

# Common Sense Ethics in Dialogue with Transhumanism

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**ABSTRACT:** On the much-trodden ground of the conflict between Good and Evil, between universality and diversity, between the creative act and a lethal status quo, between faith and reason, between religion and science, it could be argued that every human being and action will suffer the same fate, chronically falling under the antagonistic empire, adding yet another gloss to the laurels of this empire's victory and yet another defeat of the human being. Moreover, the reality becomes even more painful when the human being realizes that Someone, from somewhere in places and dimensions still inaccessible to it, is watching its hopeless struggle, from which it also reaps other laurels of a different brilliance: "Man's struggle with his own misfortune is a spectacle worthy of the gods." And yet this reality is the very gift given to the human being of stepping "per aspera ad astra." Thus, conflict, crisis, tragedy, and pain, are, in fact, challenges and opportunities and are assimilated, incubated and gestated in the human being, from which wings are then born, escaping from this empire and soaring towards transcendent realms. Today the world faces a new challenge: artificial intelligence (AI) has developed a superior artificial intelligence (ASI), and at the same time the shift from the digital to the quantum age makes it possible for human beings to witness a transition from humanism to trans-humanism, then to post-humanism and so on towards a post-non-humanism.

**KEYWORDS:** transhumanism, singularity, soulechtsomy, common-sense

## 1. Introduction

On the picture imagined and sketched in the abstract of the article I will now outline the working hypothesis: common sense, the ethic engraved in the identity of the human being becomes a relational imperative in the current context of transhumanism. Since transhumanism is already in opposition to human nature, the antithesis will be precisely the refusal of the human being to participate at the table of dialogue. History attests to the fact that the Christian attitude has abdicated from the sacred deontology of dialogue, clearly noted by Moltmann: "Ascetic Christianity called the world evil and left it" (Moltmann 2012, 39). The way to approach this article will be a highly sensitive one, in that the relationship must not conflict with the values of human ethics (Rotaru 2005, 38). Thus I will build the foundation on the Hegelian triad: The Hegelian triad refers to thesis-antithesis-synthesis. "Beginning from a category A, Hegel seeks to show that upon conceptual analysis, category A proves to contain a contrary category, B, and conversely that category B proves to contain category A, thus showing both categories to be self-contradictory. He then seeks to show that this negative result has a positive outcome, a new category, C (sometimes referred to as the "negative of the negative" or the "determinate negation"). This new category unites - as Hegel puts it - the preceding categories A and B" (Forester 1993, 132). I will also appeal to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, although over its explanatory-functional-normative algorithm I will also superimpose a comparative study with the nuance of dialogue: "However extensive the interaction between the critical theory and the special sciences whose progress the theory must respect and on which it has for decades exercised a liberating and stimulating influence, the theory never aims simply at an increase of knowledge as such. Its goal is man's emancipation from slavery" (Horkheimer 2002, 246). I deliberately chose the Frankfurt School's critical theory as a warning signal, because emancipation from bondage also set a precedent, as man sought to free himself from what defines him as a human being. Thus, on this foundation, I will build what is proper and common to the human being, regardless of the

context in which he is given to be. In the second section of the article, I will review transhumanism, this creation of man which is rightly perceived by human honesty as an offence to divinity and a danger to the sanctity of life. In the third section, I will review some of the achievements of some human categories in relation to transhumanism, and in the conclusion, I will summarize the direction of the article and express the degree to which the working hypothesis can be constituted as a thesis, whereby common-sense ethics objectively, relationally and constructively addresses transhumanism.

## 2. Absolutes of the human being

Being in the middle of the picture, the human being perceives the surroundings and the nuances according to human units of measurement, which are usually characterized by limited horizons; the natural reaction cannot be other than that expressed by the Persian Aryan religion, in which Ormazd and Ahriman (good and evil) are in a roughly equal confrontation of forces, or the Mosaic religion in which man is confronted with life and death, good and evil, blessing and curse, against which man always fails miserably. Revelation, enlightenment, occurs when the human being escapes from this picture and then realizes the big picture, freed from all human finitude and all the nuances that have colored his life and identity. And yet, in this new dimension, the danger increases exponentially with the depth of revelation. Thus the human being plunges again and again, but now into another picture, that of the various conceptions of life, materialized in religions, and from here he has other struggles, so it is not surprising that this continuous search becomes part of his very identity.

The supremacy of Christianity (Rotaru 2023, 62-79) over other religions lies in the fact that it is given a big picture and divine revelation leads the Christian into an imaginary through which horizons are freed from human finitude: "The religious imaginary reflects the totality of images, signs, myths or symbols of a religious nature generated by a person or a collectivity, starting from certain realities both immanent and transcendent.... The Christian imaginary can only be defined in terms of the relationship between the invisible divinity and the image of Jesus Christ" (Chirilă 2020, 16-17). Thus divine history is revealed to him in the infimum of human history (Bâlc 2015, 138-152), thus he becomes aware of Lucifer's revolt, smothered in divine blood, thus the struggle now appears to the human being as being of another dimension, expressed in the excellence of transcendence, excellence towards the glorification of divinity, excellence between the kenosis of Christ and the theosis of the Holy Spirit for the human being, excellence possible only in these divine dimensions. But Christianity is also offered an image in depth - divine depth - that *paredokein*, God's abandonment of Jesus (McGrath 2018, 36-37), in the presence of which being, of human nature, is transformed into being of divine nature, to the community of them all is offered the mystery that transcends from *tremendum*, through *fascinatum* to *adorandum* (McGrath 2018, 38) and divine grace, *metousia Theou*, participation in the divine essence (McGrath 2018, 174), becoming the *eikon* (image of the Holy Trinity), with the signifier *kat'eikon*, in and through Christ (McGrath 2018, 174).

Kierkegaard, the father of modern secular thought, certainly had no negative intention when he brought the conflict between reason and faith (Bâlc 2014, 125-136) to the fore, yet the consequences were not long in coming, with religion lining up behind faith and secularism (Rotaru 2006, 251-266) behind reason: „Kierkegaard came to conclusion that you could not arrive at synthesis by reason. Instead, you achieved everything of real importance by a leap of faith. So he separated absolutely the rational and logical from faith. The reason and faith bear no relationship to each other...” (Schaeffer 1968, 21).

Nor is the Frankfurt School any further from Kierkegaard. By the triad of explanation-functionality-normativity, it omits the very essence of the identity of the human being, and hence the risk that the imprint of transcendent identity is lost in an algorithm, however logical it may be, is not long in coming. Thus the postmodern human being has come to deny the

divine intervention in humanity, becoming itself god, leading to destructive effects for the harmony and destiny of all humanity: "Traditional societies believed in a structured, harmonious cosmos, controlled by gods...and this belief...has been rejected in the modern world, such that humans now believe themselves to be the makers of their history" (Puett 2012, 113).

The heritage that has been passed down from generation to generation has now become sedimented in consciousness to the point where scientific progress is considered part of the definition of being human (Chirila 2020, 13, 20). The Pontiffs (and not only them, but also other personalities with weight in the word), have perceived and analyzed the direction that humanity is taking, intervening through various declarations with the aim of turning the human being towards absolute values, towards the common good, towards peaceful coexistence (Chirilă 2020, 282-285).

Yet it is dishonest to blame the conflictual situation between good and evil that human beings experience, to blame the heritage we currently enjoy, to blame scientific progress, and thus to adopt a lethal *status quo*. The conflict between Socrates and the City (Plato 2021, 68) reminds the human being of an identity that cannot be changed, altered, or beaten into retreat by compromise or passivity: 'Why? Because unlike external interlocutors, that flawed and rude insult (conscience) lives 'in the same house' with itself" (Plato 2021, 281), Socrates thus leaving humanity a legacy signed with his own death: "Rightness (consciousness) is therefore such that it can only be right (consciousness)" (Plato 2021, 377). And Aristotle identifies this consciousness as divine in nature (Aristotle 2012, 154), conveying a categorical warning to reason that has ventured to escape from the proper domain of phenomenology and take hold of the transcendent domain as well, the domain of revelation contained in theology (Aristotle 2012, 14-15).

Eliade's statement, following his immense research in the field of the history of religions, can be used as a bridge in the approach of this article: "This profane existence is never found in its pure state. Whatever the degree of desacralization of the World to which he has attained, man who has opted for a profane life does not succeed in abolishing religious behavior altogether. Even the most desacralized existence still retains traces of a religious valuation of the World" (Eliade 2019, 20-21), thus the conflictual situation only makes urgent the urgency of viable methods of intra-relation (relation between identity, consciousness, progress) and inter-relation (relation between entities with different conceptions of life). And Aquinas quotes Cicero in his argument about the existence of a human law: "Therefore Cicero also says in his Rhetoric that in the beginning law came from nature; then certain things, from the use of reason, became habit; then fear of laws and religion enshrined both things coming from nature and those proved by habit" (Thomas Aquinas 2021, vol II, 654), and finally concludes by saying to Augustine: "To us has been impressed the knowledge of the eternal law" (Aquinas 2021, vol II, 664). Turning back, I will conclude with the axiom: losing one's meaning, it leads to the loss of being and ends in the loss of the identity.

### 3. Transhumanism

In order to define transhumanism, we need to understand other concepts. To the limited extent of the article I will also refer to these so that an overview of Christianity can be given. To begin with secular transhumanism gives us the following definition: "The term, transhumanism, or H+, refers to an ideology and movement to seek to employ technology in order to advance civilization beyond the human, to guide evolution via technological enhancement toward a new posthuman species" (Gouw 2022, xx). From Christian transhumanism we are offered the following definition: "Transhumanism can be defined as the ethical use of science and technology to transform the human condition" (Redding 2022, 114). But things don't stop there because transhumanism has spawned another category, that of philosophical posthumanism, whose tendency is to move from the foundation of Enlightenment-human values to another stage, critical

posthumanism, whose mandate is to justify the beneficial and salvific intervention of transhumanism. Thus what is now only in draft form will be followed by a campaign aggressive enough to deter potential opponents. Even the category called "Radical Life Extension - RLE" does not agree with the policies of transhumanism. "I would like RLE as human, not as posthuman...My personal motivation in developing medicines to combat aging is that I do not like the fact that everyone gets sick when they get old, much more than the fact that everyone dies when they get old" (De Grey 2022, xiv).

The essence of transhumanism is found in the term 'singularity' - the ability of Artificial Superior Intelligence (ASI) to have self-awareness, self-understanding and self-development: "The Singularity marks the treshold where the superintelligence we create will take the reins from human hands and place them in posthuman hands" (Peters 2022, 9). The use of genetics, nanotechnology and robotics (GNR), leads to the realization of *soulechtomy*, and on a spiritual level the consequence is the achievement of *homo Deus*, the offer made by the serpent to man in Eden: "If a transhumanist could successfully upload his or her brain pattern and establish his or her mind in a computer substrate, would this constitute a *soulechtomy*?" (Peters 2022, 20). Fukuyama's warning must be taken most seriously: "Transhumanism is the most dangerous idea in the world" (Peters 2022, 16).

Science before transhumanism went through various stages and created varying degrees of tension on Christianity; thus Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* (think therefore I am) turned all of Western ontology against the study of God, and Frithjof Schuon sealed its meaning with *sum ergo est Esse* (I am therefore God is) (Nasr 2005, 492), as if man conditioned God's existence and not the other way around. However Franz von Baader sensed the danger and intervened with "*Cogitor, ergo cogito et sum*" (I am thought by God, therefore I think and am) (Nasr 2006, 301). But transhumanism evades this equation: 'In order to be, do we not have to possess a brain' (Lexcellent 2019, 52), and the postmodernist deconstructivism that has passed as its legacy into transhumanism seeks closely to annihilate any imprint of human and divine identity as illusory, its imprint having its origins in evolution.

As far back as the 1980s, atheist philosopher Daniel Dennett proposed a possible new direction for ASI: artificial life (Lexcellent 2019, 19). The development from AI to ASI via GNR gives rise to *homo cyberneticus* whose consciousness is "singularity" and whose identity is the non-identity of *soulechtomy*. How will the life of such an artificial non-entity work? Or first of all, how will such a project be possible to put into operation? Specialists in this field are able to inform and at the same time warn: "Rather, what is more likely is the rise of a new ideology of human perfection accompanied by a new eugenics program. Such a new eugenics program would attempt to reduce the population of intellectually inferior persons and select, through engineered evolution, only those among us who exhibit the highest intelligence" (Peters 2022, 21).

The recent history of WWII reveals such a eugenics programme whereby, in order to preserve the so-called pure Aryan race, Hitler ordered the extermination of potential races that would endanger its purity by mixing them. Thus what for humanity was genocide, a black stain on Christian identity, for the Nazis was a revolutionary breakthrough for science. The difference between Hitler's programme and the transhumanist one is that the latter will be at much higher levels.

At the same time, in order to make this eugenic agenda possible, transhumanism has found other potential harms, including the guilt of the unborn (Hughes 2022, 96), Christianity's opposition to science, and motivations to promote their agenda globally: "As humanism freed us from the chain of superstition, let transhumanism free us from our biological chains" (Peters 2022, 6). To make it work, transhumanism sets itself up as the Messiah - science-as-savior - and becomes a new religion that offers a long, pain-free, pandemic-free life, a life that fulfills the most fanciful desires, a life expressed by the Unitarian Universalist church thus: "Through science, we mortals will attain divinity" (Peters

2022, 15). History reveals this reality, that an ideology, in order to be accepted by humanity, must also be clothed in religious garb.

The followers of transhumanism declare by their own will a completely separate identity from the human one. As human beings, however, this separation leads to several consequences, one of which is anxiety. Since anxiety is impossible for human beings to endure, transhumanism confronts it with that attitude of exaggerated self-confidence, hubris, defiant pride, arrogant superiority. Thus it conceives of ASI in order to alleviate its anxiety. Another attitude that derives from separation from divinity is liberation from moral responsibilities. Whether they admit it or not, the identification of human identity with ASI has precisely this purpose, to escape from conscience, from spiritual pains. The development of an ASI containing feelings (Scheutz 2014, 258) consciousness, is precisely for the human being to transfer them to it in order to be freed from moral pain: "While it is generally agreed that present-day AI systems lack moral status, it is unclear exactly what attributes ground moral status. Two criteria are commonly proposed as being importantly linked to moral status, either separately or in combination: sentience and sapience (or personhood). These may be characterized as follows: Sentience: the capacity for phenomenal experience or qualia, such as the capacity to feel pain and suffer. Sapience: a set of capacities associated with higher intelligence, such as self-awareness and being a reason-responsive agent" (Bostrom 2014, 321-22).

But anxiety and moral pain do not only affect the present, or a limited near future, but their dimension is eternal. Therefore the emphasis that is placed on ASI is not only for the achievement of a better present, but for the assurance of a future as long as possible. ASI's performance gives them this artificial hope, by the leap they have to make into posthumanism, that soulotomy which is an affront to the dignity of the human being, but also a blatant, declared offence against divinity. Schiller expresses the myth of apostasy thus: "Take up deity into your own will and it will come down from its heavenly throne" (Schiller 2007, 238).

When the human being generates by his own finite means actions by which to attain eternity, he thereby declares that he is himself god. However, the idea of futurum in posthumanism does not correspond to the doctrine of adventus in Christianity. When the Messiah - the artificial saviour - is put in the corner and disowned, the premises are created for a generation of violence, which will affect Christianity and, moreover, will be perceived by the deity as ingratitude. Thus generation, in transhumanism, will have serious consequences for the sacredness of life.

#### **4. Common-sense and Transhumanism in dialogue**

Ethics is the noble (Dobrin 2024, 156-161), decent and pertinent invitation that academic research asks of the two actors, the human being characterized by common sense (Dobrin 2021,48) and transhumanism, to express their identity, to identify their essence and transcendent content and to identify themselves in the socio-cultural-historical-traditional-imaginative space. The degree of responding to this invitation also denotes the degree of the possibility of relating between the two. The metaphysical principle, universally recognized and accepted by the philosophy of common sense, acts as the litmus which, poured over the two, will prove their authenticity: "Metaphysical principles... That the qualities which we perceive by our senses must have a subject, which we call body, and that the thoughts we are conscious of must a subject which we call mind; That whatever begins to exist, must have a cause which produced it; and that design and intelligence in the cause, may be inferred, with certainty, from marks or signs of it in the effect" (Woudenberg 2021, 50).

The human being retains these signs within itself, whereas transhumanism has categorically detached itself from transcendent content, recognizing only human progress within itself. By its very essence, it has come to violate the sacred, taboo limits recognized even by its predecessors, the Renaissance, Enlightenment, humanist, modernist,

postmodernist, endangering not only the identity of the human being but also its transcendence. In this totally contradictory situation, however, the human being is invited to the table of dialogue.

Dialogue creates a common, neutral space in which participants are given the opportunity to express themselves. If this space were ideally provided by a third entity, dialogue would no longer be a difficulty, but most of the time it is just the initiative of the two entities to build a space for dialogue. At this point, an excursion into the definition of dialogue, the characteristics of which are of interest in this paper, is necessary: "First all parties must commit to treating each other as equals, refraining from any form of coercion.... The second requirement for authentic dialogue is the ability of participants to respond with empathy, to walk in each other's shoes.... The third requirement...dialogue must help us to see the significance of our own assumptions and those of others" (Johnston 2003, 57) In what follows I will outline some of Christianity's reactions to transhumanism:

- a. Catholicism approves of technological progress but categorically rejects transhumanism (Green 2022, 143-61).
- b. Orthodoxy asks a pertinent question: in the exclusively divine kenosis-theosis equation, where is the place and contribution of transhumanism? (Gallaher 2022, 161-83).
- c. Protestantism is more open to dialogue but also maintains a categorical attitude: "Technology offers to give us what we want...longer life, youthful bodies, greater health, mental ability. (But) Christianity invites us to give up what we want, indeed to give up life itself, as the one condition for real life" (Peters 2022, 13).

However within the Science and Religion Discourse (SRD), and against the backdrop of Protestantism, the Christian Transhumanism Association (CTA) was founded in 2014 to welcome and embrace technological innovation with the goal of human beings becoming more human, but not posthuman: "...science...is the long arm of common-sense" (Peels 2021, 1). It is worthy to consider the CTA attitude even though Christianity and transhumanism are not compatible. The Hegelian triad makes no compromise between thesis and antithesis, nor any ecumenism or syncretism anathematized by Christianity, but the mystery of the dialogue ultimately creates a synthesis whose essence can be understood as a common denominator, a common-sense, from which the human being cannot abdicate.

## 5. Conclusion

The human being (Rotaru 2016, 29-43) is aware of two natures that are in constant conflict. Although it sometimes seems that one of the natures is dormant, the lethal danger arises when man lets his guard down, through a status quo and a passive attitude, through an escapist attitude of denial of conflict or through an attitude of exclusion and selfish rejection of the opportunity to improve. Conflict increases exponentially in relationships with others, with other human categories, in social and cultural participation, in the adoption of a concept of life. The danger of adopting an attitude that is not in keeping with the quality of being human lurks at every turn.

Intra-relational and inter-relational reality will participate at the table of dialogue to the extent that their identity, being and purpose recognize their essence as being of a transcendent order, expressed in this way: "Divinity is not a question of substance ontology but of relational ontology" (Stosch 2021, 73). The ethics of homo religious will address to his profane nature a nostalgia for paradise accompanied by *mysterium fascinans*. The ethic of homo religious will address the other, the other human categories, regardless of their degree of profanation, a relational attitude, "to be is to be in relation" (Thatamanill 2020, 112), in which the mystery of encountering one another produces transformations and is the condition of the humanity of the human being, as Desmond Tutu expressed it: "My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together" (Weber 2022, 59).

The tendency of transhumanism to penetrate into taboo areas of the human being, escapes any ethics of common sense, with unimaginable and unmanageable consequences. Moreover, the offense of excluding Ultimate Reality from human reality leads to eternal consequences. Homo religious, regardless of his belonging to any religion and social category, is invited to bear his sacred imprint in a profane world, with the sacred ethical mandate to re-sacralize through relationship what has been desacralized.

Thomas Paine made history following the publication of a pamphlet: *Common Sense*. This was the spark of *America's Declaration of Independence*, a spark that was born to fly and not to be extinguished, reaching Europe. Although the substance is political, it is imperative to note that Paine resorted not to political manoeuvring, not to sophisticated philosophies, not to spiritual-ethical values, but only to a common sense, proper to the human being, freedom: "Those men have other feelings than us who have nothing suffered. All they now possess is liberty; what they before enjoyed is sacrificed to its service, and having nothing more to lose they disdain submission" (Paine 2005, 65). Moreover, the author recognizes that it does not come from human nature and is not just a common sense of human beings to serve humanity, its purpose being a sacred, transcendent one: "The Almighty had implanted in us these unextinguishable feelings for good and wise purposes. They are the Guardians of his Image in our hearts. They distinguish us from the herd of common animals" (Paine 2005, 68). Common-sense is the common ground of dialogue, the dignity of entering into dialogue is given by the identity with which the dialogue partners identify, and the nobility of addressing the other with values of revelatory-transcendent content is constituted in the common-sense ethics of the human being. It is a pertinent request addressed both to the human being and to those categories called trans-humanism, post-humanism (and their creators), so that they remain at the table of common-sense and do not degenerate into a post-non-humanism, a decisive denial of the archetype of the human being.

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