

Upgraded Humanism: Idea and Ideology (I)*

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ABSTRACT. The desire to conquer the body, disease, and death has not disappeared from human will. Immortality is planted deep within humans. However, the method of knowing it differs in new transhumanist approaches. The general motivation for choosing this subject is based on the breadth of the transhumanist trend of the last period in the following environments: technological, medical, social, academic, religious, and biological. Personal motivation is related to religious affiliation and the perspective of the *transformation* of transhumanism and its extended claims. The method of approaching this subject is the analytical one. What did/is transhumanism propose/proposing? How much is ideology, propaganda movement; how much is scientific truth and a feasible project? Are its proposals ethical just because they aim for an *upgrade*? The *upgraded humanism* that *transhumanist apostles* propose is in direct contrast with the teaching and culture of certain schools of thought, religions, and sometimes with life itself. On one hand, in the case of transhumanism proposals, there is a special seduction, one through which more and more people become followers of a (trans)(neuro)biology and a new relationship to the world, God, the neighbor. It is said that we are only at the beginning of knowing the mystery of our body and brain. But on the other hand, it can also be said that the depth and fullness of biological mechanisms will never be known.

Keywords: transhumanism, (techno)-logy-philosophy-religion, ideology, (neuro)(bio)logy

* The present article is part of a larger study entitled: *Upgraded Humanism: Idea, Ideology, Religion*. In the second article, we will approach: the main similarities and differences between transhumanism and religion. Also, this study develops and extends upon ideas presented in Diac. Dr. Sorin-Grigore Vulcănescu, „*Metamorfoza utopiei tehnologice – secularizarea și robotizarea vieții*”, in: *Mitropolia Olteniei*, Nr. 5-8/2022, pp. 187-203.

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I.1. Introduction

“A vast New World of uncharted possibilities awaits its Columbus. We need to explore and map the whole realm of human possibility, as the realm of physical geography has been explored and mapped.”¹ This is how the urge of the father of the term *transhumanism* towards the apostles of *upgraded humanism* could be resumed. In this study, we start from the question: *What is transhumanism? An idea, an ideology, or a religion?* How much is ideology, propaganda movement; how much is scientific truth and feasible projects? We naturally ask: *Is there really hope for biological immortality*, since scientists tell us that 120 years of age might be the maximum that a human being can reach, given the limited multiplication of cells and the shortening of telomeres?² Are the proposals of transhumanism ethical only because they seek an *upgrade*? In this study, first of all, we analyze the terminology for the proposed theme: *idea, ideology, religion, and transhumanism*. Secondly, we analyze the journey from *ideology* to *religion* of an *idea*.

I.2. Title motivation

The motivation for choosing this title lies in sharing the idea that transhumanism is “an outgrowth of secular humanism and the Enlightenment,”³ “an extension of humanism, from which it is partially derived”⁴ or an extension of the Enlightenment humanism (of the belief in absolute autonomy and of reason as an instrument of immanent salvation) and because transhumanism

¹ The article “Transhumanism” of Julian Huxley a Optimist’s Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux published in 1957 in: *New Bottles for New Wine: Essays*. London: Chatto & Windus. For the present paper we use the reproduction of the text from the year 1968. J. Huxley, “Transhumanism”, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 8/1 (1968), 74.

² “Cellular division and replication in noncancerous cells can only occur a limited number of times. With each sequence, the telomeres on the DNA of each cell shorten. As the telomeres become shorter, they also become less efficient in replicating themselves. Eventually, the telomeres become so short that they can no longer function at all. This imperfect replication process also grows increasingly susceptible to mutations over time, leading to various diseases and the degeneration associated with aging. Consequently, the quest for personal immortality appears hopeless, for evolution has apparently destined human chromosomes to grow old and die.” B. Waters, “Whose salvation? Which eschatology? Transhumanism and Christianity as contending salvific religions”, in R. Cole-Turner (Ed.), *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 166.

³ N. Bostrom, “In Defense of Posthuman Dignity”, *Bioethics* 19/3 (2005), 202.

⁴ N. Bostrom, *The transhumanist FAQ*, (2003), <https://bit.ly/3HtQe5B>. (Accessed: 10.12.2024).

“shares the humanist belief that science and technology are the keys to human emancipation and progress.”⁵

The term *upgraded* was chosen, because it is used in contemporary corporate language and especially in software programs, an essential tool in the new era of (nano)(bio)technology. Secondly, *upgrading* refers to an addition, attachment, not to a merging as in the case of the transcendent and of improvement. Transhumanists talk about *improvement*, but this new interpretation of the term, which, originally, has broad religious and dogmatic connotations and charges, is totally different from Christian teaching. Finally, even the transhumanists want a *brand* change, referring to *Humanity Plus*. This differentiation that we pointed out is to signal the ontology of transhumanism, not to rewrite it, for identification, not to change the contemporary paradigm and etymology.

I.3. Terminology

I.3.1. GRIN

Biotechnology is the group of genetics, robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), nanotechnology — known under the acronym **GRIN** —, and the vision of this new complex area is one of immanence: “The vision of biotechnology is immanent because it promises to deliver bliss in the most material, tangible, corporeal, and measurable way.”⁶

I.3.2. Transhumanism

In 1957, Julian Huxley uses the term *transhumanism* for the first time, when he talks about the *new faith*:

“The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself – not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps *transhumanism* will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature. «I believe in transhumanism»: once there are enough people who can truly say that, the human species will be on the threshold of a new kind of existence, as different from ours as ours is from that of Pekin man.

⁵ S.A. Benko, A. Hruby, “Critical Transhumanism as a Religious Ethic of Otherness”, in C. Mercer and T.J. Trothen (Eds.), *Religion and Transhumanism: The Unknown Future of Human Enhancement*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger 2015), 257.

⁶ M. Marangudakis, “Eutopia: the Promise of Biotechnology and the Realignment of Western Axiality”, *Zygon* 47/1 (2012), 103.

It will at last be consciously fulfilling its real destiny.”⁷

Until now, transhumanism has been seen as: “movement,”⁸ an “idea,”⁹ an “ideology” and a “belief system,”¹⁰ a “stance,”¹¹ a “*fin de siècle* fad,”¹² a “religion,”¹³ a “secularist faith,”¹⁴ and a “new religious movement.”¹⁵ Therefore, a series of phrases and catalogs of transhumanism were given; both transhumanists and non-transhumanists. Each person looks at this current from his or her point of view, because transhumanism remains “a loosely defined movement that has developed gradually over the past decades.”¹⁶ On one hand, we can see transhumanism as a syncretistic movement of philosophies and ideologies that promote the idea of human development through technology. Nick Bostrom, founder of World Transhumanist Association, says that *transhumanism* is:

“(1) The intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.

(2) The study of the ramifications, promises, and potential dangers of technologies that will enable us to overcome fundamental human limitations, and the related study of the ethical matters involved in developing and using such technologies.”¹⁷

⁷ J. Huxley, “Transhumanism”, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 8/1 (1968), 76.

⁸ N. Bostrom, “Transhumanist values”, *Journal for Philosophical Research* 30/3-14 (2005), 3. L. Galvagni, “A Digital Spirituality for Digital Humans?”, in Giulia Isetti, Elisa Innerhofer, Harald Pechlaner, and Michael de Rachewiltz (Eds.), *Religion in the Age of Digitalization: From New Media to Spiritual Machines*, (New York: Routledge, 2022), 145.

⁹ F. Fukuyama, “Transhumanism: The world’s most dangerous idea”, *Foreign Policy* 144 (2004), 42.

¹⁰ P.D. Hopkins, “Transcending the animal: How transhumanism and religion are and are not alike”, *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, 14/2 (2005), 26.

¹¹ R. Ranisch, S.L. Sorgner, “Introducing post- and transhumanism”, in R. Ranisch, and S.L. Sorgner (Eds.), *Post- and transhumanism: An introduction*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2014), 7.

¹² L. Winner, “Resistance is futile: The posthuman condition and its advocates”, in H.W. Baillie & T. Casey (Eds.), *Is human nature obsolete? Genetics, bioengineering, and the future of the human condition*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2005), 410.

¹³ W.J. Smith, “Transhumanism: A religion for postmodern times”, *Religion and Liberty* 28/4 (2018), 17.

¹⁴ H. Tirosh-Samuelson, “Transhumanism as a secularist faith”, *Zygon* 47/4 (2012), 710.

¹⁵ R.M. Geraci, “Apocalyptic AI: Visions of heaven in robotics, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality”, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010), 13. H. Tirosh-Samuelson, “Religion”, in R. Ranisch & S.L. Sorgner (Eds.), *Postand transhumanism: An introduction*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2014), 59.

¹⁶ N. Bostrom, “In Defense of Posthuman Dignity”, *Bioethics* 19/3 (2005), 202.

¹⁷ N. Bostrom, *The transhumanist FAQ*, (2003), <https://bit.ly/3HtQe5B>. (Accessed: 10.12.2024).

Of course, there are other definitions that discover the goals of the new movement:

(3) “philosophical and scientific movement that advocates the use of current and emerging technologies — such as genetic engineering, cryonics, artificial intelligence (AI), and nanotechnology — to augment human capabilities and improve the human condition [...] to slow, reverse, or eliminate the aging process, to achieve corresponding increases in human life spans, and to enhance human cognitive and sensory capacities [...] species that transcends humanity — the «posthuman».”¹⁸

(4) “an aggregate of cultural and philosophical movements with a general aim of transcending human limitations by technological means.”¹⁹

1.3.3. Idea

“(1) a plan for action: design; a standard of perfection: ideal; a transcendent entity that is a real pattern of which existing things are imperfect representations [...]

(2) an entity (such as a thought, concept, sensation, or image) actually or potentially present to consciousness; an indefinite or unformed conception; obsolete: an image recalled by memory.”²⁰

So, we see how the basic *idea* of transhumanism started from the transcendence of humanity, that is, an improvement of humans, through a series of social and cultural changes. Later, the term was seized by the progressive movements that based the idea of human development on (nano)technology, (bio)engineering etc. Towards the end of the 20th century, the creed of extropianism – overcoming limitations and barriers through technology – became the creed of the transhumanist movement.²¹ It refers to overcoming disease, pain, suffering, and death through (nano)(bio)technologies and global problems such as global warming and overpopulation by establishing human colonies on the Moon, Mars, and other planets where human life can survive. Faced with the

¹⁸ R. Ostberg, “Transhumanism”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://bit.ly/2CGJuj3> (Accessed: 30.11.2024).

¹⁹ A. Pinsent, S. Biggins, “Catholic Perspectives on Human Biotechnological Enhancement”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 32/2 (2019), 189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946819826769>.

²⁰ Merriam-Webster, “Idea”, in *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*, <https://tinyurl.com/298aa2wr>. (Accessed: 30.11.2024).

²¹ R.F. Harle, “Cyborgs, uploading and immortality — Some serious concerns”, *SOPHIA* 41/2 (2002), 73-85.

advancement of proposals and plans, critics of transhumanism say that by identifying solutions through the lens of financial primacy, social injustices will be created, violations of human dignity and human rights will occur, soft and software eugenics will be developed, superhumans, superrobots, and bots will be designed, and an agnostic, instrumentalist and functionalist mentality will be advanced.

In brief, transhumanism was the idea that concerned the *desire of the being to know youth without old age and life without death*.

1.3.3.1. Transhumanism. From purpose to company and results

To be able to better understand the main intentions of transhumanists, we need to mention some examples of companies that are currently carrying out activities whose results are becoming visible, because “Scientific breakthroughs — including stem cell therapies, in vitro fertilization, brain chips, animal cloning, exoskeletons (e.g., robotic arms), artificial intelligence, and genomics — have redirected the dialogue between transhumanism’s proponents and its critics from the future to the present.”²² Currently, the main ongoing projects that have received a lot of attention from transhumanists are:

a) Space Exploration Technologies Corp

Founder: Elon Musk;

Year: 2002;

Purpose: colonization of planet Mars and the Moon;

Motto: “All Dragon and Starship missions have the ability to conduct scientific research to improve life back on Earth as well as raise awareness to a global audience”;²³

b) Calico Life Sciences LLC

Founder: Bill Maris;

Year: 2013;

Purpose: developing anti-aging therapies with the help of technology;

Motto: “We want to better understand the biology that controls aging and lifespan ... and we want to use the knowledge we gain to discover and develop interventions that enable people to live longer and healthier lives”;²⁴

²² R. Ostberg, “Transhumanism”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://bit.ly/2CGJuj3> (Accessed: 30.11.2024).

²³ SpaceX, *Human Spaceflight*. <https://bit.ly/3VlaCmR>. (Accessed: 01.12.2024).

²⁴ Calicolabs.com, *Think big. Explore broadly. Collaborate constantly*. <https://bit.ly/3uidqMt>.

c) Neuralink

Founder: Elon Musk;

Year: 2016;

Purpose: the development of implantable brain chips;

Motto: "We are creating the future of brain-computer interfaces: building devices now that have the potential to help people with paralysis and inventing new technologies that could expand our abilities, our community, and our world";²⁵

d) Altos Labs

Founders: Richard Klausner, Hans Bishop, Jeff Bezos;

Year: 2022;

Purpose: reversing old age and disease;

Motto: "Our mission is to restore cell health and resilience through cellular rejuvenation programming to reverse disease, injury, and the disabilities that can occur throughout life";²⁶

e) Synchron

Founder: Tom Oxley;

Year: 2012;

Purpose: Stentrode²⁷ – endovascular brain-computer interface;

Facts: July 2022, the first brain chip implanted in an American patient with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, care "to enable severely paralyzed patients to operate digital forms of communication with their thoughts."²⁸

Motto: "The brain unlocked. Our vision is to restore lives by deciphering the neural code of the brain. Our mission is to create an endovascular implant that can transfer information from every corner of the brain at scale."²⁹

(Accessed: 01.12.2024).

²⁵ Neuralink.com, *Expanding Our World*. <https://bit.ly/3imGvDH>. (Accessed: 01.12.2024).

²⁶ Altoslabs.com, *About us*. <https://altoslabs.com/>. (Accessed: 01.12.2024).

²⁷ "The Stentrode is implanted within the motor cortex of the brain via the jugular vein in a minimally-invasive endovascular procedure. Once implanted, it detects and wirelessly transmits motor intent using a proprietary digital language to allow severely paralyzed patients to control personal devices with hands-free point-and-click. The trial will assess the impact of everyday tasks such as texting, emailing, online shopping and accessing telehealth services, and the ability to live independently". Businesswire, *Synchron Announces First Human U.S. Brain-Computer Interface Implant*, (2022, July 19). <https://bwnews.pr/3VEy2tV>. (Accessed: 01.12.2024).

²⁸ R. Ostberg, *Transhumanism*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://bit.ly/2CGJuj3>. (Accessed: 30.11.2024).

²⁹ Synchron.com, *Unlocking the natural highways of the brain*. <https://bit.ly/3XOrHOW>. (Accessed: 01.12.2024).

Photo 1

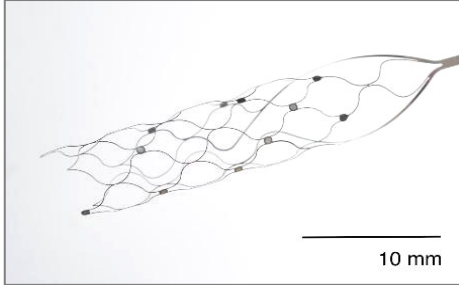


Photo 2



Photo 1: The Stentrode™ Endovascular Electrode Array (Photo credit: Synchron)

Photo 2: The Stentrode™ Endovascular Electrode Array and Implantable Receiver Transmitter Unit (Photo credit: Synchron)

If we have so far outlined the terminology for the main terms and presented the main *idea* of transhumanism, we naturally ask ourselves: *What makes an idea become an ideology? Tangible results? Advancement of new themes?*

1.3.4. Ideology

“(1) visionary theorizing
(2) «science of ideas»; «a systematic body of concepts» especially those of a particular group.”³⁰

The era of the ideology of transhumanist messianism began with promises and technological advancements.³¹ Many of the results in the biomedical field have saved and continue to save human lives. But, in addition to these successes, independently of them, but dependent on their notoriety, problems have crept in. Over time, trust in technological progress and medical successes have become tools of propaganda for certain sterile slogans, speculating a series of other intentions. Transhumanism is said to do *wonders*, with reference to various medical successes. In all this breath of individualistic optimism, one forgets the fact that these successes and therapies are blessed by God through the hard work of scientists and through the tireless hands of doctors.

³⁰ Merriam-Webster, “Ideology”, *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*, <https://tinyurl.com/bdhkjduc>. (Accessed: 01.12.2024).

³¹ T. Peters, “The Ebullient Transhumanist and the Sober Theologian”, *Scientia et Fides* 7/2 (2019), 98.

In brief, transhumanism *is an ideology that promotes the idea, treatments, and interventions of improving the human body through the use of (nano)(bio)technologies*. What makes an ideology become a religion?

Conclusions

The multifaceted nature of transhumanism fluctuates between ideology, scientific progress, and a quasi-religious belief in enhancing humanity through technology. A key insight is that transhumanism is not solely a (pseudo)scientific pursuit but also a cultural and philosophical movement deeply intertwined with the human desire for immortality and perfection. While technological advancements offer medical progress, extended lifespans, and improved cognitive abilities, they also raise concerns about human dignity, identity, and social equity.

The evolution of transhumanism from a theoretical notion to an organized ideology has been driven by breakthroughs in genetics, artificial intelligence, and neuroscience. However, its emergence as a belief system or “secular faith” suggests that it extends beyond neutral scientific inquiry — it embodies a vision of the future that challenges conventional notions of life, death, and human nature. While transhumanist aspirations to overcome suffering and mortality are compelling, they also entail risks. The commodification of the human body, the potential for deepening social inequalities, and the instrumentalization of human existence pose serious ethical challenges. Despite its focus on progress, transhumanism continues to face criticism from religious, philosophical, and even scientific perspectives, questioning whether humanity should pursue enhancement at any cost.

