

From Modernity to the Transhumanism

An Orthodox Theological View On

Myths of Transhumanism

Conf. Dr. Dorin Gabriel Pandele

University of the Lower Danube Galați, Romania

Abstract

The myths of modernity can be found in an evolved form in the postmodern period, as are evident in the legitimation of transhumanism. The myth of human reason, the myth of building the enhanced man and the myth of trust in progress are the three main founding myths of the modern, postmodern and transhuman periods. However, these myths are rediscovered and reinterpreted in a new way, creating a legitimate philosophical and ideological framework and at the same time offering a new approach to reality with all that it entails as a way to give life to the ideals of a changing world. Thus, in transhumanism, the myth of human reason as the supreme reality becomes the myth of artificial superintelligence, superior to the human one, the myth of the enhanced man of Fr. Nietzsche becomes the myth of the enhanced man and the myth of trust in progress becomes the ideology of progress, progress understood as a reality and intrinsic necessity of the man-machine, but also of the whole world. The Orthodox Theology does not reject the idea of continuous progress as the existential matrix of man, nor the importance of rationality present in the created world as an intrinsic support of evolution towards perfection, nor the efforts of constant improvement of the human being, body and soul. However, the deification of man by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the growth of the human being in love through eternal loving dialogue with his Creator, of which the Holy Eastern Fathers speak is very far away from the idea of singularity of consciousness or digital immortality in transhumanist utopia.

Keywords: digital immortality; The orthodox Theology; the man-machine; perfection;

1. Introduction

The myths of modernity can be found in an evolved form in the postmodern period, which are evident in the legitimation of transhumanism. The myth of human reason, the myth of the construction of the enhanced man and the myth of progress are the three main founding myths of the modern, postmodern and transhumanist periods. However, these myths are rediscovered and reinterpreted in a new way, creating a legitimate philosophical and ideological framework and at the same time offering a new approach to reality with all that it entails as a way to give life to the ideals of a changing world. Thus, in transhumanism, the myth of human reason as the supreme reality becomes the myth of artificial superintelligence, superior to the human one, the myth of the superman of Fr. Nietzsche becomes the myth of the improved man, and the myth of trust in progress becomes the ideology of progress, progress being understood as a reality and intrinsic necessity of the man-machine, but also of the world. Orthodox theology does not reject the idea of continuous progress as the existential matrix of man, nor the importance of rationality present in the created world as an intrinsic

support of evolution towards perfection, nor the efforts of constant improvement of the human being, body and soul. However, the deification of man by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the growth of man in love through the eternal dialogue with his Creator, of which the Holy Eastern Fathers speak, is very far from the idea of “singularity of conscience.[1]” or that of digital immortality in the transhumanist utopia.

The emergence of the current transhumanist in the last decades of the twentieth century questioned the fundamental myths of modernity and the postmodernism, not only in terms of legitimacy, but also in terms of solutions of contemporary philosophy and ontological and the ethics dimensions of being human. The contemporary myths are an ideological and cultural constructions, they give meaning to the society and to the human being. The modern myths do not imply the appeal to the Divinity, but they bring into people's lives a system of values in line with the needs and ideals of the people of that era [2]. The myths of the postmodern period are reinterpreted and revalued in a different way, under the pressure of the phenomenon of deconstruction, according to the opinions of some philosophers such as: Jean Fr. Lyotard, Gilles Lipovetsy, Gianni Vattimo, et al. which offers a new vision of the changing foundations of transhumanism. According to M. Eliade, the myth, including the one of religious origin, is a cultural construction that offers meaning to the world and to man, “an extremely complex cultural reality, which can be approached and interpreted in multiple and complementary perspectives[3]”. From the current of Modernity we selected the main three fundamental myths, which were its basis, which we analyzed in a new construction, namely that of the transhumanist current: the myth of the Superman, the myth of progress and the myth of Reason. These three myths must be contextualized in Transhumanism. This current can be characterized by a pronounced increase of distrust in the meta-narratives of modernity. This continuing mistrust forces the reinterpretation of the existential myths of modernity.

2. Argumentation

2.1. From the Superman of Fr. Nietzsche to the enhanced man of the posthumanist age

The philosopher Fr. Nietzsche generated the concept of the Superman, a concept that has undergone a spectacular evolution defining the dominant ideologies of the twentieth century, Nazism and Socialism. For Fr. Nietzsche, human being is a stage in the evolution from the anthropoid ape to the Superman. Nazi ideology took from Nietzsche some of its radical ideas, which it took to the extreme: contempt for democracy, the superiority of one race over others, morality specific to the master and the slave, racial purification, eugenics, living space, etc. .a. Modernity preserves in the human frames the valences of Nietzsche's superman, according to the exigencies of individualism specific to the postmodern era, even under the disintegrating pressure of the old ideologies that animated the twentieth century. The construction of the new Man, of the Superman is the point of convergence between the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx. Transhumanism resumes this myth of the superman from a new perspective, that of an individual who, through technique and technology, of biological improvement will overcome his own physical and psychological limits, through a constant self-determined progress. Thus, the myth of the superman becomes the myth of the improved man. The technologies of genetic improvement, digitization of consciousness, cryogenics, human cloning, genetic editing, all will be able to permanently reconstruct the bio-enhanced man so that the human condition in the classical sense will be irreversibly changed through an endless evolutionary process. Ancient deities or demigods such as Icarus, Dedalus, Hercules or Nietzsche's superman will be able to be made with the help of technology. This concept of superman underlies the new philosophical current, but in a different way from modernity. The

improved man, Cyborg, is in fact the new concept that will be like a succession of ideals specific to the transhumanism. If the myth of modern Superman is actually a development of all natural ability of the human being, within the limits of biology specific human nature, in transhumanism this development of man goes beyond the natural limits. The human hybridized by current technologies becoming a man-machine, or Cyborg [4], a cybernetic organism of a new species, the transhuman one. The improved man is the subject but also the motivation of genetic bio-improvements, nanotechnologies and genetic bio-engineering as well as of the psychological transformations to which the unmodified man is subjected. Through current bio-technologies, man must, say transhumanists, overcome disease, old age and death, and genetic editing will ultimately lead to the creation by accelerated evolution of a new species, the transhuman [5]. The two species, the enhanced and the unenhanced man, will inevitably create the competition, and one of them, the non-genetically modified, will obviously be subject to the other.

The way in which technological evolution takes place is important. The evolution of this myth of the superman of modernity aims at developing human capacity within the strict limits of the human, according to the ideals of the modernity: the affirmation of the self, idea of progress, virility, strength and success. Its evolution in modernity has a natural evolution. Posthuman individuals are those who reject the natural evolution, and by technique they give birth to a new humanoid species, type man-machine. Therefore, the next stage, posthumanism will continue the evolutionary process begun in transhumanism.

Unlike transhumanism, seen as an intermediate stage in the evolution from man to cyborg, posthuman individuals are those entities derived from transhuman individuals, able to self-program and evolve continuously in the sense of autonomy, being a superior species to the unimproved [6]. The posthuman individual is on an infinitely higher plane of unchanged humanity, like the divinity, under the spectrum of what Ray Kurzweil called right: "singularity of consciousness"[7]. The nuanced definition of transhumanism continues through the writing of the philosopher Max More. He founded the Extropian Movement in 1990. This movement cultivates four principles : 1. Boundless Expansion, 2. Self-Transformation 3. Dynamic Optimism and 4. Intelligent Technology. In 1991 he founded the Extropian Institute as a distinct current within the transhumanist movement to the lead out his theories academic world [8].

Digitization consciousness involves transferring data from human brain unchanged to the servers of certain huge computers [9]. "Digital Immortality" is a different transhumanist concept emerged in 1971 through the writings of Professor 's George Martin, Gerontology at the University of Washington. He considered "digital immortality [10]" desirable and even achievable through their information technology, by decoupling the biological body from information resources that can be preserved, augmented and even improved in order to avoid the loss of valuable information accumulated over a lifetime and which is required to be recovered [11].

It is interesting to emphasize the difference between this concept of immortality specific to Prof. Martin and the Christian one. Truly Christianity speaks of eternal life, of eschatological immortality, therefore in a strictly spiritual plane, while transhumanism speaks of an immortal life in temporal and informational plane. The two planes are communicating but they do not overlap. Therefore, just as in the case of millenaristic heresies, which promised a paradise on earth, so transhumanism too, claim to gain an immanent digital immortality. As in the case of hiliastic heretics, so I think that transhumanism brings to the world's attention a utopian

project and in essence, it is a tragic one, understood as man's inability to acquire immortality by himself on earth but without God.

2.2.From the supremacy of the Reason to the Superintelligence

Another myth taken from modernity is the supremacy of reason in the process of knowing the world and man, by eliminating the belief in divine Revelation. Baruch Spinoza, Leibniz and Rene Descartes founded knowledge rationality. More precisely, it would be to affirm a certain primacy of Reason since the period of classical Greece. In transhumanism, Reason triumphant myth of modern times become the myth of Artificial Intelligence. Artificial intelligence is superior to the human intelligence and is found in a continuous upgrade process. Through the existing rationality in nature, visible in the harmony and beauty of the world, the transhumanist rationality sees the overcoming of a religious vision of the universe and builds in parallel a new transhuman vision, based on the same rationality that becomes more evident in information technologies and technology of the future. For them, reason is also a working tool but also a perspective from which the universe and the improved man are approached.

For Christian theology, however, human reason is the reflection of the supreme Reason that identifies with God, present in the laws of nature and of every human cell, and this rationality is a way of discovering the Creator of the world and his internal laws. For Eastern Christian theology there are several ways of knowing, one of which is based on reason, but there are also ways of knowing based on faith by assimilating revelation or knowledge from the concrete circumstances of life. The rationality of creation is a matrix inserted since the creation of the world by God the Supreme Reason, and this rationality present in the physical world, in the terrestrial phenomenology or in the structure of the human being ensures the balance and naturalness of sustaining life towards acquiring holiness, as absolute tenderness reflected over the world. On the other hand, dilution of human species through transhuman technology is an aggression and finally utopia which can generate a disaster.

Transhumanism re-enacts this myth of triumphant reason in the form of Technological Reason or Supreme Reason as Technology or Information. Human reason is thus overtaken by Artificial Superintelligence, a higher evolutionary form of postmodern Reason. However, artificial superintelligence also has the risk of completely controlling human beings but also the improved ones. Lack of ethics presents a number of very important risks, the most important of which are loss of control over one's life, ethical drift or self-destruction.

2.3.From the progress to the ideology of technical progress

The third myth of transhumanism taken from modernism is the myth of progress. Resumed in its original form from modernity through the writings of Francis Bacon, it is re-thought in a technological and informational context so that this myth has become the myth of endless progress. If the idea of progress was embraced by many currents of modern philosophy, at the end of the twentieth century we are witnessing a leap towards what can be called the ideology of progress as progress as ideology. Jurgen Habermas formulates a new vision of postmodern society, based on the specific learning phenomenon and formulates the theory of social evolution. Continuous evolution is considered an absolutely necessary process for the proper functioning of postmodern society which will ultimately lead to the birth of a global antagonistic society. Tensions related to the dynamics of the hierarchy can be resolved by introducing innovations into the newly introduced social structures. The introduction of new structures can be interpreted as a phenomenon of social learning. Jurgen Habermas considers

specific learning as one of the myths of postmodern society, and this myth, in a different form, was adopted by the transhumanist current.

But transhumanism takes a step further to talk about infinite progress, as a state of affairs of new technologies and the final stage of human evolution. Endless progress becomes necessary and achievable in the new transhuman reality, and the phenomenon of upgrade from information technology will be present in all areas of life. Endless progress will be related to the phenomenon of adaptation and proper functioning of man-machine but also to the adaptation of the new species to the natural and social environment.

4. Conclusions

The three great founding myths of modernity, the myth of efficient reason, the myth of continuous progress, and the myth of the superman are adapted to a new society of transhuman age. Under these conditions appear respectively: the myth of artificial super-intelligence, the myth of technological reason and the myth of enhanced man. All these are true pillars of the transhumanist current, and Orthodox theology considers that all these transhumanist myths are an integral part of a new utopia, "as the most dangerous idea in the world.[12]".

5. References

- [1] Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near. When Humans Transcend Biology*, Viking Publishing, New York, 2005, pp. 12-19.
- [2] Lucian Boia, *For a history of the imaginary*, (Romanian), Humanitas, Bucharest, 2001, translated by Tatiana Mochi, p. 40.
- [3] Mircea Eliade, *Aspects of the myth*, (Romanian), Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978, p.5.
- [4] Katherine Hayles, *How we became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics Literature and Informatics*, University of Chicago Publishing House, Chicago, 1999, pp. 244-280.
- [5] Nick Bostrom, *Transhumanist Values*, in *Review of Contemporary Philosophy*, Volume 4, 2005, available at: <https://nickbostrom.com/ethics/values.html>.
- [6] Michael Hauskeller, *Utopia in Trans - and Posthumanism*, in Stefan Sorgner, Robert Ranich (editors) *Posthumanism and Transhumanism*, Peter Lang Publishing House, Bern, 2013, pp. 4-11.
- [7] Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is near*, Published by the Penguin Group, New York, 2005, pp. 283. : define the singularity like this : " The Singularity denotes an event that will take place in the material world, the inevitable next step in the evolutionary process that started with biological evolution and has extended through human-directed technological evolution. However, it is precisely in the world of matter and energy that we encounter transcendence, a principal connotation of what people refer to as spirituality. Let's consider the nature of spirituality in the physical world".
- [8] <https://www.closetotruth.com/contributor/max-more/profile>. See the art. : *Religia și știința, moduri de cunoaștere a lui Dumnezeu*, în "Analele Universității de Vest din Timișoara", Seria Teologie, vol. 14/2008, ISSN: 1453-7652, p. 19-27

- [9] Sim Bamford, *A framework for approaches to transfer of a mind's substrate*, in *International Journal of Machine Consciousness*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2012, pp. 23-34.
- [10] George Martin, *Brief proposal on immortality: an interim solution*, in *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, Volume 14, Issue 2, 1971, pp. 321-349.
- [11] George Martin, *Brief proposal on immortality: an interim solution*, in vol. : *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, volume 14, number 2, 1971, p. 339.
- [12] Francis Fukuyama, *Transhumanism: The World's Most Dangerous Idea*, available at: <http://www.au.dk/fukuyama/boger>.