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Transhumanism and Christianity. Conflict or Compatibility? An Orthodox Perspective

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Introduction

Motivation for choosing the topic

The recent era is characterized by extraordinary technological advancements. These bring about a series of challenges to which both the society and the Church are compelled to respond. We refer here to research in the field of Artificial Intelligence, as well as to research concerned with improving certain human characteristics. In this context, a philosophical movement has arisen that aspires to alter human nature and even aims to engineer a new and superior species through technological means, known as Transhumanism. What began as a fringe philosophy has now gained considerable traction, particularly in influential sectors such as technology companies and academic institutions. Transhumanist writers have gained popularity through media exposure, and their works are widely read. A significant number of individuals who support this philosophy identify as atheists, agnostics, or anti-religious. They advocate for a materialistic anthropology, rejecting the notion of a soul. Their objective is to overcome death via technological advancements. While this movement appears to be grounded in scientific principles, transhumanism exhibits traits akin to religious belief. The conviction of its adherents is focused on the anticipation that, eventually, innovations will emerge that can eradicate diseases, aging, and even death, relying on the achievements of science and technology to date. Some argue – as will be discussed in this thesis – that humanity represents a transitional phase aimed at the development of general artificial intelligence and Superintelligence, which will dominate the entire universe. Essentially, this theory suggests the extinction of man. Another theologically significant assertion is the idea that mankind will create God. The hope is that Superintelligence will find answers to the problems of humanity and thus ensure the path to a perfect world: "Once we saturate the matter and energy in the universe with intelligence, it will <<wake up,>> be conscious, and sublimely intelligent. That's about as close to God as I can imagine."[1]From this, it is evident that transhumanism is not solely a philosophy focused on technology; it also poses a challenge to Christian theology, extending to the aspiration for humanity to attain godhood. Therefore, the Church must not adopt a passive stance in response to a viewpoint that seeks the eradication of humanity and the emergence of a deity.

[1]Ray KURZWEIL, *The Singularity is Near. When Humans Transcend Biology*, New York, Viking, 2005, p.275.

When viewed through a Christian lens, we recognize the sin of idolatry, as humanity places its hope and faith in technology to address the ultimate issue: death. From a Christian perspective, transhumanism can be interpreted as humanity's ambition to manifest the Kingdom of God on earth by supplanting Him with one or more Superintelligences.

Structure of the thesis and limitations

The work is structured into seven chapters and several subchapters. The first, *Transhumanism. Definitions and Brief History* is dedicated to presenting the movement that is the subject of this work, starting from the way in which accomplished transhumanists define their vision in their writings. We will then briefly discuss the relationship between transhumanism, humanism, and posthumanism. At the same time, the history of transhumanism is also investigated, because the historical perspective helps us understand how this vision of the world emerged and how ideas have changed over time.

The second chapter, titled *The Christian and Transhumanist Anthropology*, focuses on the two approaches to understanding humanity, aiming to identify both their similarities and differences, as well as their potential compatibility. In the subsequent chapter, *Improving Human Nature through Biotechnology*, we examine how certain transhumanist authors, referred to as "bioliberals," propose enhancing human traits through technological advancements. Additionally, we explore the responses from thinkers who oppose these methods, known as "bioconservatives," to this challenge. We then shift our attention to how one can engage with the idea of enhancing humanity through technological means from a Christian-Orthodox perspective. To achieve this, we begin by considering the relationship between the Orthodox Church and medical science, followed by an exploration of how, from an Orthodox standpoint, we can approach specific enhancements of human traits (such as physical strength and memory), the ethical implications of applying enhancement technologies to human embryos, and the aspiration to create a more moral individual through biotechnology. Transhumanists also express a desire to achieve an extended lifespan, significantly surpassing the current average, while maintaining optimal health. Consequently, we allocate considerable attention to this topic, aiming to provide a potential perspective from an Orthodox viewpoint. Within this subchapter, we examine the practice of cryogenics concerning deceased individuals (supported by transhumanists).

Transhumanists highlight the significance of advancing artificial intelligence to achieve the objectives they set forth. Consequently, the fourth chapter, titled *Transhumanism and Artificial Intelligence*, focuses on their perspective regarding the relevance of this technology, as well as how it can be understood from an Orthodox Christian standpoint. Various subjects discussed in this chapter pertain to the historical development of this technology, its current impact on our lives, and the aspirations of transhumanists, including the challenges associated with the creation of superintelligence and of singularity.

The influence of transhumanist thought on religion must not be overlooked. Consequently, the fifth chapter, *Transhumanism and the Great Religions* (Judaism, Islam, Taoism), provides a brief overview of their connections to this emerging trend. The sixth chapter, *Religious Movements Inspired by Transhumanism*, discusses new religions that have arisen and are significantly shaped by transhumanist ideas. The final chapter of this work, titled *The Attitude of Christian Denominations towards Transhumanist Thinking*, examines how Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox authors approach this topic. Our methodology was based on the historical method, tracing the development of the transhumanist trend and its interaction with Christianity. Additionally, we employed descriptive and analytical methods to present the views of various transhumanist thinkers and their relevance to Orthodox theology. In addressing the challenges posed by transhumanism to Orthodox Christianity, we utilized exegetical and synthetic methods, enabling us to identify and reference texts from the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers, and Christian thinkers (both Orthodox and from other denominations) that discuss technology, the body, and the relationship between Christianity and transhumanism.

Over the years, we have published studies that have attracted interest from both the academic world (being cited in volumes and magazines, blogs) and the media. This is a list of citations:

1. *The Christian-Orthodox Faith and Christian Transhumanism* (published in Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai-Theologia Orthodoxa, No.1/2020) was quoted in: Tul'pe Irina, *Transgumanizm i postgumanizm v kontekste religiovedeniya[Transhumanismand Posthumanism in the Religious Studies Context*]. Vestnik Leningradsko gogosudarstvennogo universiteta imeni A. S. Pushkina – Pushkin Leningrad State University Journal. No. 1., on p.211[2];

[2]https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/transgumanizm-i-postgumanizm-v-kontekste-religiovedeniya/viewer,accessed on 28.05.2025.

Hatice Keleş, *Hiristiyanlikvetranshümanizm* in Muhammet Yeşilyurt (Editor), *Dinlervetranshümanizm,* Ankara, Sonçağ Academy, 2023, on p.72.

2. *Transhumanism and Christianity. Conflict or Compatibilty* (Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai-Theologia Orthodoxa, No.2/2019) in:Hatice Keleş, Hiristiyanlik ve transhümanizm in Muhammet Yeşilyurt (Editor), Dinler ve transhümanizm, Ankara, Sonçağ Academy, 2023, onpp.45; 46; 55. Güçlüer, Fatımanur;Yazoğlu, Ruhattin, *Transhümanizmde Tanrı*, Turkish Studies - Comparative Religious Studies; June 2024, Vol. 19 Issue 2 on p.261.[3];
3. Risa Kanai, *The path to progress: what could possibly still be holding us back?-part II.*(https://www.posthumans.org/blog/archives/02-2021)

We were invited to talk about Transhumanism on the following programmes:

1. *Lumi în coliziune* [Colliding Worlds], (Radio Gold FM, producer Radu Golban, https://www.facebook.com/radiogoldfmromania/videos/12092021-radu-golban-in-discutie-cu-prof-steve-fuller-si-calin-emilian-cira/636530577330703 /;
2. *Compas* [Compass] (Cotidianul Tv, producer Radu Golban, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_8NUKFJuOQ).
3. *Cultură, morală, societate* [Culture, Morals, Society](Radio Renaşterea, producer Father Robert Kovacs, PhD, https://radiorenasterea.ro/notiuni-generale-despre-transumanism/ ; https://radiorenasterea.ro/transumanismul-si-prelungirea-vietii/)

As is the case with any scientific document, we have also faced certain limitations; we are, however, confident that this remains an ongoing project for future research and doctoral dissertations. The topic addressed is extensive, and for this reason, it cannot be explored in its entirety. Each theme we focused on can be further developed and examined in studies, books, and various academic theses, including bachelor's, master's, and doctoral theses. Our objective was to analyze the challenges posed to Christians by transhumanist philosophy. Consequently, we have only briefly touched upon the feasibility of actually achieving their goals from a technical standpoint. Ultimately, predicting the future of scientific and technological advancement is quite challenging. Additionally, throughout this work, we endeavoured to provide solutions to the issues that transhumanism raises concerning certain

[3]https://isamveri.org/pdfdrg/D04441/2024_2/2024_2_GUCLUER.pdf, accessed on 28.05.2025.

potential technological changes (for instance, advancements in artificial intelligence). This thesis intersects with the philosophy of technology, bioethics, and the ethics of artificial intelligence; however, how these subjects are approached within the transhumanist movement represents only a starting point in order to subsequently present a possible Orthodox Christian viewpoint, focusing not on specific technologies aimed at enhancing human nature or particular developments in artificial intelligence, but rather on the transhumanist perspective.

Conclusions

The topic of transhumanism has only fairly recently captured the attention of theologians. This is understandable, as the movement was initially considered marginal, with its assertions resembling those found in science fiction films. Over time, its concepts have permeated both academic circles and technology companies. The works published by certain transhumanists have achieved bestseller status. Consequently, this line of thought can no longer be overlooked by Christians and, by extension, theologians, as it presents a series of challenges to the tenets of faith. Transhumanism advocates for the enhancement of humanity through technological means. This perspective is fundamentally materialistic, standing in stark contrast to the Christian worldview. For transhumanists, the existence of the soul and the concept of an afterlife are not pertinent issues. Some even view Christianity as a hindrance to their aspiration of attaining immortality via technology. Furthermore, they believe that the only viable path is through technological advancement. Humanity is seen as a fortuitous outcome of evolution, and there is a perceived obligation to take control of this process. Their view of the body diverges significantly from the Christian perspective. On the one hand, humanity is reduced to mere physicality, necessitating biomedical interventions to achieve enhanced traits such as greater intelligence and health. On the other hand, they acknowledge the frailty of the human body, with the ultimate aim being the transfer of human consciousness into a digital realm that is free from physical limitations. Thus, while mortality is acknowledged, the goal is to extend life until technology evolves sufficiently to facilitate this transfer into electronic environments or robotic forms. This would enable individuals to exist in multiple locations at once. However, from a Christian standpoint, there is a resemblance to Gnostic beliefs that denigrate the body. Christianity posits that humans consist of both body and soul, valuing each as a creation of God. Another important point is that the second Person of the Holy Trinity assumed human form for the salvation of the world, and humanity is called to the Resurrection while the cosmos is called to transfiguration.

Consequently, the care for the body is emphasized within the Christian faith, acknowledging its frailties. Death is perceived as a result of sin, yet it was overcome by the Resurrection of the Savior. Therefore, the body should neither be dismissed nor worshipped, particularly in circumstances where the duty to sacrifice one's own life may arise: "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." (Mark 8:35).

Transhumanism, while aiming to be grounded in scientific and technical knowledge, possesses a soteriological aspect. This serves as an additional justification for the examination of this philosophical movement. It represents a secularized variant of religion. Within the philosophy of transhumanists, we find elements of anthropology, soteriology, and eschatology. The conception of humanity is fundamentally materialistic; however, liberation from the bondage of vulnerabilities and the ultimate adversary, death, is sought through scientific and technical advancements, with singularity as the objective. This singularity signifies a phase of relentless accelerated progress, during which humanity, as we currently understand it, will cease to exist, giving rise to a new species with superior traits compared to present-day humans. A parallel can be drawn with Christianity. The place of the Saviour is taken over by technical evolution that will make immortality possible, and the „new heaven and new earth" spoken of in the Book of Revelation is the equivalent of the "Singularity." And this is a reason for conflict between Christianity and transhumanism. Basically, it is a battle between faiths. An important point that must be mentioned is that transhumanism emerged in the West, where Christianity had a strong presence until recently, and its values still have a strong influence today. For this reason, similarities with the Christian religion are observed.

Orthodox theology has shown even less interest in this topic compared to Protestant and Catholic theologians. This situation can be attributed to the historical circumstances of the Church in nations with a predominantly Orthodox population, which faced crises and economic and political issues during the 1990s and early 2000s. Consequently, pastoral-missionary concerns encountered different challenges, particularly in countries that had long endured authoritarian communist regimes. Access to research and literature published in the West was restricted during this time. As previously noted, significant studies on this matter from the Orthodox perspective were authored by Western Orthodox theologians who maintain a cautious stance towards transhumanist proposals. Undoubtedly, the ideas emerging from leading universities and corporations today have global repercussions. The Eastern European Orthodox Churches cannot overlook this topic due to its significant influence on human

existence. Consequently, the question arises regarding the compatibility of Christian Orthodoxy with transhumanism. We have observed that within the Protestant context, efforts have been made to establish compatibility through the "Christian Transhumanist Association." Nevertheless, this viewpoint remains marginal. Orthodox scholars who have examined this phenomenon are notably resistant. It is widely believed that Orthodoxy cannot endorse transhumanist propositions, as they are deemed anti-Christian. Indeed, establishing communication with transhumanists is quite challenging, as they are materialists and frequently view religion as an impediment. Furthermore, transhumanism seeks to eliminate humanity as we currently understand it and to engineer a new, enhanced species. From the perspective of Orthodox theology, the objectives of transhumanism are unacceptable. Humanity was created by God, and therefore, we have no authority to destroy it. Another concern we previously mentioned is the idolization of technological creations. Consequently, faith is redirected towards technology rather than God. Moreover, transhumanist religions have emerged, which are evidently incompatible with the teachings of the Orthodox Church. For this reason, we can regard transhumanist philosophy as a threat to salvation, as the biblical commandment is unequivocal: "You shall have no other gods before Me." (Deuteronomy 5:7).

In addition to advancements in medical technologies, artificial intelligence is crucial in fulfilling the objectives of transhumanist philosophy. It is important to highlight that this field has undergone remarkable progress recently. Therefore, while we may not yet possess highly effective technologies for enhancing certain human traits in medicine, the advancements in artificial intelligence have significant implications for society as a whole. For transhumanists, this represents the means through which their aspirations will be realized, particularly within the medical domain. Extremists, as we have noted in this thesis, argue that the ultimate aim of humanity is to develop Artificial General Intelligence that could supplant the human race. Thus, humanity is merely a transitional phase between the biological realm and the robotic entities that will ultimately dominate the universe. Clearly, the Church cannot endorse this viewpoint, which promotes the extinction of humanity. Theologically speaking, humans are destined for eternity, which imposes a duty to safeguard their existence rather than to obliterate it. The sacrifice of Christ was for the redemption of humankind. Any doctrine that jeopardizes the human race must be denounced rather than supported. Furthermore, transhumanist writings express a desire to create a superintelligence endowed with nearly divine qualities (such as omnipotence and omniscience). This reflects humanity's yearning for God, suggesting that if God does not exist, humanity will endeavour to create a deity. Beyond

the technical hurdles, there exists a theological challenge as well. Should superintelligence ever be realized, it would be susceptible to sin, just like us. Consequently, we cannot be assured that it would act benevolently towards humanity or choose to annihilate it. The belief that it will rescue us from our myriad problems is simplistic and constitutes a form of idolatry. Conversely, it could lead to our destruction, as it may find no need for human beings. Historically, idols have sometimes demanded human sacrifices. Superintelligence could potentially eradicate humanity entirely. In light of this danger, it is now the Church's duty to resist. These theses, while extreme, have gained significant popularity among transhumanists who are infiltrating society beyond their limited circles. Nevertheless, until the advent of Superintelligence (if it is ever achievable), specialized artificial intelligence is already integrated into our daily lives. Consequently, the Church must acknowledge this reality and address the issues that arise from its utilization. We are specifically referring to the surveillance of populations and the implicit violation of human rights by certain regimes, as well as the challenges it poses to the labour market. The present paper has only briefly touched upon these sensitive issues, which also possess a theological aspect, as the protection of human life and dignity are core tenets of Christian theology. The Church is tasked with examining how each technology is employed and, through its prophetic role, warning of potential dangers that may emerge. Therefore, the objective is not to categorically reject technologies that can enhance life, but rather to discern the positive and negative applications of their use.

Another area of contention between Orthodox theology and transhumanism arises from the latter's role in the formation of new religions, such as the Turing Church and Terasem. Their beliefs stand in opposition to Christian doctrine. Although their follower count may be limited, these new religions particularly appeal to an educated and affluent demographic that wields significant societal influence. From a spiritual perspective, the threat is evident; by embracing the tenets of these new religions, Christianity is effectively dismissed. According to the Holy Scriptures, salvation is attainable solely through Jesus Christ, who is referred to as "The Way and the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6). Thus, there exists no possibility for reconciliation between these new religions and the tenets of Orthodox Christianity.

From a philosophical standpoint, transhumanism is regarded by political scientist Francis Fukuyama as "the world's most dangerous idea." Fukuyama's assertion, which may initially appear to be an exaggeration, is underscored by ongoing research in numerous university and corporate laboratories focused on developing technologies endorsed by

transhumanists. Thus, these are not mere science fiction scenarios but rather a tangible reality. We confront a “dangerous idea” because, should transhumanist objectives be realized, there exists a significant risk of the human species facing extinction. Fukuyama’s viewpoint is secular in nature. In light of Orthodox theology, we contend that this notion can be embraced, as alongside the existential threats posed by the transhumanist outlook, there lies the delusion that humanity can liberate itself from death and malevolence through its own capabilities. Transhumanists, even when they occasionally acknowledge the potential dangers of certain technologies, generally maintain an optimistic view of technological advancement. This faith in technology often leads them to overlook the adverse consequences it may entail. The Church, as its historical narrative illustrates, does not inherently oppose technology. On the contrary, over the centuries, clerics and monks have played a significant role in this domain of knowledge. Nevertheless, Scripture indicates that humanity is susceptible to sin, and by extension, what we create can be misused for malevolent purposes. There is no creation that does not possess some negative impact on humanity or the environment in some capacity.

The Church bears the responsibility to regard transhumanism and its associated ideas with seriousness, as they possess a remarkable allure, particularly within intellectual circles. Responses to transhumanist assertions should not entail a complete dismissal of technological advancements. Most of these changes are inevitable. Orthodox theology can offer a path of discernment, particularly by opposing the inclination to idolize technology. This represents a significant spiritual peril, as it creates the false impression for modern individuals that they can resolve all global issues while firmly rooting their existence in the material realm.

Thus, transhumanism and Orthodoxy are fundamentally incompatible. Nevertheless, this does not imply that we should adopt a technophobic stance. On the contrary, numerous Christians engaged in leading-edge technological fields can play a vital role by advocating for the principles of Christian ethics. This illustrates that technology is intended to enhance human existence rather than obliterate it, while also establishing boundaries that, at the very least, mitigate the adverse impacts of any technological or medical innovation.