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**TRANSHUMANISM IN THE LIGHT OF
THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE:
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CHRISTIAN
METAPHYSICAL IMPLICATIONS
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INTRODUCTION: ORTHODOX RESPONSES TO TRANSHUMANISM

Within Eastern Orthodox tradition, the vision of God (*theoptia*) as an unmediated experience of the uncreated light and its glory underlines the important role of the *nous*, the intuitive intellect. It also shows that reason should not be disregarded, but transformed and remodelled based on a virtuous life. The goal of human perfection is the transfiguration of the mind into a mind capable of seeing the Truth, within the context of the process of *theosis* (becoming like God). Without this divine-human anthropology, academic epistemology is an empty scheme, without substance. It cannot be more than an incomplete and inconsistent primitive epistemology. Theological and symbolistic vocabulary contain expressions of mystical realism. In contrast with a mentality rooted in the ideology that science is supreme, patristic wisdom has established that scientific proof is a much weaker notion than living the truth. Living the truth is a reality given by God, not a mental or conceptual human construct. It transcends human limitations and can face the challenges of an elaborated discourse. Spiritual realities can be intuited via a sense of perception which exceeds empiricism and rational facilities. They become accessible through spiritual experience lived in accordance with the tradition of the Church.

At the present time, when many philosophers and academics endeavour to eliminate God, to depart him from human minds, this volume is an ambitious initiative. It has profound implications for understanding the relations between language, truth and the human mind. Such an understanding is necessary in the context of the challenges provoked by the progressive world view of transhumanism, “a life philosophy, an intellectual and cultural movement and an area of study”. It can be understood as “a type of nonreligious philosophy of life that rejects faith, worship and the supernatural, instead emphasizing a meaningful and

ethical approach to living informed by reason, science, progress and the value of existence in our current life.”¹ In the present study I develop the argument that this ideology waters down the essence of thought in its desire to create a substitute human person in a unified system of universal transhuman language.² The contributors to this volume aim to restore the strength of symbolic thought and of the implications of soteriology and argue for using precise and clear language based on theological evidence. In a context characterised by increasing nominalism and instrumentalization, the cognitive abilities of the human soul are perceived as detached from reality and life. Instead, they are transferred into the virtual sphere of cybernetic immortality in a mathematical game without intuition, exclusively determined by algorithms, where the human being is reduced to the post-human level of a thinking machine.³

¹ Max More, “The Philosophy of Transhumanism” in Max More and Natasha Vita-More (eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and the Philosophy of the Human Future* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 4. In this introduction to transhumanism, More also provides several other definitions, including a citation from his own earlier work: “Philosophies of life (such as extropian perspectives that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life-promoting principles and values”. Max More, “Transhumanism: Toward a Futurist Philosophy,” *Extropy* 9 (1990): 6-12. See also e.g. Robert Pepperell, *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2003), Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture*, (Manchester: University Press, 2002) and Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

² Alexandre Moatti, *Aux racines du transhumanisme: France, 1930-1980* (Paris: Odile Jacob, coll. «Histoire», 2020); Riccardo Campa, *La specie artificiale: saggio di bioetica evolutive* (Monza: Deleyva Editore, 2013); Michael Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection. Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Harvard, Harvard University Press, 2007); Riccardo Campa, *Mutare o perire: La sfida del transumanesimo* (Bergamo: Sestante Edizioni, 2010); Nick Bostrom, “Transhumanist Values”, in Frederick Adams (ed.), *Ethical Issues for the 21st Century*, (Charlottesville: Philosophical Documentation Center Press, 2003): 1-12; Max More, “The Overman in the Transhuman”, *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 21:1 (2010): 1-4; Natasha Vita-More, “Transhuman Manifesto”, 1983 <https://www.transhumanist.biz/transhumanmanifesto.htm>; Natasha Vita-More “Transhuman Statement (Manifesto)” in Alex Danchev (ed.), *100 Artists’ Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Suckists* (New York: Penguin Modern Classics). Various authors, “Transhumanist Declaration” (2012), in More and Vita-More (eds.), *Transhumanist Reader*, 54-55. See also: Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (eds.), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017); A. Severan, *Metamodernism and the Return of Transcendence* (Windsor: Palimpsest Press, 2021).

³ Max More argues that one needs to “amend the human constitution” using biotechnology in at least seven areas ranging from ending ageing and death to not limiting

The contributors to this volume testify to the reality of life after death. This teleologic perspective demonstrates that the world would be without sense in the absence of life after death. The existence of life after death is currently supported even in some branches of academic research and science. Mathematicians with interest in philosophy, such as Kurt Gödel (1906-1978), have expressed the conviction that the human soul is immortal and that in the future it will be possible to scientifically demonstrate this.⁴ Opposing the metaphysical devaluations resulting from positivism, Gödel aimed to develop a formal metaphysical theory which include the concepts of God and soul.⁵

The contributors to this volume agree that there is more sense in religion, supported by reason, than in prejudices against religion. Saints have increasingly been considered as irrelevant for today's secular world, but a longing for the immortal, the eternal, remains. Without solid foundations,

human capacities "by remaining purely biological organisms" (More, "A Letter to Mother Nature", in More and Vita-More (eds.), *Transhumanist Reader*, 450). According to Simon Young, *Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006) 32: "As humanism freed us from the chains of superstition, let transhumanism free us from our biological chains". See also, Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (NY: Penguin Books, 2005). For transhumanism's debate with theology and further discussions, see: Daekyung Jung, "Transhumanism and Theological Anthropology: A Theological Examination of Transhumanism," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 64, no. 2 (2022): 172-194; Sabine Maasen and David Atwood (eds.), *Immanente Religion – Transzendente Technologie: Technologiediskurse Und Gesellschaftliche Grenzüberschreitungen* (Leverkusen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2021); Hendrik Klinge, "Remoto Homine: The Posthumanist Challenge to Christology," *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 64, no. 3 (2022): 251-267; Bernard Baertschi, "Plus vite, plus haut, plus fort, plus. pour aller où? Transhumanisme et aspiration au bonheur," *Journal International de Bioéthique et d'éthique des Sciences* 29, no. 3/4 (2018): 170-188; Calvin R. Mercer, "Bodies and Persons: Theological Reflections on Transhumanism," *Dialog* 54, no. 1 (2015): 27-33; Ronald Cole-Turner, "Going Beyond the Human: Christians and Other Transhumanists," *Dialog* 54, no. 1 (2015): 20-26; Dominique Lecourt, *Humain, posthumain* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003).

⁴ Mario Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary, *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008); Denyse O'Leary, Michael Egnor, *The Human Soul: What Neuroscience Shows Us about the Brain, the Mind, and the Difference Between the Two* (forthcoming 2025).

⁵ Adrian Lemeni, *Adevăr și demonstrație. De la incompletitudinea lui Gödel la vederea mai presus de orice înțelegere a Sfântului Grigore Palama* [Truth and demonstration. From the incompleteness of Gödel to the vision beyond all understanding of Saint Gregory Palamas] (Bucharest: Basilica, 2020); Piergiorgio Odifreddi, *Il dio della logica. Vita geniale di Kurt Gödel, matematico della filosofia* (Milano: Longanesi & Co, 2018).

such a longing runs the risk of being transformed into an ideology in the tradition of “will to power”.⁶ To enable people of today to understand Christian revelation and to make it possible for them to return to the integrity of its discourse, several bridges need to be built: between the church and the world, between reality and language, and between language and the experience of truth. Refusing to accept patristic arguments leads to a risk of being tempted by falsehoods masking as truth. Dialogue is thus needed between Christians and the surrounding world, to enable (post-) modern people to remain in or to return to the truth. The content of this dialogue is determined by a theology of the experience of God and the corresponding terminology and nature of thought. Another important element is analysing the meaning of the terminology of Christian metaphysics, such as the distinction between “to say” and “to tell”, attempting to express that what cannot be said, but is lived.

Engaging with transhumanism also requires addressing the issue of the relationship between the mind and the body from the discipline philosophy of mind, entailing questions such as: What is the mind? What is its origin? Can the mind be equated with the physical brain? In addition, it involves taking recent discoveries in the area of cognitive neuro-science into consideration, such as the limitations of the algorithmic nature of the human mind. The human mind cannot understand its own mechanism. In response to transhumanism, the contributions in this volume uphold the view that the mind is superior to computers and artificial intelligence, and that it cannot be replaced by them. The mind is separated from the material brain. The mind cannot be reduced to the mental part, to the brain. There are not enough neurons to fulfil all the functions of the mind.

⁶ The phrase was first mentioned by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1883), [*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*], translated by A. Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. RJ. Hollingdale and W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (Cambridge University Press, 1996, orig. 1878); Elise Bohan, “Nietzsche and Transhumanism: Much Ado About Nothing?” *Deliberatio* 1:1 (2021): 19-31; Yunus Tuncel, *Nietzsche and Transhumanism: Precursor or Enemy?* (Cambridge: Scholars Publishing, 2017); Adam Buben, “The Dark Side of Desire: Nietzsche, Transhumanism, and Personal Immortality” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 59:1 (2020): 66-84; M. Agatonović, “The Case of Transhumanism: The Possibility of Application of Nietzsche’s Ethics and Critique of Morality Today” *Philosophy and Society* 29:3 (2018): 429-439; Antoine Robitaille, *Le Nouvel Homme nouveau. Voyage dans les utopies de la posthumanité* (Montréal: Boréal, 2007).

I

TRANSHUMANISM AND OUR GARMENTS OF SKIN

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Abstract: While we must certainly recognize that theological perspectives on eternal life and *theosis* are very different to the notions of immortality held by some of the more extreme transhumanists, this recognition does not (as I noted at the at the beginning of this essay) allow us to treat transhumanism as a monolithic project that can be demolished simply by criticizing the pretensions of its more extreme forms. Rather, transhumanism involves a whole spectrum of approaches and hopes, which are linked to one another, not by a single, overarching set of beliefs and goals, but by what followers of Wittgenstein might call “family resemblances.” Not all of these approaches have implications of the kind associated with its more objectionable forms, and indeed some of them involve the use of technologies that few would find questionable. This means, quite simply, that we cannot, as theologians, argue against transhumanism as such. We must, instead, examine all projects of a transhumanist kind on a case-by-case basis, asking whether they ultimately contribute to God’s purposes in the “fallen” world or whether, on the contrary, they inhibit the fulfilment of those purposes.

Keywords: Garments of skin, “Natural” evil, death, the “Fall”, deification, Spiritual Anthropology

Transhumanism: not a monolithic project

The concept of *transhumanism* has been defined in terms of the “social and philosophical movement devoted to promoting the research and development of robust human-enhancement technologies. Such technologies would augment or increase human sensory perception, emotive ability, or cognitive capacity as well as radically improve human health and extend human life spans. Such modifications resulting from the addition of biological or physical technologies would be more or less permanent and integrated into the human body.”¹

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transhumanism>

The term *transhumanism* was popularised over half a century ago, when Julian Huxley described it in terms of the way in which it would become possible for “man, while remaining man”, to transcend the “nasty, brutish and short” character of the human condition as it has been experienced by most people for most of human history.² Long before Huxley’s time there had, however, been similar proposals³ – sometimes developed within a Christian framework⁴ – and since that time the potential for this transcendence has become clearer through technological advances of various kinds, so that not only are the ethical issues involved in transhumanist technologies increasingly being discussed, but the question of what “remaining man” means has inevitably been asked. In particular, the notion of the “cyborg” – in which a biological organism has its functions restored or enhanced by some artificial component or technology – has been a focus of one important strand of recent thinking about this issue, not least because some have speculated that the biological aspect of what it means to be human might eventually be largely or even completely eliminated in a way that allows immortality to be attained.

Such utopian (or some would say dystopian) versions of transhumanism are seen by David Bentley Hart, not only as arising from “a sensibility formed more by comic books than by serious thought” but also as a “logical consequence (if a particularly childish one)” of a current revival “of eugenic ideology in the academic, scientific, and medical worlds.” Hart recognizes that most of those involved in this revival see their project “as suffering from none of the distasteful authoritarianism of the old racialist eugenics,” but they are, in his view, either “deluding themselves or trying to deceive us.”⁵ Moreover, according to the philosopher, Mary Midgley, aspects of transhumanism embody the quasi-religious attitude that she has labelled as “Science as Salvation.” This attitude, she observes, is one that arises from “belief in an endless evolutionary escalator exalting

² Julian Huxley, “Transhumanism”, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 8 (1986) 73-76

³ See Michael Burdett, *Eschatology and the Technological Future* (New York, Routledge, 2025) 18-24.

⁴ In the Orthodox world an interesting example is the approach of Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov (1829-1903). See Travis Dumsday, “Sergius Bulgakov’s Critique of N.F.Fedorov’s Technologized Resurrection (and Why it Still Matters for the Christian Dialogue With Transhumanism)”, *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 55 (2020) 853-874.

⁵ David Bentley Hart, “The Anti-Theology of the Body”, *The New Atlantis*, Number 9, Summer 2005, 65-73

the human race, which is often [wrongly] seen as part of science." This belief, she says, may be seen as "a prime example of the dreams, dramas, myths or fantasies out of which faiths are constructed to fill the vacuum which is left when more familiar ones are abandoned."⁶

There are, it must be said, genuine ethical issues related to the eugenic strands of the transhumanist project that Hart emphasizes, as well as more wide-ranging theological issues of the sort that Midgley has highlighted. However, in seeking to address these issues it is important to recognize that if people's enthusiasm for transhumanism is sometimes based on very questionable assumptions of the sort identified by these two critics and by many others, it is sometimes focused on more immediate therapeutic goals that have no intrinsic connection to these assumptions. This therapeutic focus is important because it reminds us that transhumanism is not a monolithic project, which can be demolished by criticizing the pretensions of its more extreme forms. Rather, it involves a whole spectrum of approaches and hopes, which are linked to one another not by a single, overarching set of beliefs and goals but by what followers of Wittgenstein might call "family resemblances." Not all of these approaches have implications of the kind associated with the history of eugenics or with utopian visions of some kind of quasi-religious "salvation," and indeed some of them involve the use of technologies that few would find questionable. An artificial cardiac pacemaker or an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator,⁷ for example, arguably makes the person in whom it is implanted a kind of cyborg and thus in some sense *transhuman*. Few consider such implants to be objectionable, however.

⁶ Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and its Meaning* (London, Routledge, 1992) 146

⁷ An implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD) is a specialized device designed to directly treat many dysrhythmias, and it is specifically designed to address ventricular tachyarrhythmias. ICDs have revolutionized the treatment of patients at risk for sudden cardiac death due to ventricular tachyarrhythmias. A permanent pacemaker is an implanted device that provides electrical stimuli, thereby causing cardiac contraction when intrinsic myocardial electrical activity is inappropriately slow or absent. All modern ICDs also function as pacemakers.

Distinctions sometimes made

Once we recognize this spectrum of varied approaches – which is such that criticism of any one of these approaches will rarely be applicable to all - it becomes necessary to try to develop criteria to distinguish between those kinds of transhumanist project that are acceptable and those that are not. Some try to do this by stressing therapeutic aims in relation to those whose capacities are lower than the human norm. Raising people's quality of life by bringing them from situations of disability to situations in which their functioning becomes comparable (or at least closer) to that of normal, healthy people is, they believe, not only acceptable but is an ethical imperative when – as with cardiac pacemakers – the necessary technology is available and is relatively inexpensive. However, a problem here is that the concepts of “normal” and of “disability” are slippery ones. In comparison with median functioning, many are at least partially disabled in one way or another, while in comparison with optimal functioning we are all “disabled.” The question inevitably therefore arises of whether - if and when it becomes possible - we should all have the opportunity to be enhanced so to have physical and mental abilities comparable to (or even greater than) those of world-class athletes and intellectuals of the present day. The therapeutic focus of this kind of transhumanism thus inevitably elides into something closer to one of its utopian forms, and the question arises of what ethical or theological criteria can be developed to indicate when some proposed project crosses a boundary that should not be crossed.

Another distinction that is sometimes made is between the kind of enhancement that affects purely physical functioning (such as that provided by a cardiac pacemaker) and the kind that directly affects human cognition. In a different way, however, this distinction is equally questionable, since a concept that is evoking increasing scientific interest - that of “embodied cognition” - makes this distinction a problematical one. Andy Clark, in particular, has pointed out that what we tend to see as interactions between humans and “external” machines in practice constitute part of a cyborg system. Existing examples of this system can be very low tech and simplistic, such as using pen and paper to make notes, or relatively

high tech, such as using a personal computer or telephone. According to Clark, these existing interactions between a person and a form of technology integrate that technology into the cognitive process in a way that is analogous to the way that the kind of technology that would fit the traditional concept of cyborg augmentation becomes integrated with its biological host. Because all humans in some way use technology to augment their cognitive processes, Clark comes to the conclusion that we are "natural-born cyborgs."⁸

Natural and unnatural

This notion of what is "natural-born" raises the problem of how we use the word *natural*, which in practice has many meanings that are not all mutually compatible. One of the things that affects many people's unfavourable reaction to transhumanism is the sense that it involves something *unnatural*, and in a theological context this concept is often equated with the sense that it is not "God-given." (Gene editing, for example, is sometimes criticized from this perspective, especially when it is associated with "moral enhancement.")⁹ This view – though usually quasi-instinctive rather than coherently thought through – might in principle be defended in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between nature and artifice. However, as Noah Efron has pointed out, the dividing line between these concepts has been drawn in different places at different times. In relation to cheating in sports, for example, personal coaches were, at one time, considered in some circles "to confer an 'unnatural' and therefore unfair advantage to young athletes." This view, says Efron, was founded on a notion of nature that was "Aristotelian in aspect," and was informed by the insight "that once an athlete became the object of another agent's amelioration project, his performance reflected not his own capacities, but

⁸ Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004)

⁹ For thoughtful analyses of why this kind of moral enhancement may not be objectionable from a theological standpoint, see Gayle Wooloschak, "Can we Genetically Engineer Virthue and Deification?" *Theology and Science* 16 (2018) 300-307; Adam M. Willows, "Supplementing Virtue: A Case for Limited Theological Transhumanism", *Theology and Science* 15 (2017) 177-187; Alison Benders, "Genetic Moral Enhancement? Yes. Holiness? No.", *Theology and Science* 16 (2018) 308-318.