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THE PARADOXICAL DEATH THROUGH CRYOTHANASIA OR PLAYING GOD. A MORAL-THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

In the 21st century a new paradigm is developing — transhumanism. Scientific discoveries and technological development in various areas, especially those such as bioengineering, biotechnology and nanomedicine, push this paradigm towards a new revolution and a new approach towards life and death. Currently, hundreds of people in the terminal stage of an incurable disease turn to the services of cryogenics institutes, hoping that in the future, with the development of medicine and nanotechnology, they will be *awakened* and healed. If today cryopreservation is possible only after the declaration of death, the right of premature cryopreservation by euthanasia — *cryothanasia* is requested, by which it is assumed that death could become a reversible process.

Keywords: euthanasia, cryothanasia, cryogenics, playing God, death.

Introduction

In the 21st century, a new paradigm is emerging in the (bio)(cryo)technological-medical society — transhumanism. Scientific discoveries and technological advancement in various fields, especially those such as bioengineering, biotechnology, bioinformatics, cryobiology and nanomedicine, push this paradigm towards a new revolution and a new approach to life and death. If we look directly and objectively at this phenomenon, we can say that the world no longer looks and, obviously, will no longer look and behave as (we knew it) / know it.

Cryonics, although it appeared and developed during the 20th century, is expected to reveal its full effectiveness by the end of the present century (Swan, 2019, p. 704). In this age, dominated by an “after God” culture (Engelhardt, 2012, p.5,8) in which the traditional morality has been deflated and replaced by an autonomous and secularized morality (Donovan, 1997), *homo transhumanus* struggles to prolong his life by any method, at any cost and especially with the help of technology and of artificial intelligence. This struggle is based on another, because *homo transhumanus* has developed out of the *homo hedonicus*, the one who fights to have a quality life, in a utilitarian and hedonistic sense, in which health and material prosperity are the *barometers* of his life and death, while suffering and death are his enemies. Thus, when his ideals are no longer satisfied, *homo hedonicus* chooses to end his life through assisted death procedures (euthanasia, medically assisted suicide and assisted suicide). *Homo hedonicus* has always longed for such goals, but without the necessary tools (currently available) these goals have remained at the level of desires and the masking of ideals. Without technological progress, ideals have been limited to the pursuit of everyday pleasures and lust. With this progress, whether we are talking about medical technology or nanorobots, extraordinary treatments or encouraging empirical evidence, *homo hedonicus* updates herself or himself to *homo transhumanus* and tends to *homo Deus*, that is, to the adamic desire to be exactly like God, creator and ruler, omnipotent and immortal alike.

In this post-traditional culture, it is considered that man chooses “the path of prolonged life, health, and youthful vigor over the default route of aging, disease, and death”

(Bostrom, 2008, p. 7). This consideration is perfectly true and justified from all points of view. Man was created by God immortal and happy. These two coordinates: immortality and happiness are identity and intrinsic to human nature. However, the methods used by *homo transhumanus* to be immortal, from a biological point of view, are those that give rise to numerous bioethical debates and social controversies.

Transhumanist / technological immortality techniques

Many cryobiologists believe that, just as in nature there are organisms that can survive in a state similar to death for some time, so biomedical technology can transfer this process onto humans. One is referring above all to the following instances:

- a) the North American forest frog that blocks its vital functions, its heart stops beating and its body freezes from winter to summer when it thaws and comes back to life (Cron, 2014, p.3);
- b) Another case considered encouraging by contemporary researchers is *Turritopsis dohrnii* or the *immortal jellyfish*, found in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea and in those of Japan. From what is known so far, it is the only organism able to return to the larval stage after passing through the stage of maturity (Matsumoto, Piraino & Miglietta, 2019).

Based on these evidences and the technological advancement, more and more researchers, scientists and bioethicists hope that the chances of cryonics are greater than zero; so, they argue, cryonics must be a promoted and supported field (Moen, 2015). There are also other techniques and technologies to be developed, through which man can become biologically immortal. We can mention here:

- a) *mind uploading* or digitizing brain information on a computer;
- b) *gene therapy* that prevents aging by stopping the disintegration of genes (Cron, 2014, p.3).

In addition to these techniques, cryobiologists also rely on certain empirical evidence related to some cases when certain organisms have been brought back to life under hypothermic conditions:

- a) For example, in 1955, a rat was brought back to life after being kept at 0° C and its brain activity was completely absent during the experiment (Lovelock, 1955).
- b) Another experimental validation is the case of pigs, an experiment successfully performed in 2006 (Alam et al., 2006).
- c) From 2015, at the UPMC Presbyterian Hospital in Pittsburgh, victims of severe illness, so that they are stabilized and the traumas do not get too intense, their blood is being replaced with a cold saline solution, meanwhile brain activities stop, doctors treat the condition, then reintroduce the blood into the body and the body is reheated (Moen, 2015; Thompson, 2016). This procedure is based on the empirical demonstration of drowning in cold water, when rapid cooling leads to fewer or less severe brain trauma. By these means there were people who were brought back to life after 66 minutes (Bolte, & Black, 1988, p. 377).
- d) Cryopreservation, thawing and recovery of sperm, eggs or tissues are also discussed, so, as the advocates of cryonics claim, contemporary cryobiology is not a new practice nor a complex approach, but a practice present already in society, which, however, must be refined to produce spectacular results (Best, 2008; Moen, 2015, p. 678).
- e) Of all these techniques and procedures, the vitrification process is increasingly used in emergency rooms and laboratories, because unlike the freezing process, during which the organs may suffer considerable damage, in the vitrification, the cells do not freeze, but are cryopreserved with antifreeze-like chemicals called cryoprotectants, e. g. glutaraldehyde, without the risk ice crystals forming and instantaneous degradation. In

this sense, there have been offered empirical demonstrations on rabbit kidneys (Fahy et al, 2009; McIntyre & Fahy, 2015).

f) Medical biostasis(de Grey, 2020, p. 191) — “an experimental procedure that induces metabolic arrest at cryogenic temperatures to allow terminally ill patients to benefit from future medical advances and restore them to good health” (de Wolf, 2019, p. 191).

Cryonics

Cryonics, one of the most important techniques proposed by transhumanists,¹ is the science of using ultra-cold temperature to preserve an organism with the intention of bringing it back to life and restoring its health, when the development of technology and medicine allows this (Minerva & Sandberg, 2017). In other words, cryonics is the practice by which an organism is brought to very low temperatures in the hope of being brought back to life in the future when there may be a cure for the disease due to which it has reached the end of life (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Cryopreservation involves the process of vitrification (from the Latin word *vitrium* — “glass”) when the patient is placed in an ice bath immediately after the death is legally pronounced, with the purpose of cooling his body down to 0°C. Respiration and blood circulation are artificially restored and maintained through medical equipment that takes over the functions of the heart and lungs. Substances such as heparin are injected to protect the cells from ischemic damage and to prevent blood from clotting. During a procedure that lasts for almost two weeks, the blood is gradually replaced with a cryoprotective chemical solution that preserves the body, prevents the appearance of ice crystals inside and other fractures, until it reaches a glassy state at about -120°C. The whole body is then cooled and immersed in liquid nitrogen until the temperature drops to -196°C (Moen, 2015; Alcor, n.d.).

Cryothanasia

Hundreds of people in the terminal stage of an incurable disease are currently turning to the services of cryogenics institutes (Alcor News, 2019), hoping that in the future, with the advancement of medical technology, they will be *awakened* and healed (Shaw, 2009). The cryogenic process ideally begins in the first moments after the person’s heart stops beating. Otherwise, if this moment is delayed, the cells and organs begin to deteriorate and, once the body begins to freeze, there is a high chance that organs such as the brain will be severely or irreparably damaged. That is why many cryogenics advocates, cryobiologists or transhumanists advocate for both legislative and medical permission for the patient to be euthanized and then cryogenically treated while dying as a “modern will to master the time and manner of death” (Cohen, 2020, p. 2). In this sense, people on the deathbed are recommended to be hospitalized in palliative care centers near cryonics centers, just so that the team of specialists can start the cryopreservation procedures from the moment of death, where the law allows a form of assisted death (See case: Norman Hardy)(Cohen, 2020, p.1).

If cryopreservation is possible today only after the declaration of death(Shaw, 2009; Moen, 2015), the right of premature cryopreservation by euthanasia — *cryothanasia*, by which it is assumed that death could become a reversible process, is demanded (Shaw, 2009; Moen, 2015). According to bioethicists Francesca Minerva and Anders Sandberg, even if euthanasia and cryothanasia aim to end the life of a patient whose suffering is unbearable, in the case of cryothanasia, the goal is also related to the possibility of resuming life: “Cryothanasia would offer the option of ending the patient’s suffering by inducing a cryopreservation, which is a state of (hopefully) reversible biostasis. It achieves the positive

¹ There are five major cryonics institutes in the world: Alcor, Cryonics Institute, and Oregon Cryonics located in the United States; KrioRus in Russia and Southern Cryonics / Stasis System Australia in Australia.

goal of euthanasia (ending suffering) without its negative instrumental side-effect (permanent cessation of life). Even if it turns out to cause information-theoretic death, the intention is clearly to extend life” (Minerva & Sandberg, 2017, p. 528).

Trap statements in the debate on cryoethanasia

In bioethical debates on sensitive issues such as abortion, assisted death or cryopreservation, there is a number of ambiguous statements made by promoters, supporters and advocates of certain causes they represent. The viability of projects that from the very beginning have certain synopses is knowingly asserted. The warnings, especially from the side of the opponents, are also being ignored. Usually, when warnings become deeds, this topic is covered by denying the facts or by directing the attention to other, seemingly much more important issues. As we will see, neither cryonics nor cryoethanasia overcome this obstacle of the trap statements.

1) First of all, in an age when disease eradication and death conquest through the so-called institutes of immortality and cryogenic centers, nanorobots and smart drugs, represent a rising trend, cryoethanasia appears as a progressive solution for man’s desire and struggle to be biologically immortal. Moreover, “Most cryonics members, and life extensionists in general, aim not only for the defeat of death, but the reversal of aging as well” (Cohen, 2020, p. 8). *Homo transhumanus* wants to know eternity here on earth. Cryonics or cryoethanasia, mind uploading or gene therapy appear to him as viable solutions in his plans. Proposing and promoting euthanasia combined with cryogenics is part of the same mechanism devised by *homo transhumanus* who, when he cannot overcome death, he tries at least to postpone it or pretends to postpone it.

However, murder, disguised as euthanasia, remains an ethically, morally and legally reprehensible act. Euthanasia has become a legal and medical practice in many states and the consequences of this procedure can be seen in all areas: medical, social, legal, spiritual etc. The same condemnation and at least moral, if not legal, guilt also characterizes cryonics. In the absence of unequivocal morality and empirical and scientific evidence, this process is at least damnable. The promise of scientists that people who have been cryopreserved can be brought back to life and healed is, for the same reasons, scientifically unjustified, unethical, and ultimately inhuman. This kind of promise urges unethical experiments, illusions, pressures and revolt. Of course, there are financiers who want to have results in the shortest possible time. This pressure translates into unethical experiments, the concealment of medical truth, and overestimated results. In the end, the lack of concrete results and unethical experiments will lead to an acceptance of the precedent and the normalization of evil. The human habit of this type of approach is, in fact, the target of these experiments, not biological immortality.

2) Second, advocates of cryoethanasia say that *slippery slopes*, present in the case of euthanasia or abortion, would not exist in the case of cryoethanasia. Basically, we are told that in the case of cryoethanasia, the cessation of suffering, pain and disease specific to euthanasia will be doubled by the lack of definitive cessation of life. All the hopes attributed to cryoethanasia would be, according to them, harmless, and even there would be only advantages. Questions such as: *What is the scientific basis for these promises? Are these attempts by advocates of cryoethanasia morally justified? Is there transparency in the empirical demonstrations, in the results of cryonic experiments, in the management of the funds of this process?* are discredited.

However, the *slippery slopes* visible in the case of euthanasia and its *surrogates* (assisted suicide and medically assisted suicide) are amplified in the case of cryoethanasia, doubling the number of dangerous effects, because through cryoethanasia we reach an acceptance of all unethical activities *that gain time*, even a few months (Zechert, 2015;

Minerva & Sandberg, 2017). Actually, we accept any unethical act only on the basis of a promise. Illusion, not deed, riddle, not science, are at the root of this phenomenon of transhumanism. The funds invested in this process of cryopreservation of man and in other related experiments motivated by the possibility of an ulterior revival could be reasonably used in other certain activities of cryopreservation, which would be of real use for human life and which would have results in time, without putting pressure on finance, science and, above all, on morality. Any doubt must be answered to by a double assurance, precisely to prevent the mistakes that scientists made in the 20th century, when, in their conscience, notions such as eugenics prevailed instead of discernment and morality. Therefore, *slippery slopes* become realities of human cryopreservation, before the expected results can be concretely observed.

3) Thirdly, cryoethanasia, just like assisted death, is also a desire of *homo Deus* and *homo transhumanus* to arbitrarily control life and death, the adamic and luciferic desire to be exactly like God. Euthanasia and its *surrogates* refer to the non-acceptance of death, pain, suffering, disease, the meaning of life and death, the salvation and the Last Judgment as well as to revolt. It is a revolt against his own inability to accept biological death and the return of man to the earth from which he was made. For this reason, man chooses the path of self-suppression by means of accelerating death: suicide, medically assisted suicide, assisted suicide, euthanasia etc.

Cryoethanasia overcomes this non-acceptance of the phenomenon of assisted death into a denial of the reality of life and death in another attempt by man — *playing God*. The phrase *playing God* does not refer to a repulsive attitude toward progress or to a condemnation of science and technological progress, but it shows astonishment and concern for the divine power with which people associate in the actions by which they violate “God’s prescriptive natural law” and “God’s purposes as they are manifested in the natural order”, without having “the wisdom of God [...] and the lack of uncontrollability and uncertainty of the consequences of human interference with the natural order” (*Splicing Life*, 1982, p. 55, 58).

The meaning we use in this work for the phrase *playing God* is that of omnipotent behavior that *homo transhumanus* arrogates to himself without any real basis, without any justification. One has no longer inhibitions or limits regarding their intervention in the creation, while one “trying to invade God’s privileges and prerogatives”, therefore, euthanasia and cryoethanasia violate the creative, providence and ruling act of God, considering that the “old God” no longer exists and that His place must be taken by someone else (Fletcher, 1974 as cited in Shannon, 2005). Only on the basis of the technological advancement, man cannot call himself Creator and God; one remains, by the will and word of God, only the icon of all creation without full rights. Life as a gift from God, not as an autonomous property, gives man, that is, its bearer, the status of bearer-economist, and not of his own or self-creator, nor that of arbitrary and absolute master, which is why living and dying, the beginning and the end of his life depend on and belong entirely to God (Hauerwas, & Bondi, 1976), for “In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12: 10, KJV). God reveals to the human being the vocation, the way, the orientation and the care to protect, to defend and respect his life by participating and contributing to God’s dominion over creation, but not as an absolute and causal, subjective and arbitrary mastery of self-fulfillment of desires and against the God’s economy, but a discerning, responsible and right mastery of the moral, wise and conscious man of the creation: “And ordained man through thy wisdom, that he should have dominion over the creatures which thou hast made. And order the world according to equity and righteousness, and execute judgment with an upright heart” (Wisdom of Solomon 9: 2-3, KJV) (Papa Ioan Paul al II-lea, 1995). In this exercise of the iconic powers of creation with discernment and

morality, the human being must be aware, protect, and act according to His will and with the will of God, with discernment, morality, and deep respect for the privileged quality of being free and hardworking, to discover and bear the gift of freedom (Popa, 2019, p. 492).

4) Advocates of cryoethanasia and transhumanists put science at the forefront, sometimes pseudo-science, since we cannot speak of science without obvious results, only with vain promises or illusions packed as certainties. Science is at the forefront and the scientist plays the role of centralizing the power, of making and modeling the matter, of deciding over life and death: “Modern man has begun to relate to the world in an outward way, at the discretion of the world in his name, not of God, with his own criteria, not with God’s own criteria. He gradually gave up seeing the world through the «eyes» of God and he began to look at it only through the eyes of his autonomous and self-sufficient scientific research. That is why he does not see in the world a spiritual purpose, but only a material object: the world becomes a good to be exploited for the material progress of mankind, the spiritual dimension of the world or the materials of the world being thus suspended” (Ioja, 2016, p. 77).

In this context, science is born as a religion of crime and chaos, without an order and a symmetry of ethical decisions and actions, in which researchers and scientists become masters and decision-makers in matters of life and death, and the beginning and end of the life of others among their concerns and decisions. There are enough cases of multiple crimes committed by specialists to show us that the unwise and unethical profession can turn some people into masters of life and death (Kinnell, 2000). Again, I left the lessons of history to history. Lack of ethics and discernment has already resulted in hundreds of millions of casualties, world wars, the Holocaust, the Gulag, nuclear bombs, embryo selection, the ecological crisis, the liberalization of abortion and assisted death, which should warn us that one has to reflect more before proceeding to action.

Conclusions

What is the target of *homo transhumanus*? As I mentioned, *homo transhumanus* longs to become biologically eternal. In general, people have turned their face away from authentic morality, in which norm, law and order come from and belong exclusively to God. The autonomous individual denies the morality and God, then he, as the sole judge, transforms and lives only in the sphere of the biological. One detaches themselves from the spiritual side and lives in and only for the body, transforming the purpose of living forever and being happy into that of knowing pleasure. Thus, his search and ideals are no longer related to eternity and the salvation of the soul, but to the eternity of the body and its salvation in the biological sense. In case of failure, the life of the body must be suppressed by means of accelerating biological death, and, if possible, the body must be burned, precisely to prove that, ultimately, throughout life, *homo hedonicus* did not value neither his soul nor his body. After earthly life, there is nothing left for it, so matter does not have to exist.

As long as technology did not allow it, *homo hedonicus* limited herself or himself to experiencing pleasure only here on earth. Technological advancement fueled his dream of becoming biologically immortal. Moreover, it led him to believe, totally unjustifiably, that he could be like God, the creator of life and the ruler of nature. *Homo transhumanus* is dissatisfied with the few pleasures of *homo hedonicus*, just as *homo Deus* is dissatisfied with the limitations of *homo transhumanus*. Therefore, euthanasia displeased *homo hedonicus*, which led to the supremacy of *homo transhumanus* and their cryonics with the aim of completing his work of awakening and healing.

This burning desire is quite old. From the Holy Scriptures we know the reason for the fall of our forefathers Adam and Eve, namely, their desire to be exactly like God. In the second book of Genesis, chapter two, we are told that “the Lord God ordered Adam, «You

are free to eat from any of the trees from the garden of Heaven; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die» (Genesis 2: 16-17, KJV). Wanting to be “like God, knowing good and evil” Adam and Eve ate from the tree of life, and instead of being like God, they knew death (Genesis 3: 5, 19, KJV). So, nothing new under the sun. The same Adamic desire in a different age. The results of this desire and the facts that will accompany it will be the same.

For these reasons, discernment and ethics must be at the heart of our actions. Along with these, we come to the wisdom and the awareness of our quality as created beings, of certain boundaries necessary for our actions and of the primary purpose of medicine, science and (bio) technology, namely that of being in the service of and for the benefit of man: In the words of P. Ramsey, “Men ought not to play God before they learn to be men, and after they have learned to be men they will not play God” (Ramsey, 1970, as cited in Shannon, 2005, p.24). The Creator planted in man the search *ad infinitum* to find out as much as possible about Him and to act exactly like Him as well as the vocation to resemble Him in order to be saved. This also means participation in His creative and masterful work, although without arbitrary, full and authoritarian control from man’s side, without a competition between the created being and the Creator, therefore, the role, not the game, entails actually an active work by which man is neither forbidden nor afraid to intervene in nature (Shannon, 2005, p.28). However, one has to recognize and to limit any reductionist or utilitarian interventions and to act ethically, with discernment and in obedience to divine commandments, for this is part of his natural work of resemblance to God (Shannon, 2005, p.28).

In conclusion, good death and immortality do not imply any direct intervention in the natural process of dying or the deferral of death by cryoethanasia, because in both cases (ethanasia and cryoethanasia), man arrogates an authority, power and dominion that belong only to God. In both cases, there is a change in the direction and mission of the specialists. And in the case of cryoethanasia, *slippery slopes* are just realities waiting to be confirmed.

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