



THE TRANSHUMANISM – PARADIGM OF SECULARIZATION AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenology of secularization is in a continuous change, generated by the alterability of all main aspects of life: the socio-political, cultural, and human psycho-physiological environment, all these being affected by the technology and lifestyle specific to the 21st century. In the field of modern technology, the scientific discoveries and the fast technological progress have led most notably to an „inhuman technicalization of life”, with a strong echo in the spiritual plan of human existence. The acceleration of these changes in the last decades, have clothed the process of secularization in a new, modern garment, semantically altering the term „progress”, in an ideological way. Sciences, culture, health, medicine, life, man, and even his nature, are targeted by a radical change, through technology, with the declared purpose of an eternal state of well-being, of infinitely improved capabilities of the human intellect and physique. This philosophy, which leads to augmentations and modifications of the human body, brain and even the genome, for purposes clearly demarcated from Christian eschatology, shapes this new current of thought - transhumanism, which promises to lead humanity towards a finality and state that are fundamentally different from the current ones, namely post-humanity.

Keywords: *secularization; transhumanism; technology; post-humanism, progress;*

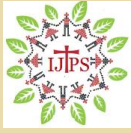
INTRODUCTION

To comprehensively address the issue of secularization in the 21st century, necessarily involves the analysis of the contemporary ideological landscape, dominated among others by transhumanism, as an emerging ideology. In this sense, it can be observed that transhumanism, as a current of thought, identifies itself almost entirely with the secularist way of thinking, from which he seems to emanate.

The attempt is to prove the paternity of secularization, in the genesis process of transhumanism, by bringing into discussion the transformation of all important aspects of life: family, school, society, medicine, etc., since, in the same way in which secularization gradually and progressively is soaking up all these areas, the transhumanism aims to transform all of them. If secularization presents itself as a simple process, without claiming a specific goal, but only the desired direction, transhumanism shows both the direction to follow and the goal pursued.

Beyond the modern means used by it, the point of interest is the philosophy that fuels its actions, which can easily lead us to the core ideas of secularization.

This article attempts to indicate, through the analysis of recent literature in the field, of the current discourse on transhumanism, and by a conceptual, semantic analysis of specific terms (i.e. secularization, post-humanism, progress), the direct link between the secularist



phenomenon and the transhumanist current of thought. First of all, the methods used by the transhumanist movement will be analyzed. Subsequently, by comparison with Christian eschatology, the finality proposed by this current of thought will be analyzed and summarized.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Secularization represents a change, first of all, in the unseen plane of man, in his way of feeling and living, and subsequently of the society of which he is a part, and which he transforms according to his own convictions. On a human level, secularization is given by the evolution of man's personal relationship with God, a relationship that falls under the influence of the external environment: cultural, social, and last but not least, ideological. Citing Steve Bruce, Jaco Beyers shows that secularization is the process resulting from social and economic influences¹. In relation to both fields, among the factors that influence the process of secularization, scientific progress appears as a new element. It leads to the re-evaluation and change of all aspects of life, through the ever deeper interpenetration of life with technology. The ideological capture of scientific progress produces an autonomization of the human mind, which gives rise to the transhumanist current of thought. It can be translated into man's personal conviction that with the help of cutting-edge technology, he acquires unlimited powers in terms of expanding his physical and intellectual capabilities, but also over life, disease, and even death. The question that arises is whether and to what extent, scientific progress potentiates the phenomenon of secularization, thus shaping a new paradigm of it.

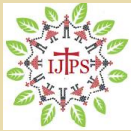
2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECULARIZATION AND THE EMERGING TRANSHUMANISM

From an epistemological point of view, secularization represents the resubordination of all aspects of life and society to principles and values other than those contained in the teachings of the Church. The element of novelty in the phenomenology of secularization is the contribution of ultramodern technology, which, once seized in an ideological sense by it, emanates from itself the main transhumanist ideas. Thus, the technological advance and the emergence of new means, bring to the fore transhumanism as a solution to the ontological expectation of human well-being, fulfillment and happiness. Just as secularization touches all aspects of life, culturally, socially, biologically, in the same way transhumanism, in the process of its unfolding, touches, transforms and changes all key aspects of man's earthly life.

The purpose is to show that the authorship of transhumanism as an ideology and current of thought can be claimed, among others, by secularization as a total phenomenon in the transformation of human life and society. But, although the germ of transhumanism remains secularization, nevertheless, it is the technological momentum that potentiates and metamorphoses it into what we call transhumanism today.

Advanced technology remains beneficial to man only until it is ideologically captured, at which point it begins to serve purposes that turn out to be completely alien to genuine Christian love. If the secularist spirit represents the germ of the transhumanist current, yet the key element, which gives life and flavor to the current, is cutting-edge technology, and progress, without which the transhumanist promise and dream could not

¹ Jaco Beyers, „The church and the secular: The effect of the post-secular on Christianity”, in *HTS: Theological Studies*, Vol. 70, no. 1 (2014), p. 4



have taken shape. Thus, from this symbiosis, between the extraordinary technological progress and the process of secularization of life, a new ideology takes shape:

„Transhumanism is a high-tech dream of computer scientists, philosophers, neuroscientists and many others. It seeks to use major advances in technology to augment the human body and mind, and ultimately the entire human experience. It is the philosophy that holds that mankind should actively self-improve and direct the course of its own evolution. Transhumanists want to become what they call "post-humans". Post-humans are people who have been altered by body and brain augmentations to the point where they can no longer be called human. They underwent mutations that turned them into completely new beings”².

From this presentation, one can see the interrelationship of secularist ideas and cutting edge technology. Transhumanism makes use not only of the most advanced technologies available, but also of the highest intellectual achievements available, which points to the human element. Daniel Estulin's definition is rather an x-ray of the ideological movement, which clearly exposes not only the goal and the means, but also its philosophy. The secularist spirit is present, through humanity's desire for self-improvement, a desire that sets in motion and appeals to all the ultra-modern means available. An important aspect that emerges from the cited definition is the perpetual character of the transhumanist dream, through which it fascinates and captivates. This aspect translates into the fact that the ideology presents itself in the form of a beautiful dream, but it does not offer any real basis, nor guarantees, or an approximate time frame for the achievement of the respective goals.

The process of secularization, whose triggering moment, in the broadest sense, is considered to be the French revolution, has progressed gradually, influenced by the particularities of each epoch that humanity has passed through, either social or technological, or by currents of thought that appeared in the last three centuries. What secularization now takes over from the 21st century, for the first time in its existence as an ongoing process, is the extraordinary leap and advance of science, reaching a level that can sometimes give man the illusory feeling of omnipotence. Once the search for God by the human soul seems to disappear, through gradual elimination, man redirects all its energies, constructively intended and associated with this ontological search, in a completely different direction, which can seduce him.

3. SECULARIZATION AND METHODS OF TRANSHUMANISM

3.1. Transhumanism In The Vision of Its Promoters

There are several definitions for the current of thought that has acquired the name of transhumanism, which is why we will use one of the most suggestive definitions, in order to highlight its roots. In this regard, father Jean Boboc quotes a definition provided by Nicolas Le Dévédec: „As an ideological background of the amelioration society, it (transhumanist ideology) sheds light on the post-humanist model of perfectibility that tends to prevail in our contemporary Western societies. [...]It is a question, no more, no less, of uprooting man from any biological anchorage, in order to access a new stage of evolution”³.

² Daniel Estulin, *Transevoluția, Apropriata epocă a deconstrucției umane*, romanian translation by Mihai-Dan Pavelescu, Meteor Publishing, 2018, pp. 183-184

³ Nicolas Le Dévédec, *La société de l'amélioration. La perfectibilité humaine des Lumières au transhumanisme*, éditeur Liber, Montreal, 2015, apud Pr. Jean Boboc, „Transumanismul deciptat. Metamorfoza navei lui Tezeu”, romanian translation from french by Manuel Valeriu, edition edited by Prof. Dr. Sebastian Moldovan, Doxologia publishing, Iași, 2020, p. 64



The definition puts before everything the very essence of the transhumanist current: the improvement of man, of society, which coincides with the declared goal of the movement. The ideal, or the model towards which it strives, is the post-humanist one of perfectibility. It follows from here that transhumanism is only a stage of evolution, towards the final stage, post-humanity. In the analysis of this term, one finds all the paradigmatic aspects of the transformation of man and society according to the transhumanist ideal. The desirability of the improvement of society, of man, without the appeal to God, to His pronia and to His work, can only have an ideological substrate, as N. Le Dévédec shows above. God himself, as the author of life, wants the same thing for man: his improvement to perfection, and the transformation of his transitory life into eternal life, with the difference that, in Christianity, immortality is regained, and in transhumanism, it would be reached for the first time in human history.

In Christian eschatology, perfection is achieved, not through augmentations of the physical body, but through the inner transformation of man following the exercise of his will for good, permanently assisted by the sanctifying grace.

Transhumanism also claims basically the same goals, but their semantic nuance is completely different. Both God and transhumanist philosophers promise and call man to the same finality, although the last ones are more reserved in offering guarantees for: well-being, eternal life, knowledge and perfected intellectual abilities. Nick Bostrom adds all of this to the stated goals of transhumanism: „Options for improvement discussed include the radical expansion of health, the eradication of disease, the elimination of unnecessary suffering, and the augmentation of intellectual, physical, and emotional possibilities. Other transhumanist themes include the colonization of space and the possibility of creating superintelligent machines, along with other potential developments that could profoundly alter the human condition”⁴.

The fundamental differences between the Christian and the transhumanist vision appear, however, in the definition of the means by which this perfection is reached. It should be noted what father Jean Boboc stated, speaking about man, namely that „all his possibilities are already set by his nature from which he cannot escape”⁵.

This means that all his biological, cognitive, physical limits are already circumscribed to carefully established thresholds, which leads us to the words of our Savior Christ: „without Me you can do nothing” (John 15, 5). In what follows, an analysis of the two paths to perfection will be conducted, first of all trying to show what this means in the transhumanist sense, and than in the Orthodox one, for finally stating the methods that the two paths assume for reaching the stated goals.

3.2. The Transhumanist Desires

As it appears from its definitions, and from the praises brought by its promoters, transhumanism does not demand any internal or moral change of man, but proposes the achievement of perfection, through complex physical, invasive interventions, in the body, and even in the very human nature. He considers man „upgradable” by augmentation, or by intervention in his genetic material, or in his brain, the two key elements in man's bio-psycho-physical existence. Thus fascinated by his own creation, the computer, man began to wish he could become like it: to be able to instantly appropriate endless amounts of

⁴ Nick Bostrom, *Ethical Issues for the Twenty-First Century – Transhumanist Values*, Oxford Philosophy Documentation Center, 2005, p. 3. Available at <https://nickbostrom.com/ethics/values.pdf>

⁵ Pr. Jean Boboc, *Transumanismul decriptat – Metemorfoza navei lui Tezeu*, romanian translation from french by Manuel Valeriu, edition edited by prof.dr. Sebastian Moldovan, Doxologia publishing, Iași, 2020, p. 15



information, to have instant access to all existing information, to be able to transfer his memory, to be able to slow down and stop aging, to be able to eliminate suffering from his existence, suffering which he considers worthless and unnecessary. This idolatry of one's own creation, and the investment of all his resources towards the desideratum of this resemblance, may present, in a broad sense, all the characteristics of a new religion, whose engine is found to be the progress, a term semantically altered in the 21st century.

By changing the human essence through augmentation, has its own risks. However, these invasive procedures in the genetic or molecular structure of man can give birth to hybrid creatures, whose belonging to human nature is called into question. Damien Broderick shows that „trans-human” refers to „someone who is actively preparing to become posthuman. Someone knowledgeable enough to know future possibilities and prepare for them, and who takes every available resolution to self-improve. And posthuman refers to a person with unprecedented physical, intellectual and psychological capabilities, self-programming, self-forming, individually limitless, potentially immortal”⁶. Even if the vision of Damien Broderick does not entirely correspond to that of Daniel Estulin, as the last one sees in the posthuman state, something that no longer belongs to human nature due to the structural changes and augmentations it has undergone, the opinion of the second one seems more grounded, since the intervention in the biological and genetic structure of man brings with it unquantifiable changes in the functioning of the human affective, rational and spiritual universe as a whole.

In the transhumanist discourse, no clear reference can be found to any change in the moral inner order, or in the way of thinking, or regarding the affective universe of man. The transhumanist dream proposes the resemblance of man to the machine, whose characteristics he wants implemented in himself: instant learning, unlimited memory, the possibility to transfer his memory, or even the transfer of consciousness, abilities that are referred to in a report of the European Union, also cited by father Jean Boboc: „Technological devices already available and ongoing research anticipate breakthroughs and technoscientific applications worthy of true science fiction [...]: gene doping, aging slowing, brain digitization and knowledge transfer, AI (Artificial Intelligence), genetic enhancement and other cognitive capabilities, mood modulations, etc”⁷.

4. CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY AND TRANSHUMANISM AS RELIGION OF THE FUTURE

4.1. The Transhumanist Dream, and the Perfection in Christian Sense

Considering the stated ideals, which are clearly demarcated from Christian eschatology, it is easy to intuit father Jean Boboc's remark that „the ideologues of transhumanism do not start from Christian anthropology”, but from the premise of a Darwinian type of evolution, which they undertake the duty of speeding it up. In this sense, one can evoke a definition of transhumanism, provided by Nick Bostrom, one of the pillars of this current of thought: „a philosophy of life (like the extropian perspective) that seeks to

⁶ Damien Broderick, „Trans and Post”, in Max More, Natasha-Vita More (eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and contemporary Essays of Science, Technology and Philosophy of the Human Future*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 430, apud Ana-Veronica Ion, „Transumanismul – Un comentariu creștin”, Eikon publishing, Bucharest, 2021, p. 20

⁷ Science and Technology Options Assessment, *Human Enhancement Study*. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2009/417483/IPOL-JOIN_ET\(2009\)417483_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2009/417483/IPOL-JOIN_ET(2009)417483_EN.pdf), apud Pr. Jean Boboc, *Transumanismul decriptat...*, p. 84



continue and accelerate the evolution of intelligent life beyond its current human form, with the help of science and technology, under the guidance of the principles and values related to defending of life”⁸. This assumption of the change in human nature and condition can be considered a direct result of secularization, through the divinization of human reason, and simultaneously, of the science it has reached.

God, however, proposes to mankind the achievement of perfection and immortality through Him, through the redemption of each person, obtained through the Son of God’s sacrifice on the cross. He proposes the achievement of absolute knowledge, and eternal happiness through repentance, prayer and good deeds, through which communion with God is reached, communion which involves the simultaneous possession of eternal life and happiness. The key element to which perfection appeals, in the Orthodox sense, is the will of man, which, intertwined with the grace and power of God, transfigures the inner man, without operating any kind of physical, biological or genetic changes to his structure.

If in transhumanism, man himself is the one who selfimproves through augmentation, trying to rise beyond the limits imposed by his nature, in Orthodoxy, God is the one who, called by man through the manifestation of his free will, changes the inner man, lifting him from the fallen condition imposed by his nature, to the divine condition of immortality and to eternal happiness. This overcoming of his fallen condition is impossible for man to achieve, but is exclusively God's prerogative. If from an orthodox, spiritual point of view, perfection comes through repentance and knowledge of God, transhumanism promises everything through the means of modern technology: operations, interventions and augmentations in the human genome, brain implants, etc. The fundamental difference between the two ways, comes from the total lack of spiritual struggle of man, in the process of reaching perfection, in the transhumanist vision.

4.2. Secularization of Man's Ontological Attraction Towards God

Speaking about the relationship between secularization and religion, Aistė Bukevičiūtė believes that a broader definition of secularization can give rise to situations where ideologies are treated as religions⁹.

This observation resonates with Julian Huxley's conclusion, drawn nearly a century ago: „«I believe in transhumanism»: when enough people will come to truly say so, the human species will be on the brink of a new kind of existence, in the same way distinct from ours, as ours is from that of the man of Pekin”¹⁰. Man is no longer urged to say „I believe in One God”, according to the orthodox symbol of faith, but his faith is diverted to a closed path, stuck in the characteristic immanence of the science, which belongs to the physical world. The ontological need of man to seek God, and to worship Him, is diverted by the ideological and secularist current.

As God has planted into mankind the struggle to reach infinity, man cannot exist in the absence of a goal, of a dream to dedicate his existence to. This peculiarity of the human being belongs to the image of God placed inside man at his creation, through which man is meant to advance eternally in the only true knowledge, that of God, which is infinite. All other knowledge is closed in the immanent, and cannot bring the human soul the fulfillment it

⁸ Nick Bostrom, „Human Genetic Enhancements: A transhumanist perspective”, in *Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2003), pp 493-506, apud Ana-Veronica Ion, „Transumanismul – Un comentariu creștin”, Eikon publishing, Bucharest, 2021, p. 18

⁹ Aistė Bukevičiūtė, „Secularization and the future of religion”, in *Scholarly Journal Problemos*, vol. 103/2023, Vilnius University press, Vilnius, 2023, p. 74

¹⁰ Julian Huxley, „Transhumanism”, in *New Bottles for New Wine*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1957, pp.13-17



seeks. Precisely this ontological need for perpetual knowledge, for perfection, is ideologically taken over inside man, by the transhumanist current, and exploited in the direction proposed by its goals. Any other path of knowledge, apart from that of knowing God, is a path closed in the immanent. Diverting man on such a path is equivalent to a gradual elimination of authentic faith from man, a phenomenon predicted by Max Weber, who stated that, in the end, religion will no longer have a place in society and will become completely obsolete¹¹.

4.3. Risks in the Transhumanist Approach

Although it is argued that the principle underlying the transhumanist approach is the defending of life¹², the major risk involved in the technological intervention in human biology and genetics, is aimed at life itself. The reference to „the evolution of intelligent life beyond its present human form” shows the participation of the theory of evolution in the genesis process of transhumanism.

According to its philosophy, mankind is in a continuous evolution, a process that must be accelerated using the most advanced means of science. The theory of evolution, closely related to the epistemology of secularization, does not see in human nature an unchangeable given fact, but an alterable element, which is in a perpetual evolution.

In the sense of secularization, it can be said that transhumanism takes from what belongs to God, and puts it under the authority and control of man. In transhumanism, man transforms natural biological life, with the desire to take it „beyond its present human form.”, as cited above At Nick Bostrom we can also find details about the methods used by the transhumanist approach: „The emphasis is placed on both present technologies, such as genetic engineering and information technology, as well as some that are anticipated to develop, such as molecular nanotechnology and artificial intelligence”¹³.

Penetrating more and more into the core of the human biological being, man sets foot on a ground that does not belong to him, that of life and of its Author, implementing changes in the very epistemology of biological life.

The intervention in the biology of life cannot remain without an echo in the spiritual plane of the person, given the fact that man is a dichotomous being. In this way is affected, in an unquantifiable way, the very ability of man to believe, and to manifest his faith. Affecting this mechanism can lead to impossibility of man to pursue and achieve the goal proposed by the Savior Christ, the regaining of eternal life and eternal happiness.

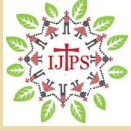
Transhumanism proposes an attempt to acquire immortality, while the phrase „eternal life” belongs to Christian eschatology. Not daring to promise immortality, transhumanism proposes only an attempt to acquire it, through the paradoxical mortal man's own intervention. Christian eschatology not only promises eternal life, but with it, also promises eternal happiness, since eternity loses its meaning without happiness.

The fundamental difference from the transhumanist ideology is that in Orthodoxy, life and eternal happiness are not self-acquired, through man's efforts and achievements, but are received as a gift from the God-Man, who redeems mankind from death through His own sacrifice. Thus, the two proposed paths to perfection present fundamental differences that cannot be reconciled.

¹¹ Jaco Beyers, „The church and the secular:..., p. 6

¹² Nick Bostrom, „Human Genetic Enhancements: A transhumanist perspective”, in *Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2003), pp 493-506, apud Ana-Veronica Ion, „Transumanismul – Un comentariu creștin...”, p. 18

¹³ Nick Bostrom, „Human Genetic Enhancements: A transhumanist perspective”, in *Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2003), pp 493-506, apud Ana-Veronica Ion, „Transumanismul – Un comentariu creștin...”, p. 18

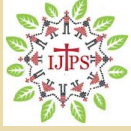


CONCLUSION

The liaison between secularization and transhumanism is one of mutual determination: secularization generates transhumanism, as a desire and hope for perfection, but in a technical way, by using the highest advances of human science. Meanwhile transhumanism confirms and strengthens secularization as a process, by the goals it proposes, and by the methods through which it wishes to reach those goals.

Transhumanism results from secularization which has been given the power provided by cutting-edge technology, and which gives it new ways of acting, and new means, as well as a new public presentation and new horizons to dream of. Thus, the whole movement is built on the fertile ideological soil of secularization, this approach gradually encompassing all aspects and sectors of life, which have previously been impregnated by the secularist spirit. If until now the secularist movement has not been able to influence human nature in any way, in the 21st century, secularization, enhanced by cutting-edge technology and by scientific discoveries that have reached their peak, brings to light this element of absolute novelty, namely the possibility and the secularist ambition to completely transform human nature, an ambition that identifies itself with the transhumanist dream.

This paradigmatic transformation of man and society is set in motion by promising infinitely enhanced physical and intellectual capabilities, and finally a state of eternal well-being, but at the cost of transformations aimed at man, that are often impossible to quantify, and most often irreversible.



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