

The Techno-Pithecus and Truth: Is a Respective Modern Hermeneutics of Orthodox Theology Possible?

Fr. Nikolaos Loudovikos*

The aim of the present contribution is to explore certain fundamental philosophical-theological parameters that influence the emergence and evolution of the problems occurring with the rise of posthumanism and related biotechnological developments. First of all, we believe that the potential danger here is not some form of idealism or authoritarianism, but the way in which the psychosomatic existence of man is perceived through the quest of desire/will in the West. Thus, the first of these parameters is the *Will to Power*; the second one, linked to the first, is the *Velvet Totalitarianism*. The examination of these concepts also determines the type of intervention that may be possible from the point of view of theology. Let us begin with the first concept-parameter, as it is developed in the philosophical line identified by the triad Augustine – Descartes – Nietzsche¹.

Despite the fact that, apart from Augustine's ideas there are also some others that continued to influence Christian medieval thought and would be of interest to us here, such as the nature-grace traversal or the denial of the synergy between God and man, what we will examine here is

* Fr. Nikolaos Loudovikos is Professor of Religious Studies and Hermeneutics of Religion at the School of Education of the University of Ioannina.

1. For a more analytical exposition of the thoughts that follow, see our book, *Ἀναλογικὲς Ταυτότητες. Πατερικὲς πηγὲς ἐπανερμηνείας τοῦ Ἑλληνο-δυτικοῦ ἔαυτοῦ*, En Plo Publications, Athens 2020, pp. 69-78, 57-62.

Augustinian *voluntarismus*, as Ivánka calls it, considering it to be an indispensable characteristic of all forms of Christian Platonism².

However, there is, we believe, an essential difference between Augustine's and Maximus the Confessor's positions on the will, which opens new paths in studying this concept³. Augustine's conception of the will –compared to that of Maximus– can be described as “transcendental” or “ecstatic”. Firstly, because, as is widely known, Augustine subordinates the will to the “virtues of the mind”⁴, thus pushing it to overcome material physicality and ascend towards divine things. Secondly, because, in his Christology, he seems to understand the human will as something to be overcome by Christ's divine will. For the sake of brevity, we shall quote here only an extract from one of his most important writings, where he makes this assertion:

How did our Lord marry two wills to become one in human nature that He borrowed? In his body, the Church, there would be some people who, while willing to act according to their own will, they would later follow God's will. The Lord prefigured these people in himself. He wished to show that, although these people were weak, they still belonged to him, and so he represented them beforehand in his own person [...]. He revealed the human will that was in him, but if he had continued to persist in it, he would have appeared to exhibit perversity of heart. If you recognize that he was compassionate of you, and is releasing you within himself, imitate the prayer he created: “Father, not what I will, but what you will, let it be done”⁵.

2. E. von Ivánka, *Plato Christianus, La réception critique du Platonisme chez les Pères de l'Église*, French transl. E. Kessler, revised by R. Brague and J.-Y. Lacoste, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1990, p. 179.

3. We should note here that whenever we are talking about Augustine, we must also add Origen; the latter is one of the former's fundamental sources of inspiration; therefore, everything we will mention about the will in Augustine also applies to a significant extent to the Greek East, with a few exceptions, one of which is Maximus the Confessor.

4. Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio libri tres*, 2, 18, 50, W. M. Green (ed.), *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 74, Vindobonae 1956.

5. St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *Expositions of the Psalms (Enarrationes in Psalmos)* 99-120, III, 19, Boniface Ramsey (ed.), transl. and notes Maria Boulding, New City Press, Hyde Park-New York 2003, p. 395.

In this text, the bishop of Hippo is trying to show how the two wills of Christ have become one, demonstrating this through the vacillating will of some believers who hesitate to immediately choose God's will over their own. Therefore, he insists that Christ "prefigures" this vacillation by wrestling with his own human will until he *overcame* it (as if it were sinful in itself), and *abandoned* it for the sake of the Father's will. In this way Augustine, by identifying axiomatically and from the outset the human will in Christ with its possible sinful version (while, according to Maximus and the Sixth Ecumenical Council, the natural human will in Christ is not at all *contrary by nature* to His divine will), seems to ignore the possibility for the human will of Christ to be *opened* to His divine will, by maintaining and transforming it, rather than overcoming it. Here, then, the human will appears, by synecdoche, to be forced to transcend its attachment to nature, which axiomatically makes it sinful and fallen. Thus, we have here the first philosophical-theological manifestation of the essence of the will as necessarily *removed* from its natural human substratum: It is the *ecstatic will*, which will have a long and important course in the West in the following centuries. Let us study the philosophical part of this course.

Descartes was the philosopher who undertook the effort to show the anthropological consequences of this ecstatic will, at the lowest possible theological cost. A series of reaffirmations of the importance of this will has of course preceded him, in the Scholastics, in some Mystics and in Luther; still, the space available is not sufficient for us to deal with the matter in greater detail. Descartes's close association with Augustine, as regards the primacy of thinking, has recently been studied to an exhaustive degree (although, once again, Origen's presence has not been noticed within the "Augustinian" heritage). Nevertheless, Descartes's debts to Augustine go much further. Descartes's closest affinity with Augustine (and unconsciously with Origen) concerns the theory of the will, although it also represents a remarkable intellectual reorientation for the French philosopher.

According to Augustine, the human will was in a certain communion with God and had not yet become autonomous, as it tends to be in Descartes: this is precisely the crucial difference between him and

Augustine. For Descartes, the will is the principal expression of thought, to which *ideas* and *judgment* belong⁶; yet, *it is unlimited, our only unlimited faculty, as an autonomous expression of the Creator's autonomous freedom* and as His image in us – an image that we have to imitate⁷. Nevertheless, through this imitation we become more and more *autonomous*, just as we become the image of this autonomous God. This autonomy of the (always) ecstatic will is the new added feature in the latter's understanding. In this case, the imitation of the divine autonomy puts in the second place the need of the participation in the uncreated perfection of the divine will. The ecstatic human will is authentic because it is autonomous and not because it can at the same time participate in the perfection of the divine will through its obeyance to it.

This cartesian *imitation without participation* is not far from what we have recently called, referring to Heidegger's understanding of the term ecstasy, *parallel ecstasies* (and, in this case, *parallel wills*) between man and God/Being⁸. In other words, man, in practice, develops at will the content of his *will*, *parallel to* what he perceives as the divine will, without being at all interested in conforming his will to the divine. This does not mean, however, that God remains, as a reality, unaffected: Marion claims that, through this *autonomous* human imitation of God's will, God is subordinated to the human Ego and will's structure; in this way, paradoxically, either the foundation (i.e., God) remains to be sought and the human subject remains insecure, or the Ego becomes the only ontological foundation, bereft of God⁹. Our view is that, Western

6. *Œuvres de Descartes*, Ch. Adam and P. Tannery (eds.), v. VII & IX, Vrin, Paris 1996, here *Third Meditation*, VII, 37.

7. *Œuvres de Descartes*, *op.cit.*, here *Fourth Meditation*, VII, 57.

8. N. Loudovikos, "Analogical Ecstasy: Maximus the Confessor, Plotinus, Heidegger, and Lacan", in: S. Mitralexis, G. Steiris, M. Podbielski, S. Lalla (eds.), *Maximus the Confessor as a European Philosopher*, Cascade Books, Eugene, OR 2017, pp. 241-254, *passim*.

9. J. L. Marion, *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes. Analogies, création des vérités éternelles et fondement*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1990, pp. 413-414, 421-422, 424-425. In his work *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes* (1986), p. 141, Marion also argues that the difference between the Augustinian "*cogito*" and the Cartesian "*cogito*", which derives from the former, is precisely that the Augustinian "*falso*" that precedes "*cogito*", and therefore the "*cogito*" itself, refers the human spirit to "un fondement distant, loin de l'ériger en principe subsistant en soi", contrary to Descartes, who perceives "*cogito*" as

philosophy, having already started with Descartes, but especially after him, has eventually combined the two alternative approaches, following a stream of thought rooted in Augustine and Origen, albeit this time in a secular way, and ultimately understood subjectivity as an image of God or as immediately and self-sufficiently God-like, through and within the autonomous will, *as an inner fact of a will for inner self-transcendence and no longer outside the human self but within it*. That took Nietzsche to be completed. Moreover, in a second phase, it led to a way of realizing the relationship with the other(s) exclusively *within* the self, that is, within what we would call the “*self-referential subject*”¹⁰. This kind of subjectivity is a mode of internal relation with others, common to God and man, who does not need a true ecstatic relation to a real Other, since this relation is realized within himself/herself alone. However, this has to do with what in the context of Western metaphysics has been called *the will to power*.

Eventually, Nietzsche’s will to power is not the will to external power or authority; according to Heidegger, it is “the fundamental character of being as such”¹¹. In other words, one does not need to seek something more, which resides outside oneself, but to desire, as another god, the infinite that exists within oneself, as a being that is always more than it actually is, and whose essence is ultimately inexhaustible; and then to seek *becoming* that infinite, rather than simply desiring it or projecting it into the future or the external world.

Consequently, existence becomes power precisely as a *continuous self-transcendence*, which takes place only within the self: the *Augustinian introversion* is added to the *Augustinian-Cartesian independence of will* (in the Kantian, and then in the Fichtean and Hegelian more secular version of the latter) – eventually resulting in Nietzsche. In this way, the will to power, or even better, the internal, autonomous self-transcendence, without being referred to an external God, was the ultimate fate of

the foundation of a substance: «et d’une substance qui joue comme premier principe».

10. N. Loudovikos, “Being and essence revisited: reciprocal logoi and energies in Maximus the Confessor and Thomas Aquinas, and the genesis of the self-referring subject”, *Revista portuguesa de filosofia* 72, 1 (2016), pp. 117-146.

11. M. Heidegger, *Nietzsches Lehre vom Willen zur Macht als Erkenntnis* (Summer semester 1939), E. Hanser (ed.), Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1989, § 50, p. 18.

Christian Platonism in the Greco-Western world. Christianity for Nietzsche, and Augustinian Christianity in particular, is therefore ultimately “nihilistic”¹², from the moment it renders the human being “transcendental”¹³ to what lies outside it. Thus, the authentic expression of the will is released; according to Deleuze, is “an inner desire”, a “primordial synthesis of forces”, and a “relation of domination”¹⁴ – in the context of this incessant inner self-expression that we have already described. According to Deleuze’s reading, equally important is the fact that this will explains and values beings and concepts¹⁵, creates values¹⁶, becomes the hidden essence of things¹⁷; *contra* Kant, the will to power is the true principle for any *critique*, to the extent that an authentic thinker tends towards the aforementioned self-transcendence, which of course ends with the final realization of the *superman*. We should note here that the emergence of the *self-contained will to power* is accompanied by the philosophical “discovery” of the body in the West (with the consolidation and radicalization of some Hegelian intuitions). This self-transcendence is carried out through and within the body, which becomes the modern man’s metaphysical boundary. Indeed –as far as the individual body is concerned– Merleau-Ponty’s corrective objection here is significant; he introduces the notion of “*inter-corporeality*” precisely in order to set some limits in this respect to the individual power’s imaginative excess. Let us note, however, that this whole discussion is taking place within Christianity’s intellectual space, even when it disagrees with the latter...

However, another related line of thought, which includes Dionysius Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, Simeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas, has as its starting point Maximus’s formulation of natural will. As we have attempted to show elsewhere¹⁸, with the concept

12. *Op.cit.*, § 156.

13. *Op.cit.*, § 765.

14. G. Deleuze, ‘Ο Νίτσε καὶ ἡ Φιλοσοφία’, transl. G. Spanos, Plethron Publications, Athens 2002, pp. 77-79.

15. *Op.cit.*, pp. 83-84.

16. *Op.cit.*, p. 120.

17. *Op.cit.*, p. 114.

18. See part II, ch. 1 of our book: *Analogical Identities: The Creation of the Christian Self Volume 1: Beyond Spirituality and Mysticism in the Patristic Era*, Brepols, Turnhout 2019.

of *the natural will* Maximus wanted to express the nature's inner life. In his work, he seeks to define the concept of the will, but in a profoundly existential, direct way: the "will" is no longer the Aristotelian rational *βούλησις*, but a universal, non-metaphysical, personal, deeply direct desire to open up to the full being, surpassing the limits of creatureliness. In his *Letter to Marinus* («Πρὸς Μαρίνον»)¹⁹ Maximus explains that Being, through its will, seeks for the complete entity/ realization of its nature, but in accordance with God's calling addressed to it through the uncreated word/will by which He creates it. The introduction of volition as *will*, as a *burning desire* beyond reason, which includes not only reason, as in Aristotle, but also emotions, desires, the bodily dimension, and also what a modern psychologist would have called *the unconscious*, creates an early ontology of the nature's freedom: Nature does not simply exist as a given; it "becomes" through a free desire, and in dialogue with the *divine volition/will*. The concept of the *dialogical nature* thus created is, even today, unknown in ontology.

The natural will is called upon to respond to nature's demands for unification, incorruptibility and meaning (instead of simply abandoning it, as the ecstatic will does) through divine participation. Still, as St. Maximus has explained, this also passes through the bridging of the fragmented nature's chasms (which are the result of the human will's failed actions when it becomes *selfish*); this is precisely the way to the *consubstantial* («ὅμοοούσιο»), as it is *analogically* transferred from the Trinitarian life to the creation, through Christ in Church²⁰. Maximus recapitulates and interpretatively completes Athanasius the Great's and the Cappadocian Fathers' teachings regarding consubstantiality, by especially focusing on Basil the Great's and Gregory the Theologian's relative writings. Therefore, the true realization of the natural will is ultimately the will for the consubstantial. This new discovery is of course due to the Cappadocians, with Gregory the Theologian being

19. Maximus the Confessor, *Πρὸς Μαρίνον*, PG 91, 12CD.

20. N. Loudovikos, *Church in the Making. An Apophatic Ecclesiology of Consubstantiality*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Yonkers, New York 2016, pp. 213-232; N. Loudovikos, "Dialogical Nature, Enousion Person, and Non-ecstatic Will in St Maximus the Confessor: The Conclusion of a Long Debate", *Analoga* 2 (2017), p. 92 et seq.

the first among them – the main responsible for this “discovery” of consubstantiality as the foundation stone of the authentic relation between subject and intersubjectivity, where the two are connected in an ontologically absolute way. Gregory the Theologian, in explaining the concept of the Monarchy of the Father in Trinitarianism, says that it is a «μοναρχία ἣν οὐχ ἐν περιγράφει πρόσωπον; ἔστι γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἐν, στασιάζον πρὸς ἑαυτό, πολλὰ καθίστασθαι; ἀλλ’ ἣν φύσεως ὅμοια συνίστησιν καὶ γνώμης σύμπνοια καὶ ταύτης κινήσεως, καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ σύννευσις [...] ὥστε κανὸν ἀριθμῷ διαφέρῃ, τῇ οὐσίᾳ μὴ τέμνεσθαι»²¹. Here, the notion of otherness becomes an absolute term of communion. In an even deeper level, will and movement not only do not break apart but contribute to the absolute unity, to the point of the Holy Trinity persons’ identification. Paradoxically, absolute communion and absolute otherness exist as mutually absolute conditions.

As far as our topic under discussion is concerned, it is obvious that it can be taken as an anthropological axiom that the more transcendental or ecstatic the will is considered, the *more ecstatic individualism (solipsism) occurs*; the mind’s primacy –the vehicle of the alleged *transcendence of the will*–, practically results in the affirmation of individualism, precisely because, on the contrary, in reality it is not the mind that is the main creator of communion but the other parts of the soul. In this case, there is communion among us, but only as a subsequent step; communion does not belong to *the first philosophy*²². But in this case, through this *ecstatic solipsism*, the original sin of modern philosophy makes its first appearance. Augustine and Origen had a way of living within church; still, as we have seen, the seed of the will to power, as a future secularized metaphysics, was already present.

And what about the Enlightenment? The Enlightenment was evolved as a culmination of the Renaissance’s attempt to defend nature, both secular and human, as it was suffering within Christian Platonism,

21. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Θεολογικοὶ Λόγοι*, *Λόγος καθ’, Θεολογικὸς Γ’*, *Περὶ γίοῦ*, 2, PG 36, 73.

22. π. N. Loudovikos, *Ορθοδοξία καὶ ἐκσυγχρονισμός*, Harmos Publications, Thessaloniki 2006, pp. 92-93; N. Loudovikos, *Church in the Making. An Apophatic Ecclesiology of Consubstantiality*, *op.cit.*, pp. 136-143, 161-177.

which perceives the soul as the man's absolute essence, and was not adequately preserved in Christian Aristotelianism. To our view, the two main characteristics of the Enlightenment, which were not always in harmonious relationship with each other, are the following ones: (a) the "re-discovery" of the very nature of man, and (b) rationalism – again, however, their origins are complicated, since the rationalism already exists in scholasticism. Yet here rationalism extracts its ultimate consequences: its idolatrous logic, which once turned the living biblical experience of God into abstract metaphysics, is here stripped of its otherworldly foresight and ambition. The Enlightenment holds the opinion that reason is a wonderful and unique tool, within the limits of man, for the exploration of the real; it does not need anymore the slippery field of metaphysics to prove its worth. Furthermore, the very fact that God and metaphysics are being discussed within the bounds of reason proves that they are in fact at the latter's limits; they are projections and inventions of the reason. Thus, we are keeping the latter while we are rejecting dubious metaphysical projections.

Of course, the two characteristics, reason and human nature, do not always coexist without obstacles. Thus, there are also self-undermining anti-intellectualist tendencies in the Enlightenment and an emphasis on the theory of instincts and impulses, which later led to the psychology of depth and the unconscious. It is therefore not ultimately paradoxical that the quintessential science of the metaphysically *ἐνθάδε* (since the metaphysical *ἐκεῖθεν* cannot be ascertained) is not Cartesian mathematical physics, but experimental science. Thus, the Enlightenment abolished the concepts of grace, fall, and salvation, as not experimentally proven, and begun to defend pure nature, which is supposed to be good in itself – let us remember Rousseau, La Mettrie, D'Holbach, Diderot. Everything functions and works quite efficiently, without the need for any metaphysical interference.

It is quite reasonable that Kant follows from this; he affirms that man is equal to God, because he is a creator – of ideas and thoughts. Long before him, Marsilio Ficino came to say that man is a god on earth by himself, because in any case the spiritual reigns over the material, and we don't need religion to tell us that. And, of course, from there on, what

Bacon called the “Kingdom of Man” –the only existing kingdom– has slowly been created. Man’s “fall” is a myth, the real meaning of which is the struggle for our dominance over the other beings. Descartes argued that man is the master and owner of the world. Thus, the discussion of biological immortality began, with the regulation of the four body elements – a belief in this biological life, with philosophers like Hume affirming the absolute self-sufficiency of the physical as a prerequisite for the concern of how we are to dominate this world, which is now ours alone.

Of course, there is a related belief in the Enlightenment –alongside rationalism– that there are many hidden forces in nature, which we can discover, and, on the top of that, some of these forces are not natural but supernatural! That’s why magic and alchemy are not at all considered as something to be discarded. It was a time when one suspected that truth can come from anywhere – apart from God. It was acknowledged that the theological past was crippled all the way through; even a new religion, the “religion of mankind” –with a calendar and saints– had been created at some point. It was an era dominated by an idol – Faust, a being of supreme intelligence, power, magic, and at the same time devoted to dark forces, who achieves knowledge, immortality, etc., but no longer through God. The word “humanism” gradually came to be identified with atheism. Humanism is materialism and empiricism, but at the same time it is definitely atheism – according to the great French thinker Charles Péguy, man had become “God in himself”. It was an optimistic period, before people like de Sade, and later Darwin, Marx or Freud appeared.

As Paul Ricoeur used to say (extending a similar dictum by Freud), immediately after the rise there came the “cosmological humiliations”: the evidence of the new subject’s degraded subordination to bestiality, the economy, the unconscious. Then, paradoxically, as a next step, a kind of contempt for man has slowly begun to appear, as if we suddenly accepted that what we had initially defended –nature– is not so powerful, not capable enough to offer us redemption. Thus, a great temptation arose – not just to help, but to upgrade human nature. So how do we make man a stronger being than he actually is? A couple

of centuries later, the Enlightenment's final outcome, on a social and anthropological level, was the *reconstruction / remaking* of man. Firstly, by improving his socio-historical efficiency, by dominating over man's nature through "social engineering" – the phrase belongs to Karl Popper, a great analyst of totalitarianism (Fascism, Nazism, Communism): the desire to redesign man in order to make him capable of transcending his nature, by trampling, as an eschatological myth, on his freedom. This *upgrading out of contempt* for man is one of the genuine pinnacles of the Enlightenment. We call this project *Eschatological Darwinism*, because classical Darwinism mutates at this point, as man begins to acquire the ability, instead of changing his genes in relation to his environment, to change the environment in relation to his genes. Thus, and this is the second way of reconstructing man, the real continuation of Darwinism, of evolution, would be the man's techno-scientific intervention on his own nature, as (bio)technology, so that, subsequently, he could further extend his domination over the world, up to the point of his absolute, (pseudo-)godlike supremacy.

Let us therefore proceed to a first recapitulation: as we have seen, on the one hand we have the will to power, as a perpetual inner self-transcendence; on the other, our need to constantly upgrading human nature. This synthesis has historically taken place on the basis of the characteristic *ambiguity of the concept of nature* in the West. In our opinion, this ambivalence originally appeared, even before the Enlightenment, in the controversy between Grotius and Hobbes²³. To put it simply, while both agree that nature is posited, as the only ontological reality, as the foundation of the truth of beings (in the place once occupied by God), they disagree as to whether this nature is rational and possesses a normative texture, i.e., whether it emanates both rules and natural laws, which men ought to apply (: Grotius's position), or nature simply teaches the individual psychobiological interest (: Hobbes's position). Although the debate continued well into the 18th century, historically it is the second position that prevailed – ending, especially after the

23. See fr. N. Loudovikos, *Η ἀνοικτὴ ἱστορία καὶ οἱ ἔχθροι της. Η ἀνοδος τοῦ Βελούδινου Όλοκληρωτισμοῦ*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2020, pp. 51-56.

modern parallel reading of History as closed and self-justifying, in what we call *Velvet Totalitarianism*.

We have devoted dozens of pages to defining the latter in our book bearing the same title. For the purposes of this paper, we will only mention that it is the third kind of Totalitarianism. The first one is what Popper described as the denial of individuality for the sake of a massive and chosen collectivity. This was historically realized in the Totalitarianisms of the 20th century. The second type is the one evoked by Huxley and Orwell, where human bodily and emotional wholeness is annihilated in favor of the rational totalitarian domination of the state and history. This totalitarianism we think is perhaps avoidable. The third Totalitarianism is the Velvet one, which appropriately and completely affirms everything that the previous ones excluded: individuality, creativity, emotion, physicality, love in all its forms, absolute entitlement, narcissism. This is the future Totalitarianism.

The problem is that all this affirmation takes place precisely within the postmodern condition of the narcissistic appropriation of history and nature: they are closed in on themselves, without rules, in the context of *a morality of taste*, as well as the will to power that always results from the above and is the instrument of the enforcement of the morality of taste. From the moment that every transgression is considered as only an internal one –nothing exists outside the subject–, it follows that every transgression from here onwards is taking place as a boundless imaginary expansion of the subject (indeed, of the infinitely expansive, on the imaginary level, self-contained physicality), through biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and the Internet and digital techniques. Since the *unum*, *verum* and *bonum* have completely disappeared and with them the possibility of articulating any ontology, in the classical sense of the term, the only thing that remains is the psychological search –if possible– for happiness techniques without ontological or cosmological rules. The being that emerges, as we have called it, is the “techno-ape”, since it consciously disregards its anthropological root and instead seeks and already abandons itself to a new, forthcoming essence, the only condition of which seems to be the freedom from all substance, a freedom that is consequently devoid of any inherited wisdom or continuity with

humanity's spiritual past. It is precisely this circumstance that ultimately makes digital reality highly unpredictable, unknowable and obscure, since, as the old King Crimson song "Epitaph" says, "no one sets the rules". Indeed, in this case, "confusion will be our epitaph".

In this case, the usual philosophical solutions are collapsing. A philosopher as important as Hans Jonas, one of the first and leading philosophers to write about these problems, explains why²⁴. In the West, he tells us, history is "progress-determined"; the continuous progress of society is seen as a dogma inherent in the historical course and as an absolute historical imperative: it is a matter of forced progress through a "self-fulfilling prophecy" that no one questions it²⁵. Everything we do simply in the name of progress and as "progressives" is by definition "right", because "society is moving forward" and in a self-evident way, no one is sufficiently frightened by the historically known fact that people like Lenin, Trotsky, Hitler, Mussolini, used exactly similar expressions to argue for the historically imposed and inevitable prevalence of destructive ideas and practices that they were implementing. We believe that this attitude is the result of *a secularization of eschatology*, originated with Hegel²⁶. In any case, according to Jonas, this led to the establishment of utopia at the core of Western self-consciousness, along with the dreams of a supposedly human perfection, devoid of contradictions, within the utopian space-time. Alas, however; according to our philosopher, the terrible historical experiences of the 20th century have revealed something completely different: "The truly non-contradictory utopian man can only be the flattened, behaviorally regulated little man of the futuristic psychic machine"²⁷. and at the same time the monstrous executioner of the Nazi camps and the Soviet gulags. That is why "it is vitally necessary to unhook the demands for justice, mercy and reason from the

24. See his book: *The Imperative of Responsibility. In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*; Greek ed.: Hans Jonas, *Η Αρχή τῆς Εὐθύνης. Αναζητώντας μιὰ Ἡθικὴ γιὰ τὸν Τεχνολογικὸ Πολιτισμό*, transl. Ntina Samothraki, Th. Stoufis, Harmos Publications, Athens 2018.

25. *Op.cit.*, pp. 424-425.

26. See the first chapter of our book: *Η ἀνοικτὴ ιστορία καὶ οἱ ἐχθροί της*, *op.cit.*.

27. Jonas, *op.cit.*, p. 518.

bait of utopia [...] to keep them bullet-proof by excessive expectations, thus avoiding the temptation to dearly pay for them – a heavy price that every secularism, by its very nature ‘totalitarian’, is ready to make those who live in the shadow of its supposed coming”²⁸. Together with technology and the vision of a boundless power, the utopia of perpetual progress becomes a “utopia of perpetual self-transgression towards an endless goal”²⁹.

Nevertheless, the German thinker considers that the contemporary technological over-specialization generates a frightening ignorance of many essential things, giving rise to obsessive ideas, pseudo-sciences and foolish prejudices³⁰, – and, we should add, along with a profound ignorance of the great traditions’ essential aspects regarding the greatest anthropological problems. Quite often, the personal positions of leading representatives of technology concerning the essentials of life make us shivering with their infantile naivety and ignorance. This was perhaps first noticed by Aldus Huxley, many decades ago, in his novel *The Genius and the Goddess*, when he described a genius physicist who, on an existential level, is foolishly handled by his beautiful and stupid wife.

As a philosophical solution, Jonas proposes the need to search for a new *rational* metaphysics (which might be able to provide a basis for a commonly accepted moral stance) – despite the fact that Kant has explicitly forbidden it. His main argument is precisely that this “rational”, in its cosmological and anthropological completeness, “is not decided exclusively by the data of the natural sciences”³¹. We acknowledge this last philosophical “discovery” as highly promising; it essentially allows the return of metaphysics, as an exploration of the *rational*, by transcending the limits of the objectifying and utilitarian thought. But is present philosophy adequate for this feat?

This literally raises the question of a new humanism; in this context, theology is of vital importance. This is the case because the ethics, for example, which Jonas finally proposes, takes the following form: “Act

28. *Op.cit.*, pp. 518-519.

29. *Op.cit.*, p. 438.

30. *Op.cit.*, p. 435.

31. *Op.cit.*, p. 136.

in such a way that the consequences of your actions are compatible with the stable preservation of authentic human life” – or, in negative terms: “Act in such a way that the consequences of your actions will not destroy the possibility of such a life in the future”; or simply “Do not endanger the necessary preconditions for the human life’s unlimited continuation on earth”; or, to put it again in positive terms: “In the choices of the present, you should include man as a whole in the objects of your will”³².

There are two things that we can notice here: on the one hand, that all of the above formulations are left to the individual judgment of the subject as to what will constitute the appropriate content of these actions, since everyone has a personal opinion as to what benefits and what harms humanity. This is in fact the problem of the Kantian categorical imperative; here, as there, each person decides only at his own discretion about which activity is worthy of becoming a universal law and is salutary for humanity. For example, if we were asking Goering, he would have no problem answering that the extermination of the Jews would be such an activity! On the other hand, we note that in an era that is difficult for philosophical metaphysics, new sources for it are needed if we are indeed to diagnose human reality in depth, something that is necessary if our actions related to that reality are going to be successful and not destructive. It was with this in mind that Henri Corbin mobilized medieval Islamic thought, Buber and Levinas the Jewish tradition, Siderits and others Buddhism, etc.

Speaking now for our own, Greek-Western Christian world, the anthropological position of *an open substance in dialogue* proposed to us by Patristic theology is the one that we should first of all use in our deliberations regarding the afore mentioned matters. It is the position, inspired by the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor (and St. Gregory Palamas, we might add, based though to Basil the Great’s and especially Gregory the Theologian’s teachings), according to which the natures/substances of the created beings are not closed, given realities, but loving words/intentions of God, realized as dialogues between God and

32. *Op.cit.*, p. 56.

men and among the latter. Thus, beings are in a continuous process of God-like fulfilment, acquiring an *analogical identity* of cooperative dialogue with God and the world³³. Our interventions on beings are not intended to replace God's wisdom, but to cooperate with it. In this case, Technology also enters into this divine-human dialogue, aiming to deepen it and to extend and develop cooperatively God's wisdom and charity, which are hidden in the depths of beings. In this way, technology and Biotechnology are linked to new theological virtues and insights.

Apart from that, in the perspective of the possibility of (Bio) Technology's coupling with the theological experience, we must reflect on the enormous potential of what we have called *the will for the consubstantial*. It is therefore true that the latter would counteract the ruthless present-day *will for power*, and, at last, the understanding of the Word's Incarnation and its rental in the Holy Spirit to man, as an authentic and absolutely real upgrading and opening up of the human nature, without the risk of the latter being abolished. This is a truly staggering proposition, in order for the new technology to become a benevolent helper and not a threat. Thus, according to St. Maximus, man is not merely a mind or even an embodied mind, but the “*ὅλον αὐτοῦ*” (“*the whole of himself*”) –the whole of the God-like Creation within him–, together with the boundless holy *Desire* for God-like improvement and *κατὰ χάρη ἀκτιστοποίησης*. Man acquires an “*analogical identity*”, of *continuous inter-substantial synergy* with God and the other people.

Of course, one would observe that such a prospect would presuppose a general religious conversion of a majority of those involved in the development of these technologies. In reality, however, although this is heartily desirable, it does not mean that its absence precludes the utilization of the above-mentioned theological positions. This is because, in reality, these positions constitute fundamental existential modes and aspects that concern man in general, whether he consciously wants to relate to God or not, and as such they answer a number of contemporary philosophical and psychological questions. It remains, of course, for some to work in the perspective of this valuable theological-

33. See our book: *Ἀναλογικὲς ταυτότητες...*, op.cit. (see note. 1).

philosophical hermeneutics. Such a perspective, however, should proceed with a substantial dialogue with modern Western theology, which, in some of its versions, which even relate to a particular reading of Greek theological sources, has much to offer, from the Neo-Thomist correction of Cartesianism and the development of a dynamically fulfilled human nature to a radical ontology of relation as a plexus of real inter-related beings and not an inter-subjective fantasy. A number of Western thinkers, from Garrigou-Lagrange to Gilson, Marion and Taylor, are useful here. We're already late...