



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

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THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

Posthumanism needs to be taken more seriously by bioethicists as posthuman principles and practices permeate public discourse and increasingly operate in medicine. People in positions of power such as bioethics advisory boards, politicians or hospital managers are increasingly using post-operative initiatives with the aim of inducing more the idea of progress than actual benefit.

Late modern culture is characterized by a growing posthuman existence, where technology, the doctrine of infinite progress, and plastic identities with capricious wills make up the contemporary public landscape.

New procedures and technologies that could be used for human enhancement stimulate the imagination, but what is often left out of these discussions are the long-term anthropological issues. Christians ask what is the purpose of "*improvement*", what did the human being set out to achieve? In other words, we cannot assess the bioethical issues of human enhancement without also addressing the anthropological vision of the new ideology that set out to enhance the human being in such a way that a "*posthuman*" type emerges.

Key words: posthumanism; morality; science

1. The model of Christ

The concept of human improvement implies a goal to correct imperfections and/or achieve certain ideals of life.

If the way of life represents the set of material and spiritual conditions specific to the life of a person, a social group or a society, the good life is a matter of personal choice. In this view, the only role of the state is to protect the freedom of individuals so that they can choose their own goal and their own means to achieve it. When they are truly free, people will have a life consciousness by virtue of which they try to make the most appropriate choices.

If the modern project is not at all an account of human perfection; for perfection in modernity seems to have been replaced by the notion of human progress, Christianity with its emphasis not only on the *imago Dei* but also on the incarnation should be able to define human perfection, at least for Christians who wish to give technology a theological meaning. On the other hand, human "*enhancement*" technology without a specific purpose is existentially incoherent (Cole-Turner, 2022).

Christians believe that the meaning and purpose of human existence is rooted in the reciprocity of the God/man relationship. We see this reciprocity in the *imago Dei* and in the command of Jesus to be perfect as God is perfect. The purpose of human existence, or God's purpose in creating us, is our entry into the Trinitarian relationship. But as God is unlimited, so are the stages of transformation and entering into relationship, unlimited. We find the conclusion in 1 John 3:2

"Beloved, we are sons of God now; and what we will be has yet appeared. We know that if He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (Cole-Turner, 2022).

Nowadays, a christened person is seen by free thinking as a species of intellect lacking autonomy, tributary to an ecclesiastical court, which in the name of the Creed of the Church, allows itself to rob the intellect of the freedom and originality specific to its free

thinking creed. However, I believe that the intellect of a baptized person must be seen as a power given to man by the Creator of the World, intended to ensure both his ascent from "*glory to glory*" and the philocalist descent into the heart, which makes possible the mystery of understanding feeling. In other words, they are among the iconic persons with both earthly and heavenly concerns and skills.

An iconic person is non-stop in iconography, continuously, day and night, that is, it exists in a strange exigency as a second nature of the intellectual act.

If in an icon, the earthly is what is seen, in short, the what is seen, and the meaning of the what is seen is, no more, no less, above the heavens, i.e. above the created heavens, then to be in icons means to permanently report all that is seen / all earthly, to the meaning that corresponds to it above the heavens. Being in iconography means that everything you do - even the most ordinary and insignificant actions of the day - should be all iconic, that is, it should not take on any visible body, however useful or sublimely aesthetic it may be, but on the perfectly corresponding to its meaning above the heavens.

Incarnated Christ is the Model of our look in iconography. From Him you learn to look iconic, to recognize everywhere the iconic skeleton of the world, the iconic model that obeys and through which all the seen and unseen creatures of the world came into being. Finally, to stay in iconography means to place yourself iconic, that is, to seek daily, if possible, to stay in that mysterious fold of the world, where the created communicates with the uncreated (Dumitrescu, 2017).

2. Improving morality through science and/or controlled behaviour

Scientific advances in recent decades in both cell biology and genetics have led to the emergence of effective therapies that are considered to have fewer side effects than traditional drug-based therapies.

The term "*regenerative medicine*" which has drawn attention in recent years, refers to innovative therapeutic approaches aimed at restoring or replacing diseased tissues, functional systems or even entire organs. The concept is based on the use of techniques from various biomedical fields such as: stem cell therapy, genetic engineering, tissue engineering and innovative biomaterials. The newest approach in regenerative medicine is rejuvenating the self-regeneration mechanism with the goal of healing or replacing tissues and organs damaged by age, disease, or trauma, as well as normalizing genetic and congenital disorders (Ma, 2014).

If the rejuvenation or revitalization of tissues and organs is an idea that concerns the possibility of reversing the aging process, their realization could lead to a profound change in the purpose of traditional medicine, from the care of diseases to complete healing, that is, the elimination of the biological basis of suffering and even of death itself. When medicine turns into a death-obsessed industry, the human being becomes a mere means to an end, and that end is increasingly affected by a posthumanism operative in culture and medicine (Bishop, 2016).

One of the paradoxes of the development of technology is the deterioration of human behaviors by accentuating the spiritual diseases of anger, greed, avarice, laziness, envy, self-pride, etc. The old methods of moral improvement that have served mankind in the past such as: education, persuasion, threat and/or punishment, in addition to requiring large resources, have become ineffective in meeting the needs of society. For this reason, various technologies have been proposed to increase human moral consciousness, capable of inducing the kind of human behavior that ensures the survival and continuation of the species. In this sense, one of the concerns of medical science in postmodernism is the manipulation of brain chemistry. Today there is a better understanding of how this chemistry can affect human behavior, which has led to the development of a vast pharmacopoeia in the

field. At first, the mechanisms by which common drugs: alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, etc. it acts on the brain influencing human behavior.

Pharmacological enhancement of sexual violence is a promising area for researchers. For this reason, psychopharmacological anti-libido intervention (PALI) and paraphilic disorder (PD) are used for sex offenders with the aim of preventing recidivism in countries such as Canada, Australia, South Korea, Russia, Indonesia and the United States (Scott & Holmberg, 2003).

The rationale behind such treatment is that by suppressing the libido, the patient will no longer have sexual impulses that would harm him or others. For this purpose, the most used drugs are leuporelin, an androgen biosynthesis inhibitor, and medroxyprogesterone, a semisynthetic derivative of progesterone. The former reduces testosterone production and the latter inhibits the body's absorption of androgens, the end result of both being low testosterone similar to a body that has been physically castrated (Thibaut et al., 2010).

Other drugs used to treat aberrant sexual behavior are benperidol (antipsychotic) and selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) (Parks, 2022).

Bioethicists question whether drug treatments that control hypersexual behaviour are effective, since such a person still makes little progress in acquiring virtue and discerning right from wrong. The situation created brings to mind the monk in the desert who is not tempted by external matters. As for mental temptations, in the physical desert the monk may still stumble upon them, but in the pharmacological desert the occasional sexual thought is not a strong source of temptations, the fact that the person involved does not undertake a struggle against his thoughts, so there is no moral improvement as pursued in counselling therapies, and the example of the spiritual program used by "*Alcoholics Anonymous*" (AA) is revealing (Tsoulis-Reay, 2022). The Twelve Steps are presented as a suggested program of self-improvement that results in a spiritual awakening after an alcoholic has recognized his helplessness over alcohol and acknowledged its harm, as well as listed and worked to correct his own shortcomings:

Step one: We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol – that we were no longer in control of our lives

Step two: We came to believe that a Higher Power could give us sanity

Step three: We decided to entrust our will and life to the care of a God, *as each of us imagined Him*.

Step four: I fearlessly took a detailed moral inventory of myself.

Step five: We confessed to God, ourselves, and another human being the exact nature of our mistakes.

Step six: We consented unreservedly for God to save us of all character defects.

Step seven: I humbly asked Him to remove our weaknesses.

Step eight: We made a list of all the people to whom we had done wrong and agreed to make amends.

Step nine: We made amends to those people where possible

Step ten: We continued our self-criticism by admitting our mistakes.

Step eleven: We sought through prayer and meditation to strengthen our conscious contact with God, *as each of us imagined Him*, asking Him to show us His will and give us strength to fulfil it.

Step twelve: Having experienced a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to convey this message to other alcoholics and apply these principles in all areas of our lives (Frantz, 2004).

3. Knowledge of the posthuman

In the public mind, the image of a posthuman being is that of a humanoid figure equipped with all kinds of advanced technology. In other words, a bioengineered creature in which its genetic material has been sanitized in terms of disorders and defects, but also endowed with superior mental acuity and physical resistance: In posthumanism - writes pertinently N. Katherine Hayles -, essential differences or absolute demarcations disappear between corporeal existence, computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism, biological organism, robotic teleology and human goals (Nancy Katherine Hayles, 1999, p.3). Imagination takes us further by considering that this posthuman figure has no organic body being only a consciousness downloaded into Hardware or running virtually on a computer (Burdett, 2022).

The synthesis of definitions related to posthumanism, provided by N. Katherine Hayles, can be considered as a reference:

1. it privileges informational matrices at the expense of instances of materialization, which leads to the conclusion that biological and anthropocentrism are "*accidents*" of evolution, not its major goals;
2. breaks down the valuing paradigm according to which consciousness represents the finality of evolution, considering it rather as an epiphenomenon;
3. perceives the body not in its anthropomorphic uniqueness, but in its quality as an "*original prosthesis*", capable of supporting other grafts and prostheses, possibly even an overall replacement;
4. considers that "*entities*" or "*beings*" are characterized by their availability to connect to the cybernetic body, the internet, the virtual cosmos, etc.;
5. perceives the human being as heterogeneous, a premise that abandons ontologism, i.e. the dichotomy between Being and phenomenon (Nancy Katherine Hayles, 1999, p.3).

Many scientists, however, express horror at Hans Peter Moravec's claim that it is quite possible to "*download*" human consciousness into a computer (Moravec, 1988). The disembodied consciousness: what could be more frightening?

Unfortunately, reality demonstrates a preference for informational models over material instances. Wherever we are in public, we see people looking at their smart phones rather than talking to each other. Many people walk through the parks with headphones in their ears, thus revealing their preference for music over the sounds of nature. We are surrounded in our personal bubble of virtual, informational networks, and we return to them when we are in public. The images during religious services in churches or in the markets are revealing. It is amazing how many participants prefer to live the eucharistic experience through the phones or tablets they use during the ceremonies (Burdett, 2022).

Another characteristic of posthumanism is the alteration of the human body considering it as an original prosthesis open to manipulation. Practices associated with this aspect include the introduction of microchips under the skin or the "*hacking of the human brain*", a procedure through which we can find out concrete information about the subject: the address, the bank used, etc. (Konnikova, 2015). Experiencing the world through informational media rather than primary material reality can even lead to habituation of consciousness to this possibility. This may be possible if we think about the claims of some researchers who claim that the said consciousness is a cumulus, a pyramidal algorithm composed of memory, improvisation and other ingredients inducible to a cyborg.

Finally, let us remember Katheline Hayles' definition of the posthuman state: the organization of life using intelligent machines, and our everyday practices do not contradict it. How many of us don't use iPhone or Android apps to schedule an appointment, send a reminder, or communicate with a banking robot. Without realizing it, with time, they started to be part of our daily routine. If at first only scientists used smart machines, today there is a

personal computer in almost every home. This is how our practices shape our behaviour and if theoretically we may not accept the posthuman ideology, yet reality proves to us that we live posthuman lives (Burdett, 2022).

Conclusions

Can we trust our species? Can we consider ourselves human as long as there are nuclear bombs? Above the entire planet floats an enormous aircraft, an Enola Gay ready to pour its radioactive rain. This thought must accompany us daily, moment by moment, define our most intimate thoughts, because we are contemporaries of the imminent possibility of our extinction as a species. Under these circumstances, to lead a "human" life, to perpetuate the species, or, extrapolating Paul Celan's statement, to write poetry, is an unconscious and gratuitous act (Amis, 1990).

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