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From Atheism to Transhumanism A CRITICAL LOOK

Introduction

At a certain point in Western history, the existence of God was radically questioned both in the atheistic worldview as well as in a variety of philosophical evaluations and everyday outlooks on life conditioned by it. Without much deliberation, one might easily point to a number of specific effects resulting from the denial of the existence of the personal God that the Christian religion treats of.¹ In the present paper, I focus primarily on one of the significant results of atheism, which has been firing up the minds of, in particular, many philosophers, theologians, and psychologists for at least 50 years. The result I have in mind is transhumanism. It conceals a particular philosophical anthropology. At its center stands the individual person on the path to enhancing both

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¹ These problematic issues are extensively addressed by Roman Rożdżeński in his book *Ateizm oraz jego konsekwencje* [Atheism and its consequences] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka, 2022), 119–267.



himself and, above all, others in relation to him. A particular expression of this enhancement is intended to take the form of such an overcoming of the self that will enable man to reach a particular state of excellence. The concluding note is to be a specifically understood immortality. In the transhumanist belief, it is exactly the experience of immortality that makes it possible to reach a whole new level of human existence and human nature.

The point of departure: atheism within Western culture

I understand atheism above all as a paradoxical phenomenon in the world of Latin civilization. The paradoxical nature of this phenomenon is expressed in the fact that the Latin civilization has, after all, been chiefly shaped by Christianity, which bears witness to a firm belief in the existence of a personal God. And meanwhile, it is precisely on the horizon of religious faith as espoused on particularly the Old Continent that various positions have emerged that not only strongly deny the existence of God, but also question the entire world of values embodied by Christianity. Some philosophers, such as Chantal Delsol, even claim that atheism is a specific feature of Western culture; that it is in Western culture that it has its origins, its already defined source:

Atheism rose against Christianity and does not exist without it. It is a rebellion against a personal God, a God revealed and claiming to be real. [...] The atheism we are faced with in the West ascribes to itself a universal meaning, but is nothing other than anti-Christianity [...] No other culture has ever been atheistic. Atheism as a feature of the West has a close relationship with the spirituality of an age of extreme rationalisation. It is a global questioning of the world informed and perme-

ated by Christianity. This questioning has a belligerent, voluntarist and aggressive character.²

Indeed, it is impossible to reach the historical-spiritual roots of atheism in the religions of Asia and Africa.³ Furthermore, such religions do not know the phenomenon of secularization, which is linked to the existence of atheism, and which has the effect of both questioning the existence of the personal God of monotheistic religions and of the deities of polytheistic religions, as well as promotion of a lifestyle as if there were no God. In this context, it should be added that atheists flatly deny spiritualism, and instead adopt a position of materialistic monism, naturalism, and immanentism. For an atheist, everything is matter, and in a very particular sense of the word. For matter—as Martin Heidegger would remind us—is, in the originary and therefore metaphysical sense, all being that constitutes the raw material for work, the raw material for processing.⁴ The human being himself, who is both the object and the subject of work, is such raw material as well. Also, matter is raw material as something primary with regard to human consciousness, which in turn is only the result of the complex material *respective* physiological-chemical processes that take place in the human brain. Naturalism, as espoused by atheists, involves the complete elimination of the existence of a supernatural being, a creator of reality. According to naturalists, while it is unnecessary to ask about

² Chantal Delsol, *Kamienie węgielne. Na czym nam zależy* [Cornerstones. What do we care about?], trans. and afterword by Małgorzata Kowalska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2018), 279 n.

³ Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld, *Doniosłość fenomenu współczesnego ateizmu* [The significance of the phenomenon of contemporary atheism], trans. Franciszek Adamski, in *Ateizm oraz irreligia i sekularyzacja* [Atheism, irreligion and secularization], selected and edited by Franciszek Adamski (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Petrus, 2011), 240.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Znaki drogi* [Pathmarks], trans. Seweryn Blandzi et al. (Warszawa: Spacja, 1999), 293.

the rationale behind the laws governing nature, it is obvious to them that these laws are the only factors that enable the explanation of reality in a rational manner. The result of naturalism is immanentism. In this view, a rational explanation of the existence of being precludes recourse to the role of supernatural factors. The linking of materialism, naturalism, and immanentism actually serves atheists in their justification of the validity of the denial of God's existence, and of the critical undermining of the legitimacy of religious belief, for the latter is to be understood as a way of enslaving man.⁵

Views of this kind have occasionally appeared, indeed without much impact, as early as the end of the Middle Ages. The cultivation of astrology, interpreted by Catholics as a threat to Christianity, revealed the tendency among some researchers of the cosmos to promote a naturalistic and materialistic conception of the universe. In it, man and all his affairs would be subordinated to the physical action of the stars, which are so powerful that in their power they can equal God and His authority. Let us note, however, that in these—admittedly isolated views dating from the end of the Middle Ages—the existence of God is not yet explicitly questioned.⁶ Indeed, such questioning only emerged *explicite*—as is well known—in the 18th century, during the Age of Enlightenment, particularly among socially influential intellectuals who, in France in particular, especially during the French Revolution, expressly manifested their atheism and from its position attempted to influence the development and content of Western European culture. The idea of uniquely conceived progress,⁷ promoted

⁵ Roman Rożdżeński, *Ateizm czyli wiara negatywna* [Atheism, or negative faith] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka, 2023), 229 n.

⁶ Roman Rożdżeński, *Ateistyczne korzenie ponowoczesności* [The atheistic roots of postmodernity] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka, 2023), 22.

⁷ Jean Antoine Nicolas de Condorcet, *A Sketch for the Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1955).

by Nicolas Condorcet and his kindred promoters of social, economic, political and religious change, played a particular role in the creation of the socio-cultural landscape. They made humanism, defined as the privileged position of man in a world without God, the foundation of this notion. Performing a historical retrospective in the context of this subject matter, Leszek Kołakowski pointed out that, according to the belief held by the main representatives of the French Enlightenment, the real progress of humanity was to consist in

consigning all religious tradition to oblivion and, if necessary, using violence to do so.⁸

The humanism as embraced by the Enlightenment people, particularly growing in strength in the 19th and 20th centuries, promotes atheism, which—as Chantal Delsol notes following Dominique Folscheid—

is war. The God of the Christians is regarded by atheists as an enemy who destroys, weakens and subjugates the culture that feeds on him.⁹

With this in mind, it is noteworthy that the atheists' thesis about the non-existence of God is conditioned by a pre-existing belief in the existence of God who is the enemy of man. And hence in their opinion, one should reject God, who for Christians is love, therefore responding perfectly to man's basic desire—namely the desire for love, without which it is difficult to live.

⁸ Leszek Kołakowski, *Moje słuszne poglądy na wszystko* [My correct views on everything] (Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 1999), 238.

⁹ Chantal Delsol, *Kamienie węgielne* [Cornerstones], 280; Dominique Folscheid, *L'Esprit de l'athéisme et son destin* (Paris: Éditions universitaires, 1991), 303.]

However, it should be noted that neither the self-idolizing rationalism that Bergson described, more than a century after the Enlightenment, in his critique of positivism, nor the ideological cult of scientific knowledge called scientism, which grew out of the spirit of positivism, in the time- and space-limited nature of their cognition, have ever managed to unequivocally question the existence of God. Nor has the existence of God been successfully negated by either the famous horsemen of the so-called new atheism—Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Jacques Monod, Carl Sagan¹⁰; nor has it been negated by the creator of the argument for atheism from God’s hiddenness, John Schellenberg,¹¹ who arouses particular interest in circles of analytic philosophy. For if the arguments for the non-existence of God, or the outright evidence of his non-existence, really had unquestionable cognitive value, there would no longer be Christians and—in general—believers today, whether uneducated or very highly educated—outstanding scholars and brilliant theistic artists. That is why one of the best-known contemporary French atheists, André Comte-Sponville, is right in his conviction that today and in the future, it is somewhat inevitable that theism and atheism, religious people and non-religious people will coexist, and that dialogue between them is therefore most desirable. In addition, this philosopher—I believe—legitimately asserts that the history of theism and atheism confirms us in the belief that it is impossible to have certain knowl-

¹⁰ Tadeusz Pabian, *Anatomia konfliktu. Między nowym ateizmem a teologią nauki* [An anatomy of conflict. Between new atheism and theology of science] (Kraków: Copernicus Center Press 2016); Piotr Roszak, and Francisco Conesa, “Nowy Ateizm: czy rzeczywiście nowy? Analiza argumentów i wyzwań dla współczesnej teologii” [New atheism: Is it really new? An analysis of arguments and challenges to contemporary theology], *Teologia i Człowiek* 25, no. 1 (2014): 79–100.

¹¹ A very competent critical analysis of Schellenberg’s argument is provided by Miłosz Hołda in his treatise *Źródło i noc. Wprowadzenie do współczesnego absconditeizmu* [The spring and the night. An introduction to contemporary absconditheism] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2020).

edge regarding the non-existence of God. At most, one can have negative faith, i.e. believe in the non-existence of God:

I do not know if God exists, but I know that I believe he does not. Atheism is a negative faith (in Greek, *ἀ-θεός* [a-theos] means ‘without god’); still, it is a belief, and therefore something less than knowledge, but more than a mere confession of ignorance or a cautious and comfortable refusal to take a stand. In this sense, I am an atheist, not an agnostic.¹²

While presenting the phenomenon of atheistic spirituality in his book, the French philosopher steadfastly maintains that the existence or non-existence of God is not a matter of knowledge, but of a faith- or unfaith-conditioned worldview, which, however, because of its metaphysical nature, can in no way be proven either by means of Enlightenment, positivist and neo-positivist reasoning, or by purely experimental research.

Unlike some contemporary atheists, I am not entering here into the problematic issues concerned with culpable or non-culpable belief in God.¹³ Rather, I am interested in the effects of atheism throughout its history. It is impossible to dispute the assertion that the belief in the non-existence of God, established in the outlook on the world, has shown its destructive power particularly within the horizon of culture, which—as Wilhelm Dilthey, Helmuth Plessner and other representatives of hermeneutic philosophy have instructed us—was not only created by man, but at the same time has created and continues to create

¹² André Comte-Sponville, *Duchowość ateistyczna. Wprowadzenie do duchowości bez Boga* [Atheistic spirituality. An introduction to spirituality without God], trans. Elżbieta Aduszkiewicz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2011), 86.

¹³ John Schellenberg, *Argument z ukrytości* [The hiddenness argument], trans. Ryszard Mordarski (Bydgoszcz: Kazimierz Wielki University Publishing House, 2019), 83–86.

the being that each of us is.¹⁴ Atheism has created a culture of destruction. The problem is that its victim—to refer to Nietzsche¹⁵—was by no means just God, but was and is above all man. In particular, the 19th and 20th centuries witnessed the terrifying work of the atheistic reason, which in effect turned out to be an anti-theistic reason as well. Thus, it was not just a matter of denying the existence of God, but of outright hatred of God and religion, of believers, against whom sophisticated measures are often taken up, including persecution.

It is impossible to enter here into the history of the tragic consequences of atheism and anti-theism, from the French Revolution onwards, which have dramatically made their presence felt both in the Western culture of the 19th and 20th centuries, and in our contemporary times, which are increasingly referred to as postmodern times. Founded by the Enlightenment, modernity came to be expressed in the belief in the unlimited capacity of the human reason—freed from the influence of Christianity—for discovering the objective truth about man, and about the entirety of reality. The achievements of the reason were seen as the driving force behind unceasing progress. In this context, let us again refer to Leszek Kołakowski, who legitimately and aptly paints a picture of modernity permeated by the idea of progress, and presented within the horizon of Karl Marx's and Friedrich Nietzsche's search for the causes of religious unbelief:

The topicality of the Christian idea certainly waned [...] in accordance with the growth of people's belief that their capacity to perfect them-

¹⁴ Jarosław Jagiełło, *Niedokończony spór o antropologię filozoficzną (Heidegger – Plessner). Studium historyczno-analityczne* [An unfinished dispute over philosophical anthropology (Heidegger—Plessner). A historico-analytical study] (Warszawa: IFiS PAN, 2011), 267–274.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Wiedza radosna* [The joyful wisdom], trans. Leopold Staff (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Zielona Sowa, 2003), 110 n.

selves and society knows no bounds, and that it will either produce ever more magnificent monuments to human greatness, or bring, in the end, for mankind a life from which evil, suffering, aggression, conflict, misery, anxiety and sorrow have been removed once and for all. We have witnessed a prolonged growth in this hope, and its two versions already mentioned—Nietzsche’s and Marx’s—have produced ideological covers to justify the two most sinister tyrannies our century has seen.¹⁶

The problem is that so-called postmodernity, which is a partial rejection of modernity, and which was created with the significant participation of such thinkers as Antonio Gramsci, Altiero Spinelli and, in particular, representatives of the Frankfurt School, admittedly rejected the violence and bloody tyranny of Hitlerism and communism in the construction of Western culture. Moreover, it even challenged the Marxists’ belief in the economically destructive nature of the bourgeois socio-economic system. However, the postmodern era did not want to radically dissociate itself from the modern era. Something brought the two eras together. The link has proven to be atheism and the rejection of the religious and moral principles of Christian life. Since at least the 1950s, this link has been promoted by the so-called cultural Marxism,¹⁷ by the ideological fathers of a variety of dynamic changes in social conventions. The participant in these has been the man of the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, who has not only lost his “spontaneous belief in God and his spontaneous belief in the constancy of his inner as well as his outer nature,”¹⁸ but

¹⁶ Leszek Kołakowski, *Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych* [Civilization in the dock] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Res Publica, 1990), 128.

¹⁷ Dariusz Rozwadowski, *Marksizm kulturowy. 50 lat walki z cywilizacją Zachodu* [Cultural marxism. 50 Years of struggle against Western civilization] (Warszawa: Prohibita, 2018).

¹⁸ Józef Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości* [Thinking in values] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2000), 477.

has consequently also created for himself a cognitive-axiological chaos,¹⁹ breaking with the centuries-verified criteria for distinguishing good from evil.

Given the above reflections on the phenomenon of atheism and related anti-theism, it is now necessary to turn our attention to its effects. Let us note at once that it is not about the effects with regard to some imaginary course of history, but above all with regard to the understanding of a specific human being affected by this phenomenon. When in almost prophetic raptures, Nietzsche (long dead now, for he died in 1900) described critically the time that was coming, and therefore our time, he noted:

What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: the advent of nihilism.²⁰

After the death of God, i.e., after the negation of God's existence and consequently of God's action in human life, a terrifying, anthropologically destructive nihilism begins to afflict man. Everything becomes meaningless. For when there is no God, when we reject him outright, as Roman Rożdżeński emphasizes—commenting on Nietzsche—

we thereby reject the ultimate and unshakeable basis of the intelligibility of our existence. For it was only on the basis of our faith in God that

¹⁹Tomasz Huzarek, Marek Fiałkowski and Arkadiusz Drzyciński, *Fenomen niewiary w świetle dialogicznej natury Kościoła* [The phenomenon of unbelief in light of the dialogical nature of the Church] (Pelplin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika 2018), 9; 77–97.

²⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and Reginald John Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 6.

it was comprehensible to us “thanks to what” this existence ultimately became ours and ultimately “for what”. When we reject our faith in God, we then lose the absolutely certain and permanent “point of reference” for our lifelong orientation.²¹

The rejection of God, the negation of His existence and of all that in human life resulted from that existence, however, abhors the existential vacuum. This is why Nietzsche draws our attention to the appearance of the tragic result of this negation, which is the last man—admittedly a victim of nihilism, but at the same time his profound, existential embodiment. Here is a man totally self-absorbed, concerned only with his own affairs, seeking happiness in the pleasures of the day and night, valuing above all his own health and long life, his youth and his beauty, for whom the highest spiritual states are but epiphenomena of man’s physiological processes on his way to a chemically induced peaceful, painless death, which, after all, is ultimately unavoidable.²²

The Nietzschean last man is a metaphor for the existential personification of nihilism. Because God has died, therefore man, devoid of faith in Him, devoid of faith in the supernatural, tied to the earth, terrified (from *terra*—earth), that is, grounded, goes looking for his happiness not somewhere in heaven, but only on earth, and only on earth does he look for the sources, tools, and forms of his own desired perfection. Now he can do anything he wants on it, including with himself, because he has no absolute point of reference that would have any influence on the direction and nature of human actions. Thus, man—David Bentley Hart points out—

²¹ Rożdżeński, *Ateistyczne korzenie ponowoczesności* [The atheistic roots of post-modernity], 161.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Tako rzecze Zaratustra* [Thus spoke Zarathustra], trans. Waław Berent (Kęty: Wydawnictwo Antyk, 2004), 13 n.

may believe in almost anything, or even perhaps in everything, so long as all these beliefs rest securely upon a more fundamental and radical faith in the nothing—or, better, in nothingness as such.²³

Hart also emphasizes that belief in nothingness actually implies uncritical trust in

an original absence underlying all of reality, a fertile void in which all things are possible, from which arises no impediment to our wills, and before which we may consequently choose to make of ourselves what we choose.²⁴

It is only in such an ethos of life that modern man can fully delight in his own autonomy. It is exactly this ethos, this *de facto* spiritual void in our times that Hart calls nihilism.²⁵ One could go on to list the various contemporary results of atheism-grounded nihilism. I think one of its philosophical consequences is transhumanist thinking about the human being.²⁶ It provides a good illustration for understanding the kind of nihilism anchored in atheism that Hart wrote about.

²³ David Bentley Hart, *The Atheist Delusions. The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 21.

²⁴ Hart, *The Atheist Delusions*, 21.

²⁵ Hart, *The Atheist Delusions*, 21.

²⁶ I hereby note some of the studies on this issue to be found in the Polish literature on the subject. It should be noted that these studies link the issue of transhumanism most often to the issue of posthumanism: Grzegorz Hołub, *Ulepszanie człowieka. Fikcja czy rzeczywistość* [Human enhancement. Fiction or reality] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum w Krakowie, 2018); Grzegorz Hołub, *Stać się więcej niż człowiekiem? Studia krytyczne na temat transhumanizmu* [To become more than a human being? Critical studies on transhumanism] (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo św. Tomasza z Akwinu, 2024); Grzegorz Hołub and Piotr Duchliński, eds. *Ulepszanie człowieka. Perspektywa filozoficzna* [Human enhancement. A philosophical perspec-

Transhumanism, or thinking in the bonds of anthropological tragicism

Let us first make a general note that transhumanism is most often defined as the belief that the individual human and the human species as a whole can and should transcend himself (itself) by realizing new possibilities of human nature. This belief is supported by an ever-increasing number of natural scientists and philosophers who explicitly advocate the development and use of new technologies: genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and neurotechnology. For in them they see a fundamental help in overcoming the known biological and men-

tive] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum w Krakowie, 2018); Grzegorz Hołub and Piotr Duchliński, eds. *Ulepszanie moralne człowieka. Perspektywa filozoficzna* [Improving man. A philosophical perspective] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum w Krakowie, 2019); Piotr Duchliński and Grzegorz Hołub, eds. *Ulepszanie poznawcze człowieka. Perspektywa filozoficzna* [Cognitive enhancement of man. A philosophical perspective] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum, 2021); Piotr Duchliński and Grzegorz Hołub, eds. *Transhumanizm. Wieloaspektowość zagadnienia* [Transhumanism. The multi-faceted nature of the issue] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum w Krakowie, 2022); Marcin Garbowski, *Transhumanizm: geneza, koncepcje, ograniczenia* [Transhumanism: origins, conceptions, limitations] (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, Wydział Filozofii, Instytut Filozofii, 2021 – nieopublikowana praca doktorska [unpublished doctoral dissertation]); Jarosław Jagiełło, *Projekt człowieka przyszłości. Transhumanizm – szanse i zagrożenia* [A design for the future man. Transhumanism—opportunities and threats], in *Kim jest człowiek? Współczesne debaty antropologiczne* [Who is man? Contemporary anthropological debates], ed. Andrzej Maryniarczyk (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2020), 387–423; Agnieszka Lekka-Kowalik, “Transhumanistyczne szczęście – iluzja w świecie bez troski,” [Transhumanistic happiness—an illusion in the world of carefreeness] *Teologia i Moralność* 17, no. 1–31 (2022): 19–30; Jerzy Łepkowski, *Transhumanizm – nowa religia?* [Transhumanism—a new religion?], accessed May 3, 2024, <https://open.icm.edu.pl/items/e9a1b4fe-939d-4fbc-a8a9-8b7cfcfc6770>; TRANSHUMANIZM, in *Ethos* 28, Issue 3, 111 (2015).

tal limitations of each of us, and believe that in them they attain excellent means for further evolutionary development according to their own preferences. This overcoming is supposed to open the way for us to become what we supposedly have always wanted to be—perfect beings, fully satisfied with ourselves, happy. Hence, in the name of the enlightened reason, science and progress, transhumanists are striving after a radical transformation of human nature,²⁷ which neither Dilthey nor Plessner nor even Ortega y Gasset dreamed of.²⁸

Discarding the image of the old man created in the image and likeness of God, transhumanism proposes—as Stefan Lorenz Sorgner points out—the image of a new man, freed from his connection with God, created now only by himself or by another man.²⁹ Since such a man denies the existence of an absolute, supernatural point of reference in understanding himself, he therefore looks for something to replace this point of reference, as after all without a fixed point of reference one can completely lose one’s bearings in life. And now this point turns out to be—as I have already written—various modern technologies, giving directions to the dynamic development of technology. It must therefore be concluded that in transhumanism God’s place is taken by man-adored technology,³⁰ the only “tool hope” for the creation and perfection of man, which takes place under the banner of the

²⁷ Michael Hauskeller, “Reinventing Cockaigne. Utopian Themes in Transhumanist Thought,” *The Hastings Center Report* 42, no. 2 (March 2012): 39 n.

²⁸ Jarosław Jagiełło, *Zmiana paradygmatu myślenia o naturze ludzkiej* [A paradigm shift in thinking about human nature], in: *Spory o naturę człowieka. Józefowi Tischnerowi w 15. Rocznicę śmierci* [Disputes over human nature. To Józef Tischner on the 15th anniversary of his death] ed. Jarosław Jagiełło (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Jedność, 2015), 179–200.

²⁹ Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Schöner neuer Mensch* (Berlin: Nicolai Publishing & Intelligence GmbH 2018), 4–6, 74.

³⁰ Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus. A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London: Vintage, 2017), 382–408.

pursuit of his happiness³¹ and immortality, of the creation of a new man. Sorgner writes:

All transhumanists aspire to immortality.³²

After all, it is not about immortality in the religious sense. Transhumanists are generally naturalists, and do not include in their views either cult rites, prayers and rituals or unproven religious dogmas and symbols.³³ A transhumanist wants to, and can, by means of technology, create the perfection of the human being within the horizon of thinking about his immortality. The thing is not about personal immortality, but—in the broadest terms—about extending the life of the species as much as possible, about intervening by means of science and technology in the evolutionary process in such a way as to give it the desired direction in human development. The final result is supposed to be—as Raymond Kurzweil has long wished³⁴—the liberation of man from the frailties of his ageing body by, broadly speaking, linking the human brain to a computer (the so-called mind uploading)³⁵ and thereby achieving digital immortality. The quest for immortality is therefore actually about taking some global action against suffering and the terrible fact of death. Therefore, transhumanists advocate the social, mental and physical

³¹ Lekka-Kowalik, “Transhumanistyczne szczęście,” [Transhumanist happiness], 20–22.

³² Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *Transhumanismus. „Die gefährlichste Idee der Welt”!?* (Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder, 2016), 9 [own translation: “Alle Transhumanisten streben die Unsterblichkeit an”].

³³ Sorgner, *Transhumanismus*, 9.

³⁴ Ray Kurzweil, *Nadchodzi osobliwość: kiedy człowiek przekroczy granice biologii* [The singularity is near: When humans transcend biology], trans. Eliza Chodkowska and Anna Nowosielska (Warszawa: Kurhaus Publishing, 2013).

³⁵ A critical discussion of this phenomenon was made by Sorgner, *Schöner neuer Mensch*, 37 n.

enhancement of not only individuals but of the entire species to make us less prone to suffering, and unwaveringly content.³⁶

In this context, let us recall that the signatories of the *Transhumanist Manifesto* unambiguously suggested in 2020 that as an intellectual movement transhumanism is not a theistic movement, but an atheistic one.³⁷ Thus, transhumanists generally question the existence of God as the Creator of creation, which in the Bible and throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition is described as good, and among the created good beings special importance is given to the most perfect being in creation, namely man. Meanwhile, all transhumanists without exception rather point to the imperfection of creation, in particular the extreme frailty of man, who, aware of his imperfection, has always striven—as his history testifies—to enhance both himself and other people.³⁸

³⁶ Michael Hauskeller, *Reinventing Cockaigne*, 40 n.

³⁷ *The Transhumanist Manifesto*, accessed May 3, 2024, <https://humanityplus.org/transhumanism/transhumanist-manifesto>. It should be noted, however, that there is literature demonstrating that some theists, particularly Christians, identify themselves as transhumanists and even find justification for their transhumanist views in the Bible when they cite passages from the Gospels or the Epistles of St Paul: Janina Loh, *Trans- und Posthumanismus zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag GmbH, 2018), 11. Given the epistemological and ethical assumptions of transhumanism, as well as the numerous discussions on the possibilities of dialogue between representatives of the transhumanist vision of man and of the Christian conception of man, the possibilities of reconciliation between transhumanists and Christians along with their theology have been critically analyzed in depth: Caroline Helmus, *Transhumanismus – der neue (Unter-) Gang des Menschen? Das Menschenbild des Transhumanismus und seine Herausforderung für die Theologische Anthropologie* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Poustet, 2020), 267 nn; Micah Redding, *Christian Transhumanism: Exploring the Future of Faith*, in: Newton Lee, ed., *The Transhumanist Handbook*. (Cham: Springer Nature, 2019), 777–794; Armin M. Gouw, Brian Patrick Green and Ted Peters, eds., *Religious Transhumanism and Its Critics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022); Steve Donaldson and Ron Cole-Turner, eds., *Christian Perspectives on Transhumanism and the Church. Chips in the Brain, Immortality, and the World of Tomorrow* (Birmingham, AL, USA: Pallgrave Macmillan—Springer Nature, 2018).

³⁸ Hołub, *Ulepszenie człowieka* [Human enhancement], 9 n.

Indeed, the Judeo-Christian tradition too has witnessed the expression of numerous demands for man's transcension, for the transcension of his own limits, so that on this path, as a man-creator, he can achieve ever greater perfection, can become a new, happy man in his union with God (Matt 5, 48; Eph 4, 24).³⁹ In fact, until the 19th century, man's aspiration to transcend himself as a form of self-improvement has always taken place within the horizon of an absolute point of reference, which for man has been God, transcendent in relation to him. However, in the 19th century, first thanks to Karl Marx and the Marxists, who remained in the orbit of influence of both Marx himself and Nietzsche, a fundamental change took place in the understanding of the phenomenon of human improvement. Referring to the findings of Karl Löwith⁴⁰ as well as Leon Trotsky's ideological postulates,⁴¹ Thomas Fuchs, an expert on transhumanism, emphasizes that against the background of the necessity of man's transcension—postulated by Marx and Marxists—towards the new man, clearly visible are elements which are borrowed from Christian eschatology and apocalypics, and which border on the farcical. Here is the *porte parole* of the chosen people, i.e. the Marxian proletariat in its messianic-redemptive function, and the germ of the new man, engaged in revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie, similar to that of Christ against the Antichrist. According to Marxists, the new man is the work of a bloody revolution, the work of changing social relations. According to Nietzsche, who, like Marx in the atheistic-nihilistic spirit, reinterpreted in his own way the Christian-eschatologi-

³⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers Inc., 1947), First Part of the Second Part, Q. 1, Art. 5.

⁴⁰ Karl Löwith, *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953), 48.

⁴¹ Leo Trotzki, *Literatur und Revolution*, trans. and ed. Eugen Schaefer and Hans von Riesen (Berlin: Gerhardt, 1968), 214 n.

cal self-transcendence of man,⁴² the overhuman can create himself both through self-education, self-improvement, and even through biological mutation. Fuchs' position is that both the ideas have been resurrected in the primitive materialism and naïve technological optimism of transhumanists. Their views are extremely attractive especially to people who, unable to cope with their lives in the absence or loss of the experience of eschatological, supernatural transcendence, fully accept both the transhuman and even posthuman self-denial of the religious image of man.⁴³ In short, in the absence of God, the flesh-and-blood man has become a burden to himself and to others, including the transhumanists,⁴⁴ who have set out to change him.

In this context, it should be recalled that evolution, as a process of progressive differentiation of living organisms and optimization of life in regard to its quality, is interpreted by transhumanists as an event that every human being should find disappointing. Arnold Gehlen, in his philosophical anthropology, has long since shown that man as a product of evolution is a biological peculiarity, a flawed being, marked by some deficiency, in some sense “unready”, not permanently embedded

⁴² Maria Guibert Elizalde, “The eternal return: an immanent eschatology,” *Scientia et Fides* 11, no. 2 (2023): 233–250.

⁴³ Thomas Fuchs, *Verteidigung des Menschen. Grundfragen einer verkörperten Anthropologie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022), 81–83. Although Marek Wójtowicz maintains that it is not entirely legitimate to look for too radical an influence of Nietzsche on the development of transhumanist thought, there is no doubt that many transhumanists philosophize precisely under the spell of the Nietzschean idea of the overhuman, and they readily admit it. Marek Wójtowicz, *Friedrich Nietzsche prekursorem transhumanizmu? Wybrane aspekty współczesnej debaty* [Was Friedrich Nietzsche the forerunner of transhumanism? Selected aspects of the contemporary debate], in Duchliński and Hołub, *Transhumanizm* [Transhumanism], 437–456; Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, “Nietzsche, The Overhuman, and Transhumanism,” *The Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20, no. 1 (2009): 29–42.

⁴⁴ In the present paper I focus exclusively on transhumanism, the findings of which form the basis for thinking in terms of metahumanism and posthumanism. The differences between these three vectors of the understanding of the new man are very clearly indicated by: Sorgner, *Transhumanismus*, 65–85.

in the world. He is an accidental being, equipped with qualities that he himself simply does not want to accept and therefore wants to act to compensate for the deficiencies and to transcend himself.⁴⁵ Indeed, it is easy to see that man, at his present stage of development, can conceive of himself as a fundamentally imperfect being, and nothing is changed in this regard by the discoveries of modern genetics.

Also, although the genetic code does an amazing job, it has evolved by trial and error, and is therefore poorly structured from the genetic engineering point of view.⁴⁶

The implication is that human nature is not only changeable, but also in need of improvement. Such self-experience motivates man to free himself from the stigma of blind evolution, to break his attachment to his own biology, and to shoulder responsibility for a rationally shaped future, which today—as we know—can be done with the help of modern technologies.

This shaping of the future of man in transhumanism, after all, is not based on metaphysical conceptions of man, who appears either as a psycho-physical unity⁴⁷ or as a dramatic being within the agathological horizon.⁴⁸ This is because transhumanism wants to understand and enhance the human being solely on the basis of an extremely dualistic concept of

⁴⁵ Arnold Gehlen, *Człowiek. Jego natura i stanowisko w świecie* [Man. His nature and position in the world], trans. and scientific ed. Rafał Michalski and Jarosław Rolewski. Scientific editing of the translation by Stanisław Czerniak. Chapter 44 translated by Elżbieta Paczkowska-Łagowska (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2017), 46 n.

⁴⁶ Klaus Machtwig, *Mind Uploading – Neue Substrate für den menschlichen Geist?*, in Internationales Deutsch-japanisch-koreanisches Stipendiatenseminar, Bd. 57, ed. by Japanisch-Deutsches Zentrum Berlin (Berlin: JDZB, 2008), 80, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://jdzb.de/sites/default/files/2021-03/D57-p1184.pdf>.

⁴⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Man*, trans. James F. Anderson. Englewood Cliffs. (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc. 1963.)

man, which is expressed in the radical opposition in man of his body and spirit. Illustrative of this opposition are two vectors in the development of transhumanist thought: a vector infiltrated by a naturalistic perspective on the understanding of man, and a cultural-voluntarist vector. Transhumanists focus on either one or the other interpretive vector. In both cases, we are dealing with a radical ontologization of man.

Transhumanists with a naturalistic bent see man as a fully biologically determined being. His subjectivity, spirituality and consciousness are, in their view, nothing more than the products of various processes taking place between the nerve cells in the human brain. In fact, there is no such thing as a spirit in a human being, and if we are to speak of a human spirit, it is primarily in the sense of digitally recordable information organized according to specific algorithms. Only the action of interrelated genes, hormones and neurons—Fuchs notes critically⁴⁹—regulates the development of a person's personality, moods, social behavior, also certain moral attitudes. Even such expressions of human spiritual life as the sense of interpersonal connection, as well as love and trust often linked with this sense, are conceived by transhumanists as epiphenomena of biochemical processes or organic algorithms. Natural sciences elucidate the mechanisms of these processes, taking it into their own hands to direct them, using all possible and permissible means to do so, to achieve the outcome they desire. Since man is, in many dimensions of his life, an imperfect biological machine, it is therefore necessary to improve him, on the basis of a man's voluntary decision, conditioned by the idea of perfection promoted by enlightened transhumanism, which knows best what man needs.

However, the voluntarism of the cultural understanding of man bears witness to a very different approach to human enhancement.

⁴⁸ Jarosław Jagiełło, ed., *The Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century*. Józef Tischner (Kraków: Ignatianum University Press, 2020).

⁴⁹ Fuchs, *Die Verteidigung des Menschen*, 73.

Intelligence, personality, or sex are not permanent endowments of man, but are rather a result of the cultural and social constitution of people. This means that man does not have any fixed nature that explicitly limits human freedom. Therefore, in each case, man may advocate a model of his existence and self-understanding that seems most desirable under certain conditions. In this context, Thomas Fuchs legitimately argues that the promotion—grounded in a peculiarly conceived freedom—of, say, the idea of cultural gender inevitably gives rise to the transhumanist-supported postulate concerned with overcoming human nature. They see the fulfilment of this postulate as the realization of the project of liberating man from his frailties, from all imperfection.⁵⁰

Although these two positions—transhumanist naturalism and cultural voluntarism—are radically different from each other, they are both based on the same premise: namely, the dualistic opposition of body and spirit. In the former case, there is a complete domination of the spirit by the body. In the latter case, the exact opposite is true: it is about the radical opposition and at the same time domination of the body by the spirit. We should never forget how these two opposing positions tragically went down in the history of the world, when biologicistic Hitlerism and cultural-voluntarist communism wanted to create a new man, each according to its own project; today we would call it a “transhumanist project.”

Conclusion

The elimination of the absolute point of reference from thinking about man, or—to put it bluntly—the expulsion of God from philosophical

⁵⁰ Fuchs, *Die Verteidigung des Menschen*, 74.

anthropology, from human life, raises profound problems concerned with the understanding of human nature, as well as problems of human self-identification. Dostoevsky's famous dictum "If there is no God, everything is permissible" is momentous not only in its moral aspect, for when everything is permitted, it is difficult to say what is good and what is bad. It is important not only from the epistemological aspect, when unlimited freedom causes great difficulties with the legitimacy of the use of concepts such as truth and falsehood.⁵¹ This saying of Dostoevsky's also has its far-reaching repercussions in human philosophy: the absence of an absolute point of reference in freedom causes man to fall into a state of constant uncertainty as to the understanding of his own nature. This uncertainty is consequently accompanied by a permanent fear of man, the effect being an inability to accept him as he is. We are therefore faced with the following situation: when faith in God ends, then unfaith in man begins. I call this phenomenon "anthropological tragicism." The expression of this tragicism is exactly transhumanism in the various directions of its development.⁵²

Since—as Kant⁵³ and Feuerbach⁵⁴ noted—man is unable to endure the metaphysical void in his life, he therefore puts himself in the place of God and usurps the right to create the world, and in particular to create a new man. The problem is that man is no substitute for God, for as the biblical context of the discovery of the philosophical problem of

⁵¹ Leszek Kolakowski, *If there is no God... On God, the Devil, Sin and other Worries of the so-called Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 82.

⁵² Loh, *Trans- und Posthumanismus*, 41–64.

⁵³ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena do wszelkiej przyszłej metafizyki, która będzie mogła wystąpić jako nauka* [Prolegomena to any future metaphysics that will be able to present itself as a science], trans. Benedykt Bornstein (Warszawa: PWN 1993), 176.

⁵⁴ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Wykłady o istocie religii* [Lectures on the essence of religion], trans. Eryk Skowron, Tadeusz Witwicki (Warszawa: PWN 1953), 308–318.

man shows us, God was satisfied with His work of creation. Meanwhile, transhumanists show that man is not satisfied either with himself or with other people and therefore tries to enhance himself and others, without even asking whether this enhancement will not upset the proportions in him that are necessary for life and human development, and whether it will not result in disproportion and, consequently, in unnecessary suffering.

In this context, one cannot help but ask whether the transhumanist experiment is equipped with brakes that might be quickly applied if the so-called “enhancement” of man at some point begins to turn—as, for example, in the process of his far-reaching cyborgization⁵⁵—into an absurd enterprise of human destruction by the human being. Given the assumption that enhancement by means of modern technology is not about restoring human beings to a state of healthy equilibrium, but about carrying out various kinds of radical transcension, this gives rise to a question as to whether the backdrop of human enhancement does not conceal a totalitarian temptation for some people to rule over other people. Such a temptation arises quickly when transcension is carried out not upon the metaphysical foundation, but on the basis of the idea of human enhancement—an idea that is a product of the illusion of unlimited freedom.

Undoubtedly, man as we know him, with his weaknesses, limitations—a flesh-and-blood man—is difficult for transhumanists to accept. The idea of a radical rupture of man into two parts: a biologized body and a biologized mental sphere, culminating in the science-fiction image of mind uploading as an illustration of coveted digital immortality, places some transhumanists in the realm of developing

⁵⁵ Sorgner, *Schöner neuer Mensch*, 6; Anne Kull, “The Cyborg as an Interpretation of Culture-Nature,” *Zygon. Journal of Religion & Science* 36, Issue 1 (2001): 49–56; Anne Kull, “Speaking Cyborg: Technoculture and Technonature,” *Zygon. Journal of Religion & Science* 37, Issue 2 (2002): 279–288.

neo-gnosis.⁵⁶ Developed in transhumanism, the idea of a perfect, happy, frailty-free and digitally immortal man—as Kurzweil⁵⁷ and Moravec⁵⁸ have long written about—is supposed to awaken in the new, superior man consciousness of a unique, ontic privilege, bordering almost on the divine status of human being. Such consciousness is actually to be the salvation of man, which is to be considered a neo-gnostic position.⁵⁹

The dream man of transhumanism, a man who is constantly being corrected, does not actually need to have a home, to feel family ties, to experience love, which is often about sacrifice and suffering. He does not need to have a story of his life balancing good and evil. The man of transhumanism does not need to know fears, weaknesses and failures, loneliness and death; he does not even need to know the graveyard, he does not need to have the painful memory of his loved ones. A transhumanist man is a man—as Tischner would say—without his drama. But is he still human? And do we want a future that is axiologically undifferentiated as a result of the almost limitless knowledge of the creators of the new man, and is such a future possible? The annihilation of the man known as we know him leads to an anthropological absurdity.

⁵⁶ Stefano Abbate, “Transhumanismo y Gnosis: Un Paralelismo,” *Scientia et Fides* 10, no 1 (2022): 203–208.

⁵⁷ Ray Kurzweil, *Homo s@piens. Leben im 21. Jahrhundert. Was bleibt vom Menschen?* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1999), 205.

⁵⁸ Hans Moravec, *Mind Children. The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 108.

⁵⁹ Abbate, *Transhumanismo y Gnosis*, 211–212; Jan Skoczyński, *Polska neognoza* [Polish neo-gnosis] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2004), 12 n.



From Atheism to Transhumanism. A Critical Look

SUMMARY

In this research paper I focus on the question of the relationship between atheism and transhumanism. I expose the well-known thesis whereby atheism is a property of Western culture. At the same time, I show atheism as the real cause of the emergence of a multi-directional philosophical movement, i.e. transhumanism, drawing attention in particular to its understanding of man, to the dialectic it creates between the extant philosophical image of man and the concept of the “new man” promoted by transhumanists. This exposition of transhumanism concentrates primarily on the issue of “anthropological tragicism” that I detect in transhumanist thinking.

Keywords: anti-theism, atheism, nihilism, anthropological tragicism, progress, transhumanism

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