

THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) ON SPIRITUAL LIFE, FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence, as a manifestation of human ingenuity, has fundamentally transformed many aspects of our daily life. The present article aims to explore the multifaceted implications of AI on the spiritual life of humankind, and the define of the personal identity, specifically from the perspective of Christian Orthodoxy. While AI offers unprecedented advantages in various sectors, its intersection with spirituality poses both challenges and opportunities. This exploration addresses the shifting paradigms of belief, the human desire for connection or escape from daily reality, and the evolving definitions of soul, purpose, and spiritual ascendance.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; spirituality; identity; virtual reality; time; transcendence; transhumanism; bioethics;*

INTRODUCTION

With the exponential development of technology in the last nearly 50 years, concerns about the moral principles of its use have gradually emerged, leading to the creation of a new branch of science, generally called Bioethics. Governmental institutions, academic environments, and, not least, the Church have attempted to formulate certain moral principles to guide the ethical application of new discoveries, such as in vitro fertilization, organ transplants, implants, nanotechnology, connection to virtual environments, etc.

Appearing in America in the 1970s, in a context characterized by moral pluralism and changing ideas about the nature of moral authority, bioethics asserted the need to develop a set of principles and a method for making morally acceptable decisions for all.

Since its inception in the United States, bioethics has been marked by the commitment of theologians or Christian philosophers. All, absolutely all of those we consider the founders of this discipline belonged to these categories. Catholics Richard A. McCormick (1922-2000), André Hellegers (1926-1979), Edmund Pellegrino (1920-2013), Daniel Callahan (1930-2019), H. Tristram Engelhard (converted to Orthodoxy in 1991), and Protestants Joseph Francis Fletcher (1905-1991), Robert Paul Ramsey (1913-1988), James Gustafson (1925-2021) played an essential role in the emergence of scholarly discourse in bioethics.

In 1969, Daniel Callahan founded the Hastings Center, and in 1971, André Hellegers became the founding director of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University. The first Center for Bioethics in Europe was the Borja Institute of Bioethics of the Jesuits in Catalonia. It's also worth noting that one of the foundational documents of biomedical and

behavioral research ethics involving human subjects - the Belmont Report - was developed by Christian bioethicists¹.

As AI becomes an increasingly integrated part of our daily lives, it is imperative to consider its impact on the deeper dimensions of human existence. This paper explores the intersection of AI with human spiritual, ethical, philosophical, and religious considerations, focusing on the concepts of virtual reality (VR), personal identity, and transhumanism. The technological revolution and its integration into our lives raised fundamental questions about what means to be human, our unique spiritual journey, and the ethical considerations surrounding science.

The spiritual life of humankind, traditionally the realm of religion and philosophy, now confronts a new dimension: a world where the boundaries between machine and human blur. Humanity's spiritual journey has always been influenced by its understanding of God, His creation – the cosmos, and its place in it. But in light of new scientific discoveries, new philosophical concepts such as transhumanism, posthumanism, relativism, consumerism, etc., also emerge. For example, the Transhumanism, a movement that aims to transcend the limitations of the human condition, often through technological means, it has been very fashionable in recent years. AI plays a crucial role in this vision, particularly in endeavors like brain-computer interfaces or digital mind uploads.

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As we embrace the future, it is crucial to anchor our explorations in spiritual, ethical, and philosophical frameworks that respect both: the marvels of technology and the profoundness of human spirit.

¹ Dr. Vasile Astărăstoae, *Bioetica într-o societate orfană de Dumnezeu (III)*, (*Bioethics in a godless society*) from: <https://poruncaubirii.agaton.ro/articol/4606/bioetica-intr-o-societate-orfana-de-dumnezeu-iii>, accessed on 28.01.2024.

As a gift of God, human intelligence is a universe of cognitive processes, emotional understanding, intuition, creativity, and adaptability. On the other hand, AI, as a creation of human ingenuity, is a tool, designed to simulate human-like thinking processes using algorithms and computational models. Rooted in data processing, it operates based on predefined criteria, learning mechanisms, and optimization techniques.

1. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DESIRE TO ESCAPE FROM DAILY REALITY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

From the ancient tales told by campfires to the captivating world of movies and now to the immersive experience of VR, the need for escapism has been a recurrent theme throughout human history. This proclivity to escape can be seen as a response to the stresses of daily life and an innate desire to experience alternative realities. Before delving into VR, it is crucial to understand that escapism is not a new phenomenon. Historical practices like ritual dances, storytelling, theater, and later, radio, television, and now the internet, have served as escape mechanisms. These mediums allowed people to detach momentarily from their realities and lose themselves in a different world.

Everyday life brings about challenges, from mundane tasks to existential crises. Economic pressures, societal expectations, personal failures, and global events can contribute to stress and anxiety. The repetitive nature of everyday life can also be mentally exhausting, giving birth to the desire for something different or stimulating.

The allure of alternate worlds stems from the human desire for exploration, adventure, and the escape from physical limitations. However, the contrast between our ideal and real selves can create cognitive dissonance, leading to a desire for places where we can reinvent ourselves and explore new identities, often found in virtual worlds. VR provides a sense of belonging and community, enabling users to form relationships and find refuge, especially for those feeling alienated in the real world.

While VR offers comfort, the virtual-real divide can cause psychological distress due to the gap between virtual satisfaction and real-life dissatisfaction, worsening feelings of unhappiness, depression, and anxiety. Overuse of VR may affect cognitive function, distort perceptions of reality, blur virtual and real boundaries, and potentially hinder decision-making, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. Relying on virtual worlds can challenge societal structures and norms, redefining community, relationships, and individual roles. The merging of reality and virtuality could reshape social interactions, giving rise to new social paradigms.

In the virtual space, the phenomenon of religion could not be absent. Shortly after its emergence, cyberspace became a mission territory for almost all churches and religious groups, a place where any religious idea and belief has the chance to be known and embraced by an impressive number of people. Between redefining the virtual space as sacred and demonizing it as a source of secularization of religious manifestos, communities of believers who have chosen a form of computer-mediated communication have found strategies to adapt to the new conditions and have developed at a pace worthy of the information age. In the year 2000, more people were using the Internet for spiritual and religious purposes than for banking operations or other services². The concept of a virtual community is not new, but the emergence and growth of information technology have led to

² E. Larsen, *Cyber Faith How Americans Pursue Religion*, from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2001/12/23/cyberfaith-how-americans-pursue-religion-online/>, accessed on 05.01.2024.

the proliferation of this reality so much, so that there is increasing talk of a mass exodus to a vast and still insufficiently explored territory. This territory promises to dissolve the boundaries between the imaginary and the real, creating new forms of human interaction. The demographic explosion of the virtual space has manifested itself in the emergence of an impressive number of diverse online communities, with a continuous influx of members, accessing them and tremendous potential for development.

From creating an escape from everyday life to establishing support groups for patients with incurable diseases or facilitating the collaborative research efforts of expert groups, virtual communities have demonstrated their applicability in a variety of domains of individual and social existence. The Metaverse is a challenge that will fundamentally change our perception of the world. This new form of VR, also known as augmented reality (AR), is taking shape, evolving rapidly, and will become the new mode of expression for the internet, seamlessly integrating into real life in the very near future. Does it produce anxieties and fears? Certainly! Are they justified? Very likely, yes! Will it have benefits or harm us? It's hard to answer. What is certain is that there is no turning back, so adapting to and prudently managing the new challenges of the digital universe are the only alternatives.

Most virtual experiences are visual in nature. However, technological advancements now offer the possibility of complex simulations that engage other senses (such as somato-kinesthetic senses that continuously inform the central nervous system about the body's position, muscle contractions, and tactile sensations), transforming virtual reality into AR. Some technologies provide mechanical feedback to motion, creating a complete mental experience or tricking the brain and senses, making the synthetic world, in terms of perception, similar to reality.

The main issue is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the human brain to distinguish between digitally complex sensory events and truly real ones. Consequently, managing both worlds - the real and the virtual - becomes an ongoing challenge for the nervous system, leading to disturbances and adverse effects. Specifically, the question arises as to whether the human brain will be able to differentiate between the virtual universe it perceives with its senses and the real one. Furthermore, virtual experiences trigger real physiological reactions. There are changes in breathing and heart rate, blood pressure fluctuations, the presence of stress as a physical-chemical phenomenon in the body, and the experienced emotions are real, leading to the release of neurotransmitters. All of these effects are more intense when an individual's sensory involvement is more complex.

Virtual reality and augmented reality can have long-lasting psychological effects because the brain's perception of digital experiences is identical to that of the real world, altering how the physical world is understood. The observed negative physical effects of using virtual and augmented reality include:

1. Vision impairment
2. Spatial-temporal disorientation
3. Postural instability
4. Physical discomfort
5. Nausea and/or dizziness
6. Seizures
7. Accidents (broken bones and ligaments)
8. Severe fatigue
9. Headaches
10. Insomnia

All these symptoms are collectively referred to as "cyber sickness" or "simulation sickness." Additionally, they can have an impact on emotions. If the physical symptoms resemble motion sickness in broad strokes, the effects of digital worlds generate significant, primarily negative consequences, especially on mental health, which are the main causes for concern.

A study conducted at Stanford University found that augmented reality experiences to which subjects were exposed altered people's interactions in the real world, even long after the AR session had ended. For instance, people refused to sit in an empty chair where they had previously seen an AR-generated avatar sitting. This intense behavior is what psychologists refer to as social inhibition, the difficulty of performing a task when they believe they are being observed. They also transferred characters, emotions, and feelings experienced in the digital environment into the real world³.

A pattern of repetitive, passive thinking centered on virtual situations was observed, as well as an increased brain response to stimuli that would be neutral in the real world, along with lower cognitive performance due to longer reaction times.

Regarding the potentially negative effects that disrupt the logical thinking patterns of virtual and augmented reality, these concerns have been present from the beginning. However, it was considered that most of the symptoms of cyber sickness are mild and quickly disappear once virtual experiences cease. Content creators and technology developers warn users about immediate side effects, which can be compared to motion sickness and possible accidents, but the long-term psychological effects of virtual and augmented reality are often overlooked.

Other psychological effects include the acceptance of violent behavior, heightened competitiveness, along with chronic nervous overstimulation leading to desensitization to violence and reduced empathy - a deeply human trait - among individuals who extensively use virtual reality. All of these factors cumulatively contribute to a shift in personality and self-identification with game characters.

Another set of negative effects observed are related to reduced satisfaction with real-life events - where strength, abilities, and achievements are inferior to those allowed by the digital world. This is associated with anxiety, depression, and a tendency to become less adaptable to real life, limiting the ability to focus on important aspects of real life. All these negative effects are significantly amplified in adolescents and children whose brains are still in the developmental stage⁴.

An increasing pervasion of social networks into daily life has brought a considerable transformation in how individuals perceive, consume, and interact with digital content. A crucial aspect of this transformation involves the "scroll" technique, utilized ubiquitously across platforms, affecting users' perceptions and experience of time. With the advent and proliferation of social networks like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok, and Twitter, users globally have embedded these platforms into their daily routines. A dominant interaction technique across these platforms is the infinite scroll, which allows users to

³ Alex Shashkevich, *New Stanford research examines how augmented reality affects people's behavior*, from: <https://news.stanford.edu/2019/05/14/augmented-reality-affects-peoples-behavior-real-world/>, accessed on 18.01.2024.

⁴ Silvana Pătrășcanu, *Metaversul: Efectele Universului Digital, (The Metaverse: The Effects of the Digital Universe)* from: <https://www.reginamaria.ro/articole-medicale/metaversul-efectele-universului-digital>, accessed on 18.01.2024.

continuously engage with an endless stream of content with a simple swipe or scroll of their device.

The anticipation of finding interesting content triggers the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward. The rapid consumption of information may hinder users' ability to retain and process content effectively. This has implications for critical thinking, information recall, and the development of deep insights. This can lead to a disconnection from the physical world, affecting users' relationships, productivity, and overall well-being. The experience can contribute to heightened levels of anxiety, stress, and a fear of missing out (FOMO).

This technique, while facilitating a seamless and frictionless user experience, has implications regarding our perceptual and experiential engagement with time. The seemingly unending cascade of content ensures that users remain engaged. A blend of varied content – images, texts, and videos – creates a rich, captivating experience, diluting any temporal benchmarks that signal the passage of **time**. Infinite scroll technology enables instant access to a plethora of content, fostering a desire for immediacy and gratification that is perpetually satisfied by a never-ending content feed.

Time holds a unique and profound significance in religious traditions across the world. In the Orthodox Christian tradition, time is not merely a measure of chronological progression; it is a vessel through which believers experience their relationship with God. Orthodox Christianity views time as a sacred reality, reflecting the divine plan and presence. The notion of time as a gift from God is deeply rooted in the Orthodox theological framework. Creation itself is seen as an act occurring within time, and God's providence unfolds through history. Thus, every moment is imbued with divine significance, inviting believers to discern God's presence in the unfolding of their lives.

Orthodox theology distinguishes between two types of time: "Chronos" and "Kairos". Chronos represents chronological time, while Kairos refers to a moment of divine opportunity or encounter. Kairos moments are those instances when the eternal breaks into the temporal, offering the potential for transformation. Orthodox spirituality emphasizes the need to be vigilant and receptive to these Kairos moments, recognizing them as invitations from God to draw nearer. Ascetic practices are integral to the Orthodox tradition, and are often seen as means to redeem time. Through fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and other ascetic disciplines, believers strive to cultivate self-control and detachment from the distractions of the world. This ascetic ethos transforms one's relationships with time by reorienting priorities toward the eternal, and cultivating a sense of inner stillness.

Central to this understanding is the belief that God is both transcendent and immanent, existing beyond the constraints of time and space while actively engaging with creation within these parameters. This theological foundation underscores the idea that time is a creation of God, a dimension through which humanity can experience divine presence and purpose. The seven sacraments of the Orthodox Church, including Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, Confession, Holy Unction, Matrimony, and Ordination, are significant markers of time in the life of an Orthodox Christian. Each sacrament represents a sacred moment of encounter with God's Grace, guiding believers on their journey toward Salvation. In these sacraments, time is transformed into a vehicle of divine communion, fostering spiritual growth and unity with God.

"Chronos is imbued with meaning by Kairos, and Kairos is nothing more than a stop, a way station, from which we can survey the past and look out onto the future. Without Kairos, time flows on without meaning, sunk in death, and nothing that happens within it

survives. In all of creation, only the human being can change time into Kairos. The prerogative and responsibility of the freedom given to him or to her by the Creator is to enter through time, even if only briefly (as happens in the Divine Liturgy), into the presence and foretaste of the Eschaton, that which will not be lost together with all the useless things we carry around us in this life”⁵.

Beyond altering the perception and the way time is spent, virtual reality induces a depreciation of personal identity. In the online environment, a person can assume any kind of identity, change their gender, declare abilities and qualities they do not possess. This mirage of personal improvement has no counterpart in the real world. We desire to look our best, according to the models we see in the mass media, and if this does not happen in real life, we take refuge in the virtual one. Orthodox Christianity teaching places crucial emphasis on the unique value of the human person. Personal improvement is more related to spiritual progress, the becoming of the human being in its entirety, body and soul. But the main goal is spiritual perfection, the salvation of the soul, considering the transient nature of physical life. On the other hand, when a person truly wishes to escape from the reality of their daily life, Christianity offers them the alternative of retreat into monastic life, characterized by the desire for self-transcendence, continuous spiritual progress, through asceticism and prayer. The great historian of religions, Mircea Eliade, after a study trip to India, said with nostalgia: "I know that there is somewhere in the mountains, a cave that awaits me!" Others connect their aspiration to a space considered perfect, an island, a forest, or any other place where they have felt spiritually fulfilled. Often, spiritual inclinations towards philosophy and spirituality have been related to the contemplation of the beauty of nature and withdrawal from the tumult of large urban centers.

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Orthodox Christianity teaches that time is not limited to the temporal world but extends into eternity. The ultimate goal of an Orthodox Christian’s life is theosis, the process

⁵ John Zizioulas, “*Response to the Academic Laudatio and the honors bestowed to him during his reception as Fellow and Honorary Member of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies*”, October 28-30,2011, from: publicorthodoxy.org/2023/02/16/Kairos-of-john-zizioulas/, accessed on 05,01,2024.

of becoming likeness with God. Time is seen as a journey towards this union, a pilgrimage through which believers draw closer to the eternal reality of God's presence. The Orthodox perspective on time invites individuals to live in anticipation of the eternal life promised by Christ. Understanding the value of time in Orthodoxy offers insights into the spiritual richness of this tradition and its relevance in a contemporary world marked by hurriedness, superficiality, distraction, and the desire to escape from reality. It reminds us, that time, when embraced in a spiritually meaningful way, can lead us towards the timeless and eternal presence of God.

Another danger resulting from the excessive use of the internet is related to the privacy of each person's private life. Although they believe they are a user of a "free" service, their profile is carefully monitored based on the choices they make during each online session, stored in a vast database, and targeted to become a loyal, ideal, and dependent consumer. Based on this profile, they can be subliminally influenced in the decisions they make, whether it's online shopping, participating in legislative elections, or adopting persuasively circulated mainstream opinions. This leads to a change in mentalities, moral values, and most often, not in a positive way. A person can lose their moral compass, traditions, values, and their spiritual and personal identity, transforming into just another individual, a mere binary number.

The Christian tradition places great emphasis on promoting and understanding the concept of personhood. This concept first emerged in the 4th century when the Cappadocian Fathers had to differentiate between two synonymous terms: nature (*ousia*) and hypostasis (*ipostas*) in order to defend both the consubstantiality between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and the uniqueness of God. The term "person" (*prosopon*) at that time referred to the mask worn on stage by actors. It became accepted in its Latin form as a synonym for hypostasis due to the difficulties in translating the Greek distinction between *ousia* and hypostasis.

However, in the last two centuries, under the influence of various social contexts and philosophical currents, the focus of this concept has shifted from the trinitarian realm to the anthropological one. More and more theologians are beginning to ponder what it means for a human being to be considered a person. The answer often comes with a new distinction between person and individual. The individual is merely a member of the human species, caught in the monotony of the struggle for survival and selfishness. In contrast, the person is unique, irreplaceable, and spiritual.

The concept of personhood must be understood on two levels: a triadological one and an anthropological one. On one hand, there is the existence of an absolute Person God, and on the other hand, there is the human as a personal existence. Under the sign of this personalist theology, a bridge is created, an interpersonal relationship between God and humanity. Relationship and communion become constitutive of human nature, and in this way, humanity reflects the Image of God, who is Person and Communal Love. The icon of the Trinity and the manifestation of the intra-Trinitarian relationship, full of love, serve as the human model, and humanity is called to become a communal being.

The entire Orthodox anthropology affirms the biblical axiom that the basis of human existence lies in the Holy Trinity, which serves as the foundation and prototype of humanity. The holistic view of the human being as a person stands in contrast to the individualistic philosophy that fragments and atomizes human existence into isolated self-sufficiency, detached from others.

2. TRANSHUMANISM AND THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO BIOETHICAL PROBLEMS INVOLVED

Advancements in technology, especially those related to super-intelligent machines, have led some to foresee the emergence of Homo Sapiens 2.0: a technologically enhanced variant of humanity, endowed with capabilities markedly surpassing those of contemporary humans. In contemporary discussions regarding the future trajectory of AI, a substantial group of scientists from diverse fields – including cognitive science, neuroscience, data analysis, evolutionary biology, robotics, psychology, and theology – is seriously entertaining the idea that by the 2040-2050 decade, AI might match human intelligence across numerous professions. Many believe that once machines achieve human level intelligence, they will rapidly ascend to a super intelligent level, far exceeding human capabilities⁶.

Concurrently, advancements in methods for human modification are anticipated to substantially advance and diversify, including genetically modified food to address hunger, AI-driven medical diagnosis, regularly developed bionic limbs, enhanced human cognitive abilities, and refined rational decision-making and mental state control. While only a minority of scientists foresee AI superseding and potentially extinguishing humans, the simultaneous progression of human augmentation and super intelligent machines has sparked speculations about the emergence of a posthuman era. Some even theorize that the rise of superintelligence may enable the uploading of human minds to sufficiently advanced computers, allowing them to persist indefinitely, even beyond the decay or intentional abandonment of their physical bodies.

For example: “Billionaire technologist Elon Musk announced at 31.01.2024 that his company Neuralink has implanted its brain-computer interface into a human for the first time. The recipient was “recovering well”, Musk wrote on his social media platform X (formerly Twitter), adding that initial results showed “promising neuron spike detection”—a reference to brain cells’ electrical activity.

Each wireless Neuralink device contains a chip and electrode arrays of more than 1,000 super-thin, flexible conductors that a surgical robot threads into the cerebral cortex. There the electrodes are designed to register thoughts related to motion. In Musk’s vision, an app will eventually translate these signals to move a cursor or produce text—in short, it will enable computer control by thinking. “Imagine if Stephen Hawking could communicate faster than a speed typist or auctioneer. That is the goal,” Musk wrote of the first Neuralink product, which he said is named Telepathy. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration had approved human clinical trials for Neuralink in May 2023. And last September the company announced it was opening enrollment in its first study to people with quadriplegia. Neuralink’s original ambitions, which Musk outlined when he founded the company in 2016, included meshing human brains with artificial intelligence. Its more immediate aims seem in line with the neural keyboards and other devices that people with paralysis already use to operate computers.”⁷.

Transhumanism and posthumanism represent intertwined philosophical schools of thought, both significantly anchored in the potential of technological advancements. Posthumanism envisions a subsequent phase in human evolution wherein technology interweaves with humanity, propelling us into a posthuman state. Conversely, transhumanism not only extols values that facilitate this transformative journey but also

⁶ Harari N. Yuval, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, New York, Random House, 2016, p.367-368.

⁷ From: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/elon-musks-neuralink-has-implanted-its-first-chip-in-a-human-brain-whats-next/>, accessed at 07.04.2024.

strategically guides humanity toward posthumanism by leveraging technological possibilities. Essentially, while transhumanism delineates the pathway, posthumanism embodies the ultimate destination. Despite having their distinct roles and definitions, they fundamentally converge on a unified value system.

Unfortunately, the utilization of technology appears to be altering our neural patterns, subsequently influencing our behaviour. This varies from person to person, depending on their tendencies and temptations. We can identify three main realms: social networking (identity and relationships), gaming (addiction, aggression, and attention), and search engine (memory and learning). Thus, an emerging dialog between some transhumanists and Christians seeks to shape the future of humanity by integrating the basic commitments of transhumanism and Christianity.

Religion is summoned to engage in a profound debate about the concept of human augmentation, which involves the process by which Homo Sapiens alter themselves to become more powerful, intelligent, to lead longer, improved, and healthier lives. It also addresses the notion of human enhancement, which primarily revolves around moral enhancements, emphasizing human qualities like empathy and altruism, among others.

Being a Christian, I've long believed that applying biblical wisdom could offer solutions to social issues. Unfortunately, in today's discussions about science, technology, and society, religious perspectives are seldom included, and when they are, theological arguments rarely influence decisions. Sometimes, bias against religion hinders meaningful contributions, but in many cases, poorly articulated, contentious, or unclear theology only confuses crucial conversations. Consequently, I frequently observe discrepancies between pressing problems in need of solutions and my core beliefs. These discrepancies lead to challenges in reaching agreements among well-intentioned individuals on what actions are necessary or how to achieve common goals when they are identified.

There exists a distinction between the terms "transhuman" and "posthuman." "Transhuman" refers specifically to the "moderately augmented" human, meaning individuals who have undergone a limited number of technological "prosthetic" or "augmentative" enhancements that grant them some superior capabilities compared to those who remain "unaltered" humans. However, it's important to note that the transhuman stage is merely a transitional phase. The ultimate phase is envisioned as the "posthuman" stage, characterized by entities that are "completely augmented," vastly "superior to the human species in the evolutionary scale," equipped with "artificial superintelligence," and, as transhumanists like Nick Bostrom⁸ hope for, potentially immortal.

The technology, as Bostrom argues, aims to persuade us that it will solve all of humanity's problems. Disease, poverty, environmental destruction, and suffering will be eradicated through the use of advanced nanotechnologies by super artificial intelligence. Superintelligence will indefinitely extend human life, halting aging through nanomedicine and/or providing a form of virtual "immortality" through the "uploading of the human mind" onto digital platforms. This will enable a tremendous increase in intellectual capacities. In an ideal world, humans will lead a life filled with joy and fulfilment, dedicated to their relationships with others, experiences, personal growth, and the pursuit of ideals. It's a perfect description of utopia.

⁸ Nick Bostrom, *Transhumanist Ethics*, from: <https://nickbostrom.com/ethics/transhumanist.doc>. Accessed on 20.01.2024.

The term "transhumanism" has a longer history, with its first usage dating back to 1957 by Julien Huxley, who used it to define the human will to surpass their own biological limitations and improve their living conditions through becoming "trans-human." For Huxley, transhumanism was a "religion without revelation," as evident in the title of his work. The desire to empower humans to self-transcend through technology and the ideal of modifying or reconfiguring humanity are part of a project aimed at giving technology a salvation role⁹.

This is also the point at which Christian transhumanism diverges from technological transhumanism. In the United States of America, there is currently a Christian transhumanist association called the "Christian Transhumanist Association", which aims to justify transhumanist actions and research using Christian concepts. To join this association, consent to five statements is required:

1) We believe that God's mission involves the transformation and renewal of creation, including humanity, and that we are called by Christ to participate in that mission by fighting against disease, hunger, oppression, injustice, and death.

2) We seek growth and progress in every dimension of our humanity: spiritual, physical, emotional, mental, and at all levels: individual, community, society, global.

3) We recognize science and technology as tangible expressions of our God-given impulse to explore and discover, and as a natural outgrowth of being created in the image of God.

4) We are guided by the greatest commandments of Jesus: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength... and love your neighbour as yourself."

5) We believe that the intentional use of technology, coupled with following Christ, will enable us to become more human across the entire spectrum of what it means to be creatures in the image of God¹⁰.

Comparing it to traditional religions, we can assert that this ideological movement has the potential to become a religious project. The necessity to enhance, ameliorate, or change human nature reveals a profound discontent, expressed through the desire to improve it through genetic editing, human-machine symbiosis, or transferring consciousness into a computer. All of these aspects paint a picture of a technologically rooted, Manichaeic-like gnosis that seeks to alter or annihilate humanity.

The Christian transhumanism is proposed as an alternative to atheistic, utilitarian transhumanism. This movement starts from the premise that the future will inevitably be shaped by technology, and that Christians should seize the opportunity to influence the direction transhumanism will take in the future. Therefore, Christians should engage in this movement now, guided by discernment and Christian moral principles. If the Church's purpose is to guide individuals and nations toward salvation, then it also has the responsibility to provide them with spiritual guidance in matters of ethics and bioethics in their daily lives, to prevent them from falling into the traps of an increasingly sophisticated and secularized technological environment.

Transhumanism advocates the idea that humans should enhance themselves to attain a superior state compared to their current ordinary state. Christian transhumanism holds the

⁹ Cecilia Calheiros, *Aspiration métaphysiques et attentes eschatologiques chez les transhumanistes*, From: "Revue d'éthique et de théologie morale", nr. 302, 2019, p. 45.

¹⁰ The Christian Transhumanist Affirmation, from: <https://www.christiantranshumanism.org/>, accessed on 24.01.2024.

belief that humans were created in the image and for the purpose of infinite resemblance to God and have the duty to surpass their own limits imposed by the fall and strive for perfection – understood in a spiritual and moral sense, referred to as theosis in Orthodoxy, or "deification." The prefix "trans" can be accepted by Christian transhumanism if it is understood as a desire for humans to transition to a higher state without leaving behind their humanity, as post-humanists argue, but by acquiring a transformed, divinized human condition through grace. In this sense, this endeavour for self-transcendence has always been implicit in Christian teaching, but it is understood as surpassing the fallen, sinful condition through dispassion, purification, asceticism, and prayer, with the help of God rather than technology.

When referring to "beyond human," technological transhumanism strictly means the "augmentation" of humans through technologies that aim to "free" them from their humanity and help them become as "transhuman" as possible, in the sense of superhuman or nonhuman. In contrast, Christian transhumanism understands "beyond human" as the state of perfection achieved by the Saint who, with the help of God, ascended beyond the state of sin and attained deification through grace.

Advocating this teaching since the early days of Christianity, the Orthodox Christian ethos, although the most marginalized in global cultural battles, will not be silenced. In Orthodoxy, the presence of God endures. Orthodoxy does not share common ground with the dominant ethos, as it has ancient roots immune to secularist influence. For Orthodox Christians, morality is not a set of philosophical norms but a covenant between the living God and humanity, based on His revelation, His commandments, and a reality beyond the visible world¹¹.

The Christian understanding and the transhumanist perspective on what it means to be human are fundamentally distinct. In the transhumanist view, we are recognized as members of a species, albeit at an intermediate stage of evolution, and "true persons" are individuals capable of enhancing their own existence. In the Christian perspective, humans are distinct beings from animals because they were created in the image of God, and consequently, they possess absolute value, not relative, dependent on their physical attributes. A human person, created in the image of God, encompasses even the weak, the helpless, the poor, and all are precious in the eyes of God, even if they are incapable of "enhancing their own existence."

Human flourishing entails a life with harmonious relationships both with God and with fellow humans. To be in the image of God involves responsibilities for caring for the Earth with all its biological diversity and caring for one another in all human diversity. True humanity means a humble awareness of our dependence on God.

If we were to reinterpret transhumanism in a theological context, it can be seen as a call for humans to continually transcend themselves on a spiritual level, striving for perfection and holiness. The Saint transcends the biological human dimension, and at a certain level of spiritual perfection, they reach a mystical experience that involves access to God's uncreated energies. This is the moment of absolute encounter and communion, but this time, the initiative no longer belongs to humans, but to God. This is the true transhumanism, one in which humans never lose their deepest personal identity but manage to transcend their human condition tainted by sin.

¹¹ Andrei Dârlău, *Schiță de critică morală a transhumanismului ateu din perspectiva bioeticii creștine a lui T.H. Engelhardt*, (*Outline of Moral Critique of Atheist Transhumanism from the Perspective of T.H. Engelhardt's Christian Bioethics*), in „Altarul Reîntregirii”, 2/2020, pp.102-103.

CONCLUSION

The technological revolution is of an immeasurable magnitude at this moment, and the excessive technologization of life is a warning signal about the potential dangers posed by such a phenomenon, especially considering that we are in the midst of these transformations, which truly have no precedent in human history. In the technological paradigm, humanity becomes "robotic" being "recreated" in the image and likeness of the computer, and such a transformation cannot be considered truly human.

The technological paradigm entails a fundamental shift in our relationship with God. The computer becomes the new God, as it is the core of the technological world, being omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent within this paradigm. Thus, humans are no longer called to follow God, to become godlike, but to become like computers, to become robotic.

This is not about demonizing or rejecting technology but making an effort to understand the nature and implications of current technological environments. It is a journey through which we can recognize the utopias of today's transhumanism and posthumanism, so that we can adopt and nurture a position based on spiritual discernment, even when engaging in theological reflections about the challenges in our technologized society.

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