



The Survival of The Superman Dream in Hypermodern Society: The African Anthropological Response Between Finitude and *Gbětónyinyĩ*

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ABSTRACT: This paper responds to the theme: "Transhumanism and AI: The Survival of the Superman Dream in Hypermodern Society." The central argument is simple: the idea of the "superman" is a dream and it will remain a dream for as long as humanity exists. The belief that modernity could last forever is equally a utopia, and the 21st century is making that clear.

The key question explored here is: Can human beings stop being human? To answer this, the paper shifts the focus back to what it means to be human drawing on the African philosophical concept of *Gbětónyinyĩ*, a term that captures both the reality of being alive in the world and the deep meaning of human existence.

The argument is that contemporary philosophy, by rejecting the old "master and conqueror" view of humanity, now calls us to acknowledge our finitude our inescapable limits as the foundation of what it means to be human. Rather than seeing transhumanism and AI as threats, we should channel human creativity back toward its true essence.

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Published Online:

May 22, 2026

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KEYWORDS:

Transhumanism, AI, Finitude, *Gbětónyinyĩ*, African philosophy

Cite the Article: Techou, R. (2026). *The Survival of The Superman Dream in Hypermodern Society: The African Anthropological Response Between Finitude and Gbětónyinyĩ*. *International Journal of Human Research and Social Science Studies*, 3(5), 436-439. <https://doi.org/10.55677/ijhrsss/13-2026-Vol03I05>

INTRODUCTION

To be human *Gbětónyinyĩ*¹ means accepting that we are finite beings. Every human life is marked by two certainties: birth and death. The people of Benin have understood this for generations, captured in a simple proverb: "*Gbětó jé nu ku bo jé nu gbě*" we are born, and we die. This recognition of human limits is not a weakness; it is the very foundation of human experience.

This truth became impossible to ignore during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite all the technological achievements of the modern era, a tiny virus exposed just how fragile human life really is. The pandemic was a lesson in humility, a reminder of our deep vulnerability.

Against this backdrop, we need to think more carefully about AI and transhumanism not through the lens of consumerism and profit, but through the lens of what it means to be human. As long as we admire the products of human ingenuity without thinking about the human beings who create them, humanity will remain at odds with itself. As the philosopher Jacob Agossou put it: "Humanity, whether Black, yellow, or white, is a primary reality. It is what makes and unmakes institutions but it cannot destroy itself without consequence."

This paper takes a phenomenological and ethical approach to the anxiety surrounding transhumanism. I will begin by examining the idea of the superman in today's hypermodern world. I will then argue that the absence of a coherent philosophical understanding of what it means to be human is what creates the dangerous gap between humanity and its own technological creations. Finally, I will propose the African philosophical concept of *Gbětónyinyĩ* rooted in finitude and humanization as a response that helps reconnect humanity with its true meaning.

¹ Language spoken in the South of the Republic of Benin by an ethnic group called "Fon" or "Goun"

1. THE SUPERMAN DREAM IN HYPERMODERN SOCIETY

1.1 A Shift in How We Think About Being Human

After centuries dominated by the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am," philosophy today is returning to a simpler and more grounded truth: human beings are finite. We are limited and that limitation is not a flaw. It is the most fundamental truth about us.

Contemporary philosophical thought no longer tries to reduce the human being to just reason or soul. It embraces the full picture: body, feeling, flesh, mortality, emotion. As philosopher Rémi Brague puts it, to forget the body and the senses in order to reduce humanity to reason alone is to forget what we truly are.

The over-rationalization of the world what some call "logocentrism" has reached its limits. Science and technology, powerful as they are, do not constitute thought on their own. The philosopher Jean-Luc Marion speaks of "the insufficiency of sufficient reason" as the key challenge of our time. This invites us to ask: Must thought always be identified with objective, scientific reason? Are the exact sciences the only path to truth?

These are not merely academic questions. The answers will shape what kind of human being emerges from the digital revolution and whether that revolution serves or threatens humanity.

1.2 The Digital Revolution and What It Means to Be Human

The digital revolution is best understood as an extension of human cognitive power. Like the industrial revolutions before it, it has transformed how we work, think, and perceive the world. AI acts as a kind of "second brain," extending human mental capacity in ways that are genuinely new.

But is this a threat? Philosopher Stéphane Vial argues no. According to him, this technological shift follows the same historical pattern as previous revolutions. The first two industrial revolutions mechanized physical labor; the digital revolution is now doing the same for mental labor. This is not a break from humanity, it is a continuation of it.

Father Thierry Magnin, a theologian and physicist, has identified three converging revolutions that are reshaping what it means to "become human": revolutions in technology and science, in economics, and in digital technology. Their combined effects are already visible: connected devices, artificial intelligence, robots, Big Data, and algorithms are transforming everyday life. More dramatically, nanotechnologies and neurotechnologies are beginning to blur the boundary between the human body and machines.

"Without a doubt, the conditions of 'becoming human' will profoundly change in the coming years. In the field of neurotechnologies, for example, an electronic chip implanted in the brain could improve the condition of a person suffering from Parkinson's disease or help a paralyzed person regain the use of their limbs." Thierry Magnin

Beyond repair, researchers are now exploring the invention of new senses altogether including a "sixth sense" implant that detects magnetic north, like an internal compass. The driving idea is: if we feel more, we understand more, and we live more deeply.

All of this raises a critical anthropological question: Who exactly are we talking about? Man? Humanity? Has "man" as a fixed concept ever truly captured the full reality of human existence? And if humanity now appears threatening to itself, what does that say about who we are?

2. THINKING THROUGH AND HEALING HUMANITY IN THE AGE OF TECHNOSCIENCE

2.1 Africa and Technoscience: A Different Vision of Being Human

The drive to enhance human capabilities through technology is largely an American and Anglo-Saxon vision shaped by values of innovation, efficiency, and the elimination of suffering. But this vision comes with difficult questions: If we overcome death, will we also generate more violence and social inequality? If machines do everything for us, do we grow weaker? Is being assisted by robots the same as being free?

These questions matter everywhere, but they take on particular urgency in Africa, where transhumanism is attracting growing interest even as millions struggle with hunger and poverty. The risk is clear: new technologies could widen already vast inequalities between nations, and within them.

At the same time, African solutions to the ecological crisis rooted in a deep respect for nature offer real insights for a world in environmental trouble. And crucially, the African vision of humanity has never been threatened by these technological developments, it simply does not need to be adjusted. It already offers a complete and grounded understanding of what it means to be human.

Historian Roger Bastide noted that serious study of African thought only began in the late 19th century, when Western societies needed to integrate formerly enslaved Africans into national economies. Before that, the African person was seen only as a source of labor not as a thinking, feeling human being with a rich cultural worldview.

African philosopher Jacob Agossou argues that those early studies missed the point entirely. Instead of starting with the living African person shaped by a rich cultural past, they focused on folklore and "survivals," missing what Agossou calls the "unassimilable substances" common to all humans, lived within a specific context.

Today, African philosophy is asserting itself on its own terms. As Eboussi Boulaga asked: How can a genuine philosophical discourse emerge from Black Africa, one that embraces the full becoming of the African person in all their complexity? That question is being answered by a growing body of African thinkers.

2.2 The Concept of *Gbětónyínyí*

The neologism *Gbětónyínyí* drawn from Beninese Fongbe captures the full, dynamic reality of being human. It builds on the vital principle *Sé*, which holds a double meaning: the individual principle and the creative principle. This linguistic structure reveals the human being as a totality in motion, always striving toward its own fulfillment.

Finitude, in this framework, is not a limitation to be overcome. It is the very condition that makes human existence meaningful. As philosopher Françoise Dastur writes:

"Finitude is not an imperfection it is the source of what truly constitutes humanity. It is because the human being does not create what it perceives that it must provide itself with the conditions to receive it. This is made possible by language, and by naming: for what receives a name is drawn from the indistinctness of the whole and given its own limits. It is finitude that is the foundation of what radically distinguishes humans from all other living beings."

African anthropology and Beninese anthropology in particular demonstrates that the human being is both immanent and transcendent. The concept of *Gbětónyínyí* holds these two dimensions together, without collapsing one into the other.

3. GBĚTÓNÝÍNYÍ BETWEEN FINITUDE AND HUMANIZATION

Transhumanism today presents itself as a serious movement: drawing on advances in biology and AI, it advocates transforming or even surpassing humanity, to create a posthuman with capabilities far beyond our current ones. Since 2025, the idea of artificial superintelligence has been gaining real momentum, with tech leaders like Sam Altman arguing that it is just around the corner and will fundamentally reshape the world.

But philosophers are skeptical. Eric Sadin argues that calling these systems "intelligent" is a misuse of language : they represent a "mode of rationality," not intelligence in any human sense. Aymeric Roucher notes that AI will be far superior to humans in some respects, and far weaker in others. What matters, says Sadin, is not new terminology but awareness: Are we conscious of what these ever-growing "cognitive powers" are doing to our lives, our societies, and our sense of self?

African philosophical anthropology offers a different framing. Jacob Agossou describes the human being as a true microcosm : plant, animal, and spiritual; individual and social; a creature of instinct and reason, shaped by heredity yet capable of transcending it. And Agossou knew that illness and death are not anomalies. They are part of what it means to be alive:

"Death is a situation common to all humans. It spares no one. Illness is perceived as a failure of vital balance a slowing-down of existence, a vital diminution." Jacob Agossou

This is not pessimism. It is wisdom. Acknowledging our mortality truly accepting it is what frees us to live well. As Dastur writes, "the human being is a finite being, ephemeral, since their existence extends only between the two limits of birth and death." Yet we spend most of our lives forgetting this.

The language of finitude is the foundation of being in the world. When we know ourselves to be radically contingent mortal, limited, embedded in time, we understand existence itself with greater clarity. Finitude becomes the starting point for all moral, legal, and political thought, grounding it not in abstract transcendence but in who we actually are.

4. GBĚTÓNÝÍNYÍ BETWEEN FINITUDE AND INCARNATION

Thought is what makes humanity great. And it is a sign of shallow thinking to constantly feel threatened as a human being by our own creations. Caught in the flow of technological innovation, we have no choice but to face all the consequences which is exactly why faculties of theology and philosophy must re-engage with foundational questions about what it means to be human.

African philosophers : Eboussi Boulaga, Jean-Marc Ela, Jacob Agossou, Paulin Hountondji, Ka-Mana, Souleymane Bachir Diagne have been asking these questions for decades. Their work offers a pathway out of the "augmented but alone" human and toward what Diagne calls "universalizing the human by human means."

The link between machine and human is made through reason. Robots are useful tools. But can we make machines that love? That believe? That create? If *Gbětónyínyí* (the human being) unfolds between finitude and humanization, then transhumanism and posthumanism are ultimately distractions. They draw our attention away from the genuine ethical and spiritual responsibilities that come with being alive.

Pascal wrote: "Man is great because he knows himself to be wretched." Our finitude, fully accepted, becomes a source of wisdom and humility, not a problem to be solved. The Beninese proverb says it plainly: "*Nũ bí ɔ vɔ jén nɔ vɔ*" everything eventually comes to an end.

From a Christian and African theological perspective, finitude is not simply a limitation, it is the very site of transformation. The Incarnation of God entering into human finitude, redeems the human condition in all its fragility: flesh, suffering, death, and resurrection. As Saint Irenaeus wrote:

"The molded flesh, by itself, is not the perfect man it is only the body of man. The soul, by itself, is no more the man it is only the soul of man. The spirit, too, is not the man. It is the mixture and union of all these things that constitutes the perfect man."

In this light, technological innovations must always be evaluated in terms of what they mean for the concrete human being not in terms of profit or productivity. The real threat of AI and transhumanism is not that machines will become too powerful. It is that humanity will forget itself in admiring its own tools.

As Aurélien Gbégnon, commenting on Agossou, writes:

"The human being is a sacred being. Not only body and matter, but also thought and spirit. What is indispensable to life, to its maintenance and its development, is owed to every person by virtue of what nature has made them by virtue of the strength and value of reason."

To be human *Gbětónyinyĩ* is to live in the humility of finitude and the openness of the infinite. What Western philosophy is now rediscovering through philosophies of intersubjectivity (Levinas, Hans Jonas, Paul Ricœur, Jean-Luc Marion), African thought has always known: the human being cannot be reduced to an object. Inalienable human dignity cannot be undone not by genetic manipulation, not by AI, not by any technology.

CONCLUSION

The digital revolution is not merely a technical event. It is, at its core, an anthropological one. It transforms how we relate to knowledge, to each other, and to the world. If we focus only on the risks of AI and robotics, we miss the bigger picture: the real issue is whether human memory, intelligence, and social connection are being extended or diminished.

This paper has argued that the concept of *Gbětónyinyĩ*, the human being developing between Ethics and Spirituality offers a meaningful response to this challenge. Finitude is not a defect. It is the condition that makes human understanding possible, and that gives human life its meaning: a joyful sobriety.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato si'*, does not reject progress but he warns against its excesses, and against the temptation of limitlessness. Humanity, "weary of its limitations," is always tempted by the promise of perfection. Against this, we need more wisdom, more restraint, and a deeper education in what it means to be human.

The African vision of humanity holistic, grounded, and deeply respectful of human dignity is not a step backward. It is a sure response that leads us back to what matters most: safeguarding the human being, despite the upheavals of science. Human beings must understand that genuine freedom the kind that most profoundly shapes who we are requires choosing sincerely and truthfully. Between the promises of transhumanists and the cautions of bioconservatives, the fundamental question remains: Are all possibilities desirable? And it is only by returning to the full meaning of *Gbětónyinyĩ*: the human being in all their complexity that we can answer it well.

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