

The Anthropological Challenges of Posthumanism

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Politics, law, education, religion and theology have been primarily based on general anthropological considerations, perceptions, and descriptions of man, that have changed over the long course of human civilization through a dialectic with the progress of science, technology and intellectual civilization. Beliefs such as the definition of man or life is written “in stone” or in legal texts that are not subject to revision, e.g. Constitution, cannot be seriously supported. In the long history of Christianity, even the Scriptures have undergone changes in their interpretation, and key terms of faith have been acquired new meanings. In the 21st century, it is obvious that new technological and scientific data are emerging, foreshadowing radical reorientations of both man and humanity. More specifically, biotechnology, robotics and artificial intelligence (AI), having different points of departure, promote both a superhuman and a posthuman ideal, which are not new, as they have appeared in human civilization since long ago. For millennia, people have been anticipating either the restoration of their nature in its first unadulterated status, as they perceive it, or the improvement of their nature’s inherent potential through evolutionary progress, or its ultimate transcendence¹.

The debate about the future and the perspective of man and humanity in general has been going on for a long time, but it has nowadays gained new momentum. Many scientists are pondering what the next

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1. G. Steiris, *Εύτοπια. Πολιτική ιεροσοφία στήν πρώμη Νεωτερικότητα*, Institut Du Livre – Kardamitsa Publications, Athens 2022, pp. 21-28.

stage will be and if there will be any at all. The most pessimistic ones refer to a *posthuman* condition – the final transcendence or elimination of humanness². Others, most of them, refer to a *transhuman* or *superhuman* condition, where humans will have overcome “problematic” aspects of their existence and will have passed into a higher existential stage³. Unfortunately, in Modern Greek, research to date has not managed to convincingly and aptly differentiate between the conceptual distinctions of the terms, *transhumanism*, *posthumanism*, *superhumanism*, and *meta-humanism* (as a reflection on the concept of man and the human)⁴, adopting collectively and inaccurately the general term meta-humanism. The discussions in all these contexts also contain theological dimensions, since the ideal of the evolution of man to a higher than present state has been inherent in Christian eschatology since early Christianity, both as a restorationist and an eschatological perspective⁵.

In this article, we are trying to examine the challenges posed to religion and theology by the radical changes in the conceptualization of man and humanness brought about by biotechnology, robotics and AI⁶. It is clear that it is not possible to exhaust all the options and perspectives that are opening up to us, both because of our paper’s limited scope and the dynamism of developments. Moreover, it is impossible –at this

2. D. Roden, *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human*, Routledge, London 2015, pp. 9-34; Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism*, Polity, Cambridge/Malden 2014, pp. 5-34.

3. J. L. Cordeiro, “The Boundaries of the Human: From Humanism to Transhumanism”, in: N. Lee (ed.), *The Transhumanism Handbook*, Springer, Cham 2019, pp. 63-74; R. Manzocco, *Transhumanism – Engineering the Human Condition: History, Philosophy and Current Status*, Springer, Cham 2019, pp. 32-84; J. Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today’s Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove IL 2019, pp. 39-54.

4. St. L. Sorgner, *On Transhumanism*, Pennsylvania University Press, University Park PA 2021, pp. 40-42.

5. Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, Brill, Leiden 2013, pp. 817-826; P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology*, Brill, Leiden 2007, pp. 287-293, 358-380.

6. G. Steiris, «Ἄνθρωποι καὶ νοήμονες μηχανές στὴν ἑλληνικὴ μυθολογία καὶ τὴν τέταρτη βιομηχανικὴ ἐπανάσταση», in: M. Stefanakis, Mimika Giannopoulou, Maria Achiola (eds.), *Πολύτροπος. Τιμητικὸς τόμος γιὰ τὸν Καθηγητὴ Νικόλαο Σταυρολίδη*, Mediterannean Archaeological Society, Rethymno 2023, v. II, pp. 383-396.

stage— to provide answers to all the questions and possibilities. But it is important to ask the basic questions, while there is still time to do so. Much of what we can discuss may never be realized; still, humanity must be prepared, so as not to be surprised, as was the case with Dolly, the first cloned animal, and seek *a posteriori* answers. Foresight is the key to the survival and longevity of the human species, together with, obviously, adaptability. Questions, however provocative they might seem, are always useful. We would even say that their degree of usefulness increases in proportion to their level of provocation.

More specifically, since the end of the last century, several biologists have been investigating the prospect of intervening in the human genome to evolve and improve our species; some others, more adventurous ones, have been working on creating organisms that combine genetic material from different species, the so-called chimeras. Such organisms could be a combination of human and animal genomes⁷. A team of scientists from the United States, China and Spain have relatively recently reported that they created the first embryos, which were part human and part ape, and kept them alive for about 20 days⁸. This is just one of many similar projects. Therefore, the prospect of completing the construction of human chimeras may not be that far away.

If, in the first case –i.e. the evolutionary intervention in the genome—, one can speak of an extension of possibilities already inscribed in our nature in the form of seminal discourses (in other words, of the advancement of nature), in the second case –that of human chimeras—, we are at a complete loss to classify these marginal beings, since they will combine characteristics that we are accustomed to consider non-human with those that we consider human⁹.

7. R. Streiffer, “Human/Non-Human Chimeras”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), E. N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/chimeras/> [16/9/2023].

8. Usha Lee McFarling, “International team creates first chimeric human-monkey embryos”, <https://www.statnews.com/2021/04/15/international-team-creates-first-chimeric-human-monkey-embryos/> [16/9/2023]; F. Suchy, H. Nakuchi, “Lessons from Inter species Mammalian Chimeras”, *Annu Rev Cell Dev Biol.* 33 (2017), pp. 203-217.

9. Pr. K. Nayar, *Posthumanism*, Polity, Cambridge 2014, pp. 87-96, 125-149.

On the other hand, developments in the field of AI and robotics initially create the prospect of digital intervention in humans, through the “upgrading” of human beings with the help of technology, so that they could become stronger, smarter or healthier¹⁰. In more advanced versions of this trend, some even anticipate the uploading of human consciousness into another body, in either the strict biological sense of human or not, or its rescue in some kind of network, in a fully intangible form¹¹. Thus, humans could in one sense, become pure intellects, analogous to angels¹². Apart from that, intelligent machines raise compelling questions of an anthropological nature: the distinctive difference between humans and other beings has been traditionally thought to be speech, in the sense of both voice and cognition. In this particular case, the traditional fundamental difference is not sufficient enough.

These prospects, among many similar ones, are completely changing the landscape at many levels of life and force us, while there is still time, to discuss all possibilities, even those which might not be realized, so that we are prepared for all possible outcomes. The questions that arise are many; the most important is: what is man and what he isn’t. The answer to this question will determine both issues relating to religion and theology, as well as broader political and legal ones. Will beings, such as those we have described, be considered citizens? Will they have rights, human or political? Will they participate in socio-political institutions? Will they be religious and participate in worship? To be more precise: For example, will a chimera be able to be baptized? Will a human consciousness transmuted into another body be able to partake of the sacraments?

We can observe many people to think that the answers to such challenging questions are easy, with the concept of the person, which

10. Sabine Sielke, “Outsourcing the Brain, Optimizing the Body: Retrotopian Projections of the Human Subject”, in: Herta Nagl-Docekal and W. Zachariasiewicz (eds.), *Artificial Intelligence and Human Enhancement, Affirmative and Critical Approaches in the Humanities*, De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston 2022, pp. 79-100; K. Warwick, “Superhuman Enhancements via Implants: Beyond the Human Mind”, *Philosophies* 5, 3 (2020), p. 14.

11. Susan Schneider, *Artificial You: AI and the Future of Your Mind*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2019, pp. 72-81, 148-150.

12. Patricia MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics: Embodiment and Cultural Theory*, Routledge, London 2016, pp. 109-112.

has recently become a dominant one in the Orthodox studies, as the main line of defense¹³. According to the prevailing trend in the relevant literature, a person is “any human being who transcends the necessities of nature, conquers its own particularity, but at the same time moves lovingly to meet the other human beings and, by extension, its entire environment”¹⁴. Let us examine whether this definition is sufficient enough within the context of the new reality that is being unfolded.

For a being to be considered a person, it needs to be rational. Beings such as those described above will probably fulfil this condition – relatively easily, as is readily apparent –, without having to reach fully developed forms of AI, on which scientists in the field are already working¹⁵. As far as the transcendence of the necessities of nature is concerned, such beings could overcome this obstacle, either voluntarily or by their complete liberation from any natural necessity because of the way they will have been constructed. The third criterion, the conquest of particularity, is also possible for such beings. Finally, they could also be characterized by the loving movement towards all other rational human beings and the living environment. Consequently, if such beings meet, even in the least, the conditions for being considered persons, the theological and religious problems are not solved; they are intensified. One cannot exclude that such beings will seek to enter into a communion relationship with the absolute person of God.

We should bear in mind that, according to the prevailing orthodox theological understanding, man, since he is created *in the image of God*, is a person, though not a perfect one. In other words, man is not born a person, but can become one – a central position in the theology of the person, but clearly with Thomistic overtones¹⁶. We should ask ourselves:

13. Chr. Yannaras, *Όντολογία τοῦ προσώπου (προσωποκεντρικὴ ὄντολογία)*, Ikaros Publishing, Athens 2016.

14. E. Tempelis and Chr. Terezis, «Οἱ ἔννοιες Οὐσία – Φύσις, Πρόσωπον – Υπόστασις στὴν Νεοπλατωνικὴ Φιλοσοφία καὶ στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Θεολογία», in: A. Maras *et. al.* (eds.), *Η Ὁρθοδοξία ως Κληρονομιά: Θεολογία καὶ Φιλοσοφία στὴν Έποχὴ τῶν Πατέρων*, v. III, Hellenic Open University Publications, Patras 2008, p. 252.

15. R. Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Nearer: When We Merge with Computers*, Penguin, London 2024.

16. St. Ramfos, *Ο καημὸς τοῦ ἐνός: κεφάλαια τῆς φυχικῆς ιστορίας τῶν Ελλήνων*,

Does man, who is not a person in itself, have the right not to accept and recognize as persons beings which will similarly strive to become full persons, by possibly seeking the Church's help?

We argue that the Church, as it is faced with this new reality, needs to focus on its anthropology¹⁷, which unfortunately has not been sufficiently developed lately – for some time, the emphasis has been unilaterally given to the theology of the person. The need for it to focus on anthropology is also present itself as an emergency due to the fact that it is difficult to find a coherent theory of the human being in the Christian tradition, especially with regard to the soul, which will be proved relevant to the conditions and challenges of the 21st century.

It is well known and accepted in the relevant literature that, according to the Old Testament, man is oscillated between created nature and the Uncreated God. The main difference between man and the other animals is his animation by the breath of God¹⁸. This is the literal interpretation of the biblical text, animation. Thus, God provided man with the freedom to live in His way of being and not only in the way of being dictated by his created nature. Nella's position is apt that:

Man's essence does not lie in the matter from which he was created, but in the archetype on the basis of which he was created and towards which he tends ... man's ontological truth is not to be found in himself that he has been perceived as autonomous: in his physical properties, as materialistic theories maintain; in the soul or the higher part of the soul, the mind, as many ancient philosophers believed; or in the person of man exclusively, as modern person-centered theories accept, but in God himself. Biological existence does not exhaust man¹⁹.

Harmos Publications, Athens 2000, pp. 40-41; Ét. H. Gilson, *Tὸ πνεῦμα τῆς μεσαιωνικῆς φιλοσοφίας*, transl. Chr. Marchellos, Crete University Press, Herakleion 2019, p. 254; C. I. Accetti, *What is Christian Democracy?: Politics, Religion and Ideology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019, pp. 60-61.

17. St. Giagkazoglou, «Τὸ αὐτεξούσιο καὶ ἡ ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἡ θεολογικὴ ἀνθρωπολογία τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Παράδοσης καὶ ἡ διδασκαλία τοῦ Μαρτίνου Λουθήρου», *Θεολογία/Theologia* 90, 1 (2019), pp. 119-157.

18. Gen. 2, 4-25; P. Trempelas, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, Sotir Publications, Athens 1959-1961, v. III, pp. 473-474.

19. P. Nellas, *Ζῶον θεούμενον, Προοπτικές γιὰ μιὰ Ὁρθόδοξη κατανόηση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2000, p. 33.

Much has been written and said about the relationship between Christianity and Platonism, especially about at which points and to what extent Platonism was Christianized or Christianity was Platonized²⁰. However, it is obvious, at least to most of the modern researchers, that Philo of Alexandria, Origen and other writers of the early Christian period, influenced to a significant degree by ancient Greek philosophy, constructed an anthropology, the central position of which was the view of man as a being made up of body, soul and spirit²¹. However, most of the Fathers correctly adopted the bipolar schema, according to it man is composed of body and soul, elements that, though distinct, are inseparable²².

John Damascene defines the soul as:

Ψυχὴ τοίνυν ἐστὶν οὐσία ζῶσσα, ἀπλῆ, ἀσώματος, σωματικοῖς ὀρθαλμοῖς κατ’ οἰκείαν φύσιν ἀόρατος, λογική τε καὶ νοερά, ἀσχημάτιστος, ὄργανικῷ κεχρημένη σώματι καὶ τούτῳ ζωῆς αὐξήσεως τε καὶ αἰσθήσεως καὶ γεννήσεως παρεκτικὴ οὐχ ἔτερον ἔχουσα παρ’ ἐαυτὴν τὸν νοῦν, ἀλλὰ μέρος αὐτῆς τὸ καθαρώτατον (ώσπερ γάρ ὁρθαλμὸς ἐν σώματι, οὕτως ἐν ψυχῇ νοῦς) αὐτεξούσιος, θελητική τε καὶ ἐνεργητική, τρεπτή ἡτοι ἐθελότρεπτος, ὅτι καὶ κτιστή. πάντα ταῦτα κατὰ φύσιν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ δημιουργήσαντος αὐτὴν χάριτος εἰληφυῖα, ἐξ ἣς καὶ τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ φύσει οὕτως εἶναι εἰληφεν²³.

Thus, the soul is a simple incorporeal substance, rational and intelligent, free-willed and active, using the body as its organ. The soul possesses all these characteristics from its Creator, to Whom it owes its existence. On the contrary, the body consists of the (four) physical elements: earth, water,

20. Al. J. B. Hampton, J. P. Kenney, “Christianity and Platonism”, in: Al. J. B. Hampton, J. P. Kenney (eds.), *Christian Platonism, A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020, pp. 3-10.

21. Tzamalikos, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

22. J. W. Cooper, “Scripture and Philosophy on the unity of Body and Soul: An Integrative Method for Theological Anthropology”, in: J. R. Farris, Ch. Taliaferro (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, Routledge, London 2016, pp. 27-44; Eb. Schockenhoff, “The concept of soul in Christianity”, in: Chr. Böttigheimer, W. M. Widenka (eds.), *The Concept of Soul in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston 2023, pp. 21-66.

23. John Damascene, *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, 2, 12, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1985, p. 152.

air, fire. However, it must be pointed out that, according to Christianity, the soul is connected to the whole body and not to some part of it. Even when separated from the body, the soul carries out its functions, albeit in a different way. We should not forget that the soul in this case, i.e. when it has been separated from the body, still retains its former self-consciousness²⁴. From this relationship arises the differentiation of life from simple survival. The soul animates the body; life is not limited to survival, which refers to the body, to the material mortal nature. Death does not mark the end of life, but only the end of the biological life of the body, i.e. survival²⁵.

Another key element, which is of particular importance in view of the challenges posed by technology, is the way that Christian anthropology treats man's rational part, which traditionally differentiates him from animals. The reason for Christians is a function of the soul; it is not related to what we now call the biological brain. Animals have brains too, but they do not produce complete logical thoughts. The brain receives the soul's rational energy, but it does not produce intelligence²⁶. According to Maximus the Confessor, the powers of the soul are three: the nutritive, the imaginative and the mental. The human soul possesses all three, whereas the animal one possesses only the first two²⁷.

In the context of this article's subject matter, it would be interesting to look more closely at the animal psyche. According to Gregory of Nyssa,

24. D. Krausmüller, "Faith and reason in late antiquity: the perishability axiom and its impact on Christian views about the origin and nature of the soul", in: Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth & J. M. Dillon (eds.), *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul: Reflections of Platonic Psychology in the Monotheistic Religions*, Brill, Leiden 2009, pp. 45-76.

25. T. Horvath, *Eternity and Eternal Life: Speculative Theology and Science in Discourse*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo 1993, pp. 97-98; Eleonore Stump, "Resurrection and the Separated Soul", in: Br. Davies, Eleonore Stump (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, p. 463.

26. Nevena Dimitrova, *Human Knowledge According to Saint Maximus the Confessor*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene 2016, pp. 18-23.

27. Maximus the Confessor, *Κεφάλαια περὶ ἀγάπης*, PG 90, 1028A; G. Steiris, "Seeking Maximus' the Confessor philosophical sources: Maximus the Confessor and al-Fārābī on representation and imagination", in: S. Mitalexis, G. Steiris, M. Podbielski, S. Lalla (eds.), *Maximus the Confessor as a European Philosopher*, Cascade Books/Wipf and Stock, Eugene 2017, pp. 316-331.

only human beings have such a soul, because only the human rational soul can be called a soul. The animal and vegetable souls, as have been described by Aristotle²⁸, cannot be considered souls in themselves²⁹. Characteristically, Gregory of Nyssa states:

Μηδεὶς διὰ τούτων ὑπονοείτω τρεῖς συγκεκροτῆσθαι ψυχὰς ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ συγκρίματι, ἐν ιδίαις περιγραφαῖς θεωρουμένας, ὥστε συγκρότημά τι πολλῶν ψυχῶν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν νομίζειν. Άλλ’ ἡ μὲν ἀληθῆς τε καὶ τελεία ψυχῆς, μία τῇ φύσει ἐστίν, ἡ νοερά τε καὶ ἄστος, ἡ διὰ τῶν αἰσθήσεων τῇ ὑλικῇ καταμιγνυμένη φύσει³⁰.

Origen, contrary to Gregory of Nyssa, argues strongly that animals have a soul³¹, referring to the Bible³². Although animals are generally regarded as non-rational, Origen asserts that their degree of rationality can be compared to that of humans. Nevertheless, he points out that, while the human soul was created *in the image of God*, the same cannot be said of the animal soul³³, therefore, animals cannot develop a conscious relationship with God. Humans –whose souls, unlike animals, have the privilege of being immortal– also have the privilege of a conscious relationship with God, while animals do not.

Still, the crucial question is whether the soul of the animal is of the *same* nature as that of man. Basil the Great and other Fathers attribute to the animals certain rational capacities, as well as the ability to express basic emotions. Basil the Great points out that animals have memory, as they are able to recognize persons they have met in the past³⁴. One

28. Aristotle, *Περὶ ψυχῆς*, 413b13.

29. N. G. Xexakis, *Όρθόδοξος Δογματική*, v. III, Ennoia Publications, Athens 2009, p. 148; J. Behr, “The Rational Animal: A Rereading of Gregory’s of Nyssa’s *De hominis opificio*”, *JECS* 7 (1999), pp. 219-247; K. Ware, “The soul in Greek Christianity”, in: M. James – C. Crabbe (eds.), *From Soul to Self*, Routledge, London and New York 1999, pp. 49-69.

30. Gregory of Nyssa, *Περὶ κατασκευῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, PG 44, 176B.

31. Origen, *Περὶ πρώτων ἀρχῶν*, 2, 8, 1; B. P. Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, CUA Press, Washington DC 2012, p. 208; R. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate*, Cornell University Press, New York 1993, pp. 202-203.

32. *Gen.* 1, 21-24; *Lev.* 17, 14.

33. Origen, *Κατὰ Κέλσου*, 4, 83.

34. Basil the Great, *Ἐξαήμερος*, 8, 1, PG 129, 165AB; G. Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its*

of the most important thinkers of Late Antiquity, with an important and influential work in philosophical anthropology, Nemesius of Emesa, considers that animals share a common life with man³⁵.

Thus, according to the Christian anthropology, we can think first of all about these chimeras, whose bodies could also be composed of human DNA. It should be pointed out that scientists have shown that the interaction of humans with non-human organisms is already happening, so the mixing of human element with the animal one is not as far-fetched as some may believe. This interaction leads to the incorporation of animal cells into the human body. Mosquitoes, viruses and bacteria, for example, inject genetic material from different species into their victims, including humans. Also, xenotransplantation, the transplantation of non-human organs into humans, is a practice that is gaining ground. Therefore, the combination of the human and the animal is already a reality at the corporeal level³⁶.

The crucial question is thus transferred to the level of the chimeric beings' soul. Are chimeras—if they live, grow, feel and give birth—should be considered animate? If they also possess speech, then would their soul perform all three functions described by Maximus the Confessor as features of the human soul? If we proceed to another level, we could ask: would such a soul have a conscious relationship with God? Possibly, as philosophical research has revealed, they could even be considered persons, without necessarily being categorized as human ones. The appearance of such beings in our world will certainly require from us to wholly revise many of our beliefs, as well as to appropriately adjust our institutions³⁷.

One of the main counterarguments of those who abhor such perspectives is that of the unnaturalness of such beings, i.e. the fact that they do not fit into any plan of nature or creation. Yet we know that in the millions of

Discontents: *The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2010, pp. 119-122.

35. Nemesius of Emesa, *Λόγος κεφαλαιώδης περὶ φύσεως ἀνθρώπου*, 1.

36. C. Fehilly, S. Willadsen and E. Tucker, "Interspecific Chimaerism between Sheep and Goat", *Nature* 307 (1984), pp. 634-636.

37. J. Robert and F. Baylis, "Crossing Species Boundaries", *The American Journal of Bioethics* 3, 3 (2003), pp. 1-13.

years of life on our planet the boundary between species is not clear and fixed, and that there are already transgenic organisms, such as the mule. Furthermore, once artificial insemination has been accepted on all sides, it is obvious that it is difficult to support the argument about natural and unnatural ways of reproducing beings, as well as the argument against making living organisms in the laboratory. Moreover, we have *de facto* accepted, as societies and institutions, that what is considered unnatural is not immoral. Comstock's arguments are very interesting; he says that DNA recombination, in any form, once productive, does not violate any divine plan but opens up forces already inscribed in nature. Man, as he has been created in the image and likeness of God, possesses at least a spark of creativity within him; therefore, his "creationism" should not come as a surprise³⁸. As for those who advocate positions related to anthropocentrism, nurturing the belief that people have their particular moral *status* because they are human, they cannot yet give an answer to the question of how much DNA is enough for a being to be considered human. For example, does a person with transplanted animal organs cease to be human or is he less human³⁹?

Turning our attention to the possible transference of human consciousness to another body, we've already mentioned earlier that, according to patristic theology, the human soul fully retains the self-consciousness it had before separation from its body. The death of a human being does not mark the end of life, but only the end of survival. Its soul continues to live. Instead, the biological function of the body is terminated, i.e. what is called survival. Therefore, in which category can we integrate a being which possibly fully maintains its self-consciousness in another body?

For people with our modern receptivity –as far as the body itself is concerned–, the patristic tradition allows for many interesting readings. Cyril of Jerusalem argues that in the last days our own body will be resurrected, though not in its present state of weakness. Instead, it will be incorruptible and will not need to be fed with the foods of this world

38. G. Comstock, *Vexing Nature? On the Ethical Case against Agricultural Biotechnology*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Boston 2000, p. 185.

39. D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1984, pp. 241-243.

to be kept alive. He is speaking of a body, of which even the movement will be executed differently; a spiritual body, of another order, a body sublime, which⁴⁰ Cyril is unable to describe accurately. Understandably, similar passages nowadays constitute a challenge for the imagination of scientists, who have other data and other perspectives before them. We are referring specifically to posthumanism, in all off its versions, which has theological references and –in one way or another– certainly touches on religion.

Turning to AI, things are more complicated. If such machines interact with the human body, as is beginning to happen, the boundaries of the human as we know it change. Already there have been people implanting machines into their bodies and trying to expand their capabilities to gain an advantage over other humans in physical or mental activities. Robotic humanity is not a distant dream, as some would like to believe⁴¹. Intelligent machines are perhaps not far from being considered not only rational but also conscious, if with consciousness we mean the mental faculty of an organism, which enables it to know and understand both itself and its environment, to have some understanding of its place and importance in the world, and, above all, to fully realize how it affects the world by its actions⁴². How should we treat an intelligent and self-conscious machine, artificial or not, especially within a biologically human body? How might someone question the confession of such a being – e.g., if it is claiming that it feels the divine Grace at work in it, or that it desires and strives to become a person in the full sense of the word?

Broadly speaking, the ontological and anthropological answers we are called upon to give will be based on law and politics, so that there would

40. K. Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York 1979, p. 136; E. Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem*, Routledge, London and New York 2000, pp. 107-108.

41. Anna Alichniewicz & Monika Michałowska, “A New Way of Coming-To-Be”, in: Monika Michałowska (ed.), *Humanity In-Between and Beyond*, Springer, Cham 2023, pp. 1-18; Chr. H. Lüthy & B.-J. Koops, “Towards Homo Manufactus? An Introduction to this Volume”, in: B. J. Koops, Chr. H. Lüthy, Annemiek Nelis, Carla Sieburgh, J. P. M. Jansen, Monika S. Schmid (eds.), *Engineering the Human: Human Enhancement Between Fiction and Fascination*, Springer, Heidelberg 2013, pp. 1-10.

42. P. O. Haikonen, *Consciousness and Robot Sentience*, World Scientific, New Jersey 2019, pp. 42-46.

be an institutional discourse for these beings. The questions are pressing and we still have some time to answering them. The Church must be at the forefront of this whole process; the ontological and anthropological answers it can offer will shape both its course and the broader vision of society. Philosophy and theology have the first but not the last say in the ongoing developments. This precious capital should not be spent unwisely.

We believe that the theology of the person, which is currently dominant in Orthodox Studies, cannot offer what is truly needed for the dawning new brave world. John Locke's definition of a person is: is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places”⁴³ – that is, a self-conscious being, which conceives of itself as a distinct entity, with a past and a future. According to Locke, a being with such self-awareness has the capacity to be animated by desires for its future, in this case even to seek immortality in God. It becomes apparent that beings with such self-awareness can relatively soon be among us, with modes of being different from those we are used to or have been discussed in Orthodox literature until today⁴⁴.

Thus, we are in need of something much more substantial and deeper than the theology of the person to dealing with these new challenges. We need a more sophisticated anthropology and ontology. On philosophical terms, it misleading to equate the words *person* and *human being*. These two terms are not considered identical; a person may not be a member of our species, the *homo sapiens*. Joseph Fletcher, by introducing the so-called “indices of humanhood / of being human” (self-consciousness, self-control, some sense of the future and past, ability to create relationships

43. J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke), P. H. Nidditch (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975, 2.27.9; Ev. D. Protopapadakis, *Creating Unique Copies: Human Reproductive Cloning, Uniqueness, and Dignity*, Logos, Berlin 2023, pp. 67-90; P. Singer, *Πρακτική Ήθική*, Ch. Paschalidis Medical Publications, Athens 2022, p. 164.

44. Susan Gottlöber, “‘The Universe of the Person is the Universe of Man?’ Expanding the Schelerian Concepts of Philosophical Anthropology and Personhood into the Twenty-First Century”, in: Monika Michałowska (ed.), *Humanity In-Between and Beyond*, Springer, Cham 2023, pp. 81-102.

with others, caring for others, communication and curiosity)⁴⁵, offers an initiative for a new anthropological discussion within Orthodox theology, although his indices do not currently provide answers to the problems described above. Within the neo-Thomist context, there have been discussions about these perspectives for quite some time, while the community of Orthodox scholars researching in the field is correspondingly rather small⁴⁶.

Our era marks the dawn of robotic humanity and chimeras. The new world that is being created will be radically different from the one we have been used to, because it may not be human-centered. This new situation obliges scholars to change their *habitus*, turning their research interests towards other directions, perhaps far from their previous ones; to leave their “comfort zone” by trying to formulate new questions and seeking new answers to earth shattering developments. It is certainly not easy but it is the minimum due of the academic and wider scientific community. To be sceptic about the new emerging reality neither reassures us nor offers to us solutions and answers⁴⁷. We need to take care of not letting for a new Pythia to appear, finding herself in the embarrassing position of having to utter a new final oracle, similar to the one she has allegedly given to Julian the Apostate: “Tell to God, the illustrious humanity has fallen to the ground, man has no more his dwelling place, nor the ability to prophesy, nor the voice of knowledge; the very civilization has dried up”.

The Church, as an institution with a centuries-old history, has a rich tradition from which it can draw resources to dealing with situations that it does not create itself and which are beyond its control. In this case, it needs to dust off the old debates on Christian anthropology by updating and extending them. It would be a good idea to participate actively in the international dialogue that is already taking place, so as to maintain its leading position, in terms of time or values. Denial and

45. Singer, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

46. J. Eberl and R. Ballard, “Metaphysical and Ethical Perspectives on Creating Animal-Human Chimeras”, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 34 (2009), pp. 470-486.

47. Jo Ann Oravec, *Good Robot, Bad Robot: Dark and Creepy Sides of Robotics, Autonomous Vehicles, and AI*, Palgrave McMillan, Cham 2022.

blinkeredness do not help. The small –until now– Orthodox community dealing with the challenges of super-humanism and transhumanism needs to be enlarged. This can only be achieved with the proper academic and institutional encouragement, as has so far happened several times in human history.