens; the Elohim slogan — the limit of man is the man; they want to become like the aliens through genotransformation. Machines (could rebel, as Francesca Ferrando, for example, warns us about) — robots created by man in the image of humans and animals. They have become alien... In human nomenclature, there were four levels of machines. AI-first level — the level of insects. Second level AI — the level of animals. Third level AI — a level similar to human intelligence. The third higher-level AI ('3.5') — almost corresponding to human intelligence — was the 'castrated' AI of spacecraft. Fourth-degree AI Autonomous Programming Units of Class D (JAR-D). During the Machine War, machine entities achieved the character of integrated existence — Unity. Not a separate machine is an entity, but Unity is a Being; Machine is a separate part of Unity. Being is a program — a code of Machines.

Studying in detail the characters outlined by the author of *The Deep*, one can say that the fantastic world created in this work, as well as that of other science fiction authors, sometimes rises to the level of a pro-philosophical reflection formulating as yet unspecified issues, categories, and problems connected with the current state of the world in which human, posthuman civilization functions.

Conclusions

The results of our research are as follows.

1. It is shown that the posthuman perspective has the greatest cognitive potential concerning the problem of the coexistence of various forms of life in the cosmos, both organic and inorganic.
2. It also allows for the reconfiguration of relations between humans and posthumans, including entities built on AI.
3. It is shown that the universes presented in science fiction can be an important starting material for advanced philosophical reflection.

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