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EDITORIAL

THE MYTH OF THE ARTIFICIAL MAN

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The myth of the artificial man, which is no longer an augmentation of homo sapiens, but a creation of it, which enters into an unfortunate competition with the creator, opens a new chapter in relating thought and art to changing the initial balance and risks of this gesture.

This transition from the serenity of classical antiquity to the romantic turmoil of the 19th century can be illustrated by the evolution from Galatea to Frankenstein. If in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Galatea represents the statue of a young and beautiful woman, with whom Pygmalion himself falls in love, the sculptor from whose chisel detached the object of his passion, in the anthropomorphism with morbid nuances, thought and laid out on paper by Mary Shelley, at the beginning of the 19th century, we find a much more complex and disturbing message.

Reflective consciousness, which allows us to understand and predict the behavior of other beings, based on our own experience, was not a very familiar notion in Ovid's time. Over time, the expansion of consciousness brings with it other changes. If Galatea is the fruit of Pygmalion's work, talent and inspiration, but does not go beyond the chisel and the sculptor's other tools, Victor, who will embody Frankenstein, is no longer satisfied with chemistry and does not resist the temptation that alchemy represents, a mixture of empirical chemistry and occultism, which has heated the minds of Europeans since the Middle Ages.

If Frankenstein is by no means the augmented man, in the sense in which we understand this term today, he is undoubtedly the fruit of an augmented consciousness, which no longer imposes its traditional limits and which makes the forcing of these limits a guiding principle. Not only the limits of knowledge but also those of the imagination are violated, in this case chemistry goes hand in hand with alchemy, and automata, known for their concern and attraction since antiquity, when Pindar describes walking statues and even the mechanical bird of Leonardo Da Vinci, who all just imitate biomechanics, become able to lead an autonomous existence. The expansion of consciousness demands the expansion of reality, but it has no control over this expanded reality, the natural balance is disturbed and the consequences are usually tragic.

The Cartesian zeal of the Enlightenment was intended to describe man as a machine with a soul or, in rarer cases, as Julien Offray de La Mettrie, who published in 1748 *"L'Homme plus que Machine"*, supporting the origin of the soul in biochemical processes of the body, a theory by which he managed to arouse public disapproval to such an extent that he was forced to flee the Netherlands, his native country. Through these exaggerations, through which the natural turns into a monstrous one, the elastic capacity of consciousness was lost, to return to the primordial balance. Meanwhile, the story of the young Victor Frankenstein is rewritten from a contemporary perspective, for which the genetic code is no longer a mystery, but which does not relieve us, however, of the fear that one day we will be overwhelmed by the technological progress that we can no longer control it ¹.

¹ "Frankenstein" or a modern Prometheus is a novel by the British writer Mary Shelley, first published in 1818. It is believed that the writer was inspired by the creation of the monster in the novel after the name Frankenstein.

I would conclude with a thought from ethicist Jason Eberl: “*The normative limit on forms of human improvement is to ensure that the subject of improvement remains human and is not transformed into a 'posthuman' whose self-identity, needs, interests and goals (both natural and supernatural) are changed so fundamentally that they are unrecognizable to the subject before improvement*”². In other words, human improvement should aim at the human ideal and not at the creation of entities other than human beings.

The novel tells the life of the young Swiss Victor Frankenstein, who is studying at the famous university in Ingolstadt and who manages to make an artificial man. The novel is presented in the current form of the time, as a novel in the form of correspondence, the events being related by Victor in letters addressed to the person leading the research activity. Victor warns the reader in his accounts that man must recognize and respect the limits of his possibilities, without seeking to measure his powers with the divine Creator. The figure of Victor Frankenstein resembles the characters of the character Faust or the mythological hero, Prometheus; Mary Shelley with Percy Shelley, Charles E. Robinson (eds.), *The Original Frankenstein* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2008).

² Jason Eberl, *Enhancing the Imago Dei: Can a Christian Be a Transhumanist?* *Christian Bioethics*, 2022, 28 (1): 76–93