

POSTHUMANIST DISCOURSE IN MODERN HUMANITIES STUDIES

To date, there is a certain definitional uncertainty regarding the concept of the new humanism in the foreign and national scientific discourse of literary critics, philosophers and cultural scientists. Thus, when mentioning the latest trends in humanism of the 21st century, researchers use a number of terms that are supposedly identical and intersect each other, including (but not limited to) terms posthumanism, antihumanism, transhumanism, new humanism, metahumanism.

According to the researcher Francesca Ferrando from Columbia University, USA, the adjective posthuman (as well as its derivative term posthumanism) has become an umbrella term for describing various schools of thought in the field of modern humanism epistemological, scientific and biotechnological discoveries of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It has appeared due to the need for an all-encompassing integral term capable of constructively describing such new changes in the human being [3, p. 26].

In the Western science the concept of posthumanism is interdisciplinary and is widely used by researchers in the fields of literary studies, philosophy, cultural studies, theoretical sociology, and general scientific and technical practice [1, p. 1]. It serves to describe the general concept for a new understanding of the human nature in the modern world, its connection with nature and the environment; the transition from humanism to posthumanism marks fundamental changes in the assumptions of human culture regarding itself [1, p. 1].

The main theoretical foundations of posthumanism which form its central conceptual essence are the rethinking of human nature as a unity that develops together with machines and animals. It also requires a more inclusive definition of life, a greater moral and ethical response, and requires the recognition of

responsibility for non-human forms of life in an era of blurring and mixing of interspecies boundaries [4, p. 4].

The researcher Pramod K. Nayar states that in the modern understanding posthumanism as such is based on two different views on the renewed nature of the human. The first trend is called transhumanism, which is characterized as «pop posthumanism of cinema and pop culture (Terminator, The Matrix, cyberpunk fiction), <...> a hagiography of techno-modifications of the human» [4, p. 6]. As can be conducted from the given definition, the transhumanist approach is in most cases the product of modern pop culture, and is deliberately called «the "cyborg" strand of posthumanism» [7, p. 13].

The second trend that Nayar identifies in modern posthumanism is called critical posthumanism (CPH). As the name implies, this type of posthumanism is generally critical of the idea of traditional humanism and is two-directional – in the criticism of the humanist belief in the uniqueness of a man and in the criticism of human instrumentalism (that is, the belief in man's ability to conquer and control this world).

An important role in the formation of critical posthumanism belongs to antihumanism. Antihumanism usually denies the individual worth and dignity of human beings; often, it denies that humans are the true creators of history, attributing it rather to the will of providence or supra-individual social systems or creatures such as deity, nature or society, and the absolute good is considered the one which exceeds or even opposes human good. Antihumanists are not necessarily against man; they simply claim that the humanistic view of life is incapable of illuminating the whole picture of existence and thus relying on its doctrines may be morally wrong [5, p. 214].

Another classification of the constituent parts of posthumanism was proposed by the researcher Francesca Ferrando in the monograph *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019). Thus, she divides posthumanism into three branches – critical, cultural and philosophical.

The first, critical posthumanism, is directly connected with the field of literary criticism and is called critical posthumanism by analogy with literary criticism.

According to Ferrando, the work of Katherine Hayles *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (1999), which mostly explores the place of cybernetics and IT-narratives in feminist criticism and other postmodern literary practices, had a decisive influence on the formation of this direction, which, in turn, laid the foundation for the study of the question of the posthuman by literary criticism [2, p. 2].

The second, cultural posthumanism, was formed in the 1980s alongside the critical humanism, also on the basis of literary studies of that time. According to the researcher, one of the founders and popularizers of this direction was Donna Haraway, with the work *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980* (1985), where she outlined a new «cybernetic» approach to the issue of human modifications and interspecies hybrids, which, in fact, marked the beginning of post- and transhumanist researches in all sciences about the human [2, p. 2].

And, finally, the third variety – philosophical posthumanism – Ferrando calls an integrating «onto-epistemological <...> ethical approach» [2, p. 22], which rejects all conventions in the matter of studying a human being, which serves the needs of a new philosophical view of the current epoch; it is regarded as «philosophy of mediation» [2, p. 3].

The last in the list of the notable schools of humanism of the 21st century which require special attention is metahumanism. In search of its origins most scientific works on the topic refer us to the so-called manifesto of metahumanism by the authors Jaime del Val and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, who have outlined and systematized the characteristic features of this school. *A Metahumanist Manifesto* (2010) consists of 10 points, each of which touches upon a certain aspect of the phenomenon. So, among other things, it deals with the concept of metabody – metahumanism believes the human body is included in the space of amorphous transformations, in the multiplicity of other bodies that are in an ultra-complex system: from the molecular and bacterial level to the social, planetary and cosmic, each of which is in a mutual relationship with others [6, p. 1-2]. This also includes

postanatomism, which challenges the anthropomorphic view on anatomy of the human body, and metasexuality, which raises the issues of sexual orientation and gender polymorphism [6, p. 1-2].

According to Ferrando, metahumanism must be distinguished from the much more simplistic concept of metahumanity that has emerged in popular culture – imaginative experiments in creating meta-forms of human essence in the form of superheroes and mutants in comics and role-play games, first mentioned under the collective name metahuman in DC Comics (NY) magazines since the 1970s and remaining relevant to this day [3, p. 32].

Summing up, it should be noted that the following trend is currently noted in academic circles: the focus of the humanities on the post-human problem is causing an interdisciplinary shift from humanism to posthumanism, expanding the research area for a question «what is a human being?» in the context of the modern flexible understanding of human nature in all disciplines, especially philosophy and literature, which determines the relevance of further substantive practical research in these fields.

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