



Journal of Intercultural Management and Ethics

JIME

ISSN 2601 - 5749, ISSN-L 2601 - 5749

published by

Center for Socio-Economic Studies and Multiculturalism

Iasi, Romania

www.csesm.org

TABLE OF CONTENT

Editorial	3
Liviu Warter	
Covid-19 across Cultures	5
Fons Trompenaars	
Culture Ain't What It Used to Be! Cultural Competence Reexamined in the Light of Contemporary Multidisciplinary Research	25
George Simons, Amna Ben Amara	
Christianity and Transhumanism	35
Mircea Gelu Buta	
Transhumanism in Psychology: The Attitude towards the Use of Chatbots in Psychotherapy and Ethical Implications	41
Tudor-Daniel Huțul and Adina Karner-Huțuleac	
Transhumanism in Performance Art	51
Andreea-Iulia Someșan	
Cultural Appropriation	59
Richard Marksbury, Walter Block	
Empirical Economic Ethics Research: Evidence Regarding Accounting and Statistics.....	67
Mihaela Bebeselea	
Organizational Integrity: Three Ethical Talmudic Principles That Should Influence Corporate and Personal Decisions	73
Hershey Friedman and Joshua Krausz	
Book Review	91
Aurelian Virgil Baluta	

CHRISTIANITY AND TRANSHUMANISM

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Abstract

The contradiction between Christianity and transhumanism arises from different understandings of the nature of the human person, questioning in their views whether it can be modified in various ways with or without moral limits. Their different views on the relationship between children and parents also put them at odds as Christianity sees children as a "gift" from God, while transhumanism sees them as a "product" to be shaped. Christians and transhumanists also have different understandings of the future. If the former live with the hope that the Kingdom of God will come, transhumanists seek to shape the future by improving human potentialities.

In conclusion, human enhancement should aim at the human ideal and not at the conception of entities other than human beings.

Keywords: Christianity, transhumanism, dialogue

I. The Christian commitment to bioethics

Today we notice the fact that morality has begun to separate little by little from the legal, and this puts pressure both on the person and on the communities. In this context, the emergence of bioethics comes from the need to respond to the explosion of modern technology and the discoveries of recent decades. It is a new science that wants to focus on biological and medical problems with philosophical and theological valences such as the beginning of life (methods of artificial procreation, abortion, surgery in utero...); means of preserving life (dialysis, artificial ventilation, organ transplantation); end of life (treatment of terminally ill patients, euthanasia, medically assisted suicide, etc.) (Buta & Buta, 2008).

There are not a few who argue that research and science cannot have barriers, while others consider the definition of a legal and ethical framework impetuous, because, as they point out, if the need to control biological experiments, genetic engineering is not recognized and in general of medical research and intervention, then man is underappreciated, transformed into a kind of experimental animal, in other words, into a laboratory object.

It has been repeatedly emphasized that, from the Theology point of view, work and research, especially scientific research, fall within the capacity that God Himself gave to man to become His co-worker, that is, to search and create .

However, it is clear that, according to the Christian Tradition, man's ability to create must always be connected to critical perception, which clearly protects the scientist from acting uncontrollably, so that through his research and discoveries does not only endanger man, but also the entire creation of God. Christian living, as a way of life of freedom, recognizes the sanctity of research and scientific research, but if research is uncontrollable and lacks judgment, then it ceases to be complete and authentic, that is, to have the purpose of benefiting man and the world. The distinction of spirits, to which the Holy Apostle Paul refers to (I Cor. 12, 10), is especially necessary to pursue creativity (Chirilă, 2008).

Today we are facing a dilemma. If in secular bioethics we gain universality, affirming a morality within which everyone can collaborate despite the diversity of moral visions, we will more than likely lose in moral content. On the other hand, if we gain content, we do so at the price of losing universality, because not all people will agree to collaborate (Rawls, 1971). On the other hand, Christian bioethics tries to embrace the secular world for at least

three reasons. First, the Church cannot rest as long as there are people who reject the "*Word of God*" because it inevitably leads to misery and suffering. Second, we see that most of the time when the secular world has moved away from the ethical content of Christianity, significant injustices have occurred towards the weak, children, the elderly, the dying, the poor, etc., and the Christian Church certainly has an obligation to speak incessantly on behalf of these groups. Third, there is no doubt that Christianity is waging a permanent struggle to protect the soul assaulted by the cultural values of modernity.

Sometimes faith seems powerless in the face of modern science, modern technology, modern politics and modern society, giving the feeling of capitulation to the corrupting influences of modernity (Tollefsen, 1999). That is why what concerns us refers to the Christian-Orthodox responses we expect from the provocation of such eloquent realities.

If in the Protestant and Catholic world there is talk of a "*friendly non-ecumenism*", in Orthodoxy's own vision, I think that the discussion should start from the anthropological problem of man, who was created in the image of God and destined to progress towards the likeness divinity (Tollefsen, 1999). It is about what Christos Yannaras called "*the existential adventure of our freedom*", a freedom lived in God and for God under the rule of the Holy Spirit (Breck, 1997).

In other words, it is the face of God that gives absolute value to every human being and makes it sovereign, worthy of respect, whatever its sex, race, age or condition (Larchet, 2004). This means that man is a dynamic being, existing in relation to the Triune God, whom he imagines and relates to (Mantzaridis, 2004).

Secondly, I think it is necessary to refer to God's sacrificial love, as the origin and foundation of any human relationship. It is about the fundamental principle of giving, which we find in the doctor-patient relationship in the case of medical care or donating an organ so that another person becomes healthy.

The third moral value that I will refer to is the Christian vision of the end of life, that is, the fact that Life comes from God and leads to God. In other words, death is part of life, it represents a moment and by no means a final stage. It is not an end, meaning a stopping point, a wall beyond which there is nothing, but a gate that separates earth from heaven, life on earth from life beyond. Death represents a new birth, a birth into eternal life, therefore a fragment of the continuity of life (Buta, 2011).

Contrary to secular, procedural (Because it is procedural, it does not offer a vision with content about the meaning of reproduction, birth, suffering and death) and cosmopolitan bioethics (It is cosmopolitan in the sense that it offers a framework that can be invoked outside of any particular socio-historical context), the main focus of traditional Christian bioethics is not focused on moral controversies or on the resolution through a discursive rationality of disputes between third parties, nor on the mediation of various perceptions regarding what is good, just and virtuous. I have said it on another occasion, its attention falls only on what separates us from holiness. Because of this, its challenges do not come from moral diversity but from temptations (Sf. Maximilian Mărturisitorul, 2005).

This spiritual character of traditional Christian bioethics must be understood not only as a way of restoring the integrity of the fallen character of people's lives, but especially as the way in which Christian bioethics help people to move away from what is evil, because evil is always personal, and it cannot exist outside of people and the relationships between them (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1986). This is why traditional Christian bioethics represents a challenge through which people try to settle on the paths that lead to God or, on the contrary, that take them away from Him (Engelhardt, 2005).

The way we relate to the fundamental values of the Orthodox faith will also determine our attitudes towards the numerous medical procedures that the progress of science has made

available to humanity. It is about abortion, biotechnologies and the manipulation of human life, genetics and in vitro fertilization, organ transplantation, euthanasia, etc.

To the extent that the members of the medical team seek to remain faithful to the teachings of the Holy Gospel, they must be aware of the fact that any decision regarding the life or death of a person, equally affects the lives of peers with whom the suffering person is in communion made in The Church of Christ through the Holy Spirit. That's why no believer can escape responsibility and avoid "*answering the other's call*", because "*We were all baptized in one Spirit to be one body... But God created the body in this way by giving more honour to whom lacks it, so that there is no division in the body, but that the members take care of each other equally. And if one member suffers all the members suffer with it.*" (I Cor. 13, 24-26). This means that the medical treatment is situated in a much wider context, that of the sacerdotal mystery in which all members of the Church participate.

The question we ask ourselves is how to achieve a true synergy, a cooperation between man and God in such a way that the choices and decisions regarding life and death can respond faithfully to the divine will. How to act so that God's love is the foundation of all our human, personal relationships and especially our relationships with the sick? (Breck, 1997).

In liturgical language, this means how to take on the life of another person, in order to realize the fundamental sacerdotal gesture: "*Committing ourselves to one another and our whole life to Christ our God?*" How to make the best bio-medical decisions that fully respect the analogy between the sacrifice of the person and the Eucharistic offering: "*What is Yours, what belongs to You, we offer You in everything and for everyone*"? (Breck, 1997).

Here are some questions that I would like to formulate from the beginning so that the theological perspective of bioethics is preserved.

II. The future of being human

Transhumanism is an ideology that embraces the use of various forms of biotechnology to enhance human beings into a "*posthuman*" type. Some authors question whether moderate forms of "*human enhancement by biotechnological means*" can be considered licit in a Christian context even if Christianity and transhumanism are at first sight incompatible (Eberl, 2022). The central tension between transhumanism and Christianity stems from their different understandings of human nature and how each sees the future of humanity and its well-being.

In the Christian conception, human life is a gift from God and as such is sacred. "*It must be respected and defended as the most sublime experience of God's creative work, bears the image of God and receives the gift of life to glorify God and enjoy eternal communion with Him. Christian doctrine insists on the sacredness of human life from the moment of creation.*" (Breck, 2003). The basis of this belief is the first chapter of the Book of Creation.

This sacred dimension, however, does not imply either fetishism or the "*sacralization of beings*", that is, a kind of idolatry that out of hypertrophied respect would prohibit any scientific approach to the human body. Sacredness essentially leads to the recognition of the mystery underlying life's creation, functioning and transmission. That is why life must be viewed with respect, humility both in observing the phenomena and in the debates that take place about it.

Transhumanists usually offer a three-pronged argument to support their views. First, the potential benefits are highlighted that enhancement can bring in terms of physical, cognitive, social and moral improvement over our naturally received present state. Second, they advocate a liberal conception of individual autonomy, so that the burden of decision rests with those who would restrict the "*freedom*" of those who wish to improve their characters. Third, they argue that human nature, as given, is not fixed but malleable, and the

role of human intelligence is to find ever-refining changes in the human form and not to limit itself to the "*blind*" process of biological evolution (More & Vita-More, 2013).

These different views often put Christianity and transhumanism at odds, as would for example the relationship between parents and children. While Christianity sees the child as a "*gift*" from God, transhumanism sees it as a "*product*" that should be shaped (Eberl, 2022). Also, understandings about the future of humanity are different. If transhumanists seek to prepare the future of society, trying to shape not only human potentialities, but also those of nature, Christians live with the hope that the "*Kingdom of God*" will come. This hope is by no means passive, nor does it reject the evolution of science that promotes the flourishing of society, but, as I said before, framing it in the capacity that God Himself has given to man to become His co-worker. In this view, human enhancement should aim at the human ideal and not the creation of entities other than human beings (Eberl, 2022).

There are currently certain Christian views that encourage some forms of human enhancement such as increased memory capacity, a robust immune system, the alleviation of social anxiety, and the elimination of cognitive biases that can lead to unethical social behaviours (Eberl, 2022).

There are also relevant similarities between Christians and transhumanists when we diagnose the current human condition and the desire to improve it in an active way. Both transhumanists and Christians agree that the finite and mortal human condition is far from ideal. For transhumanists, humans have failed to reach their true potential, while for Christians, humans have not yet become the creatures God intended them to be.

In response, both ideologies agree that humans need liberation from their current condition. If for transhumanists, this liberation can be achieved through technological transformation, for Christians the solution is the effort to draw closer through their whole life in Christ. If death is considered by all to be the ultimate enemy, conceptions of how it can be defeated differ. Transhumanists seek to conquer this enemy by achieving the immortality of endless time, while Christians hope for eternal life where there is no time (Waters, 2011).

Ironically, despite transhumanism's apparent denigration of religion, the latter can only be considered a "*myth*" or at least suggestive of a "*myth of progress*" (Burdett, 2011) or even "*a competitive postmodern competing religion*" (Waters, 2006) which can be defined by a search for transcendence beyond the natural condition of humanity: By appealing to a humanist pedigree, they in fact betray their hidden religious beliefs that shape their agenda. To assert that humans should become posthuman they invoke a higher or transcendent good that exceeds the anthropocentric standard (Waters, 2006).

Therefore, if transhumanism is not a "*religion*" per se, it undeniably has a totalizing worldview with metaphysical, ethical, soteriological, and eschatological as well as moral implications as influential as the Christian or any other religious worldview. Referring to these issues, Tristram Engelhardt states the following: "*Any account of the proper use of genetic engineering will have to be incorporated into Christianity's rich knowledge of the meaning of the universe, human history, and the moral significance of human nature. Central to all reflections on this matter is the fact that God created human nature as good and proper, and that this very nature, though fallen, was taken up by Christ and redeemed.*" (Engelhardt, 2008).

III. Conclusions

Of course, nowadays, the world expects from bioethicists something other than a simple legal discourse. From my experience as a doctor, I learned that we cannot talk about man without discussing the person and that we cannot talk about the person without discussing the meaning. This is why I believe that Christian ethics derives its essence less from a socio-legal or socio-biological approach than from the contemplation and respect of

the divine mystery that makes man the gardener of creation and not its blind user. However, the problem is limited to the language we have to choose to make ourselves understood. Most people today no longer have Christian culture. Although animated by a desire for spiritual life, they do not relate to Christianity, which they do not know in depth and which seems to them to be sociological and/or coercive. They turn to other languages, often very simplistic, and in our way of expressing these problems we must take this aspect into account.

This is the reason why it would be desirable for our ethical research to be based on the creativity that love and contemplation of the mystery of the person entails, as well as on freedom from the surrounding world, be it religious or secular, thus making any notion of rigid morals. It is not about relativism, nor about adapting the Truth to reality. But teaching moral concepts that do not take into account human reality is not an appropriate solution for today's world. Our duty is, I think, to be present in reality, striving to live for the Truth. It is a struggle that often turns out to be very difficult (Buta & Buta, 2008).

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