

Godmanhood vs Mangodhood: An Eastern Orthodox Response to Transhumanism

Studies in Christian Ethics

2019, Vol. 32(2) 200–215

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DOI: 10.1177/0953946819827136

journals.sagepub.com/home/sce**Brandon Gallaher**

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Abstract

This article distances the classic Patristic teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy on *theosis* from the pseudo-religious ideology of transhumanism. By appealing to the Silver Age of Russian theologians a century ago, today's transhumanist vision is dubbed Mangodhood, an idolatrous construction of a technological Tower of Babel. In contrast, the classical Orthodox teaching of deification or *theosis* relies on the spiritual grace of the true God, rendering the true goal of religion to be Godmanhood.

KeywordsOrthodoxy, Mangodhood, Godmanhood, transhumanism, Satan, *Homo Deus*, theosis, deification**Introduction**

Transhumanism is Satanic. When I write this I am not being provocative, let alone vaguely metaphorical. It is meant literally and with the strongest realism. This ideology, alternatively, new 'religion' or 'religious philosophy',¹ of transhumanism, from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, is a systematic elaboration of what various Russian religious thinkers following Dostoevsky called the Luciferan 'religion' of 'Mangodhood' (*chelovekobozhestvo* and *chelovekoboizie*) which is characterised by self-worship or the

1. See Tracy J. Trothen and Calvin Mercer (eds), *Religion and Human Enhancement: Death, Values, and Morality* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Michael Burdett, *Eschatology and the Technological Future* (New York; London: Routledge, 2015); and Ted Peters, 'The Future of Transhumanism as a New Religious Movement' (Spring 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLHnEM6B3hA> (accessed 3 August 2018).

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self-deification of humanity.² Mangodhood, it was held, with the man-god or superman as its climax, was Satanic in structure and inspiration. It is the mirror inverse of salvation, which is called, in Patristic teaching, *theosis* or *theopotesis* (divinization/deification).³ Deification is made possible through the Godman, Jesus Christ, and for this reason the portmanteau term of ‘Godmanhood’ (*Bogochelovechestvo*), coined by the Russian philosopher and poet Vladimir Solov’ev (1853–1900), was often used as short hand for *theosis*.⁴ The great Russian religious philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948) weaves together this dialectic of Mangodhood and Godmanhood in a characteristic fashion: ‘Into the religion of God-manhood enters all the plenitude of humanness ... In man-godhood perishes not only God, but also man ... The problem of man, the problem of religious anthropology is transformed in the Russian consciousness into the problem about the God-man and the man-god, about Christ and the Anti-Christ.’⁵ In the Russian Silver Age, *theosis* as ‘Godmanhood’⁶ was understood as the accomplishment by God of the mystery of his embodiment, perfectly realised in Christ, always and in all things.⁷

Mangodhood, in contrast, is an instance of the sort of sham human auto-divinisation we see in Genesis 3 with the Fall of humanity through its temptation by the serpent who weaves human beings into his ploys by both lies and illusions. Unlike the case of deification—which assumes the patient, arduous self-work of *askesis* in Christ—auto-divinisation, and transhumanism is a contemporary instance of this, is the impatient attempt at seizing our divine inheritance before we are ready for its responsibility. One uses all our intellectual capacities to split open nature, to manipulate its inner parts to serve us as journeymen gods, elevating ourselves, technologically beyond the merely human, and then in a suicidal manner to subsume creation so that all one sees in the cosmos is the idolatrous face of ourselves like Narcissus tipping into the pool. It is for this reason that the Russian theologian, philosopher and economist Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944) described

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2. See Ruth Coates, ‘Feuerbach, Kant, Dostoevskii: The Evolution of “Heroism” and “Asceticism” in Bulgakov’s Work to 1909’, in Robin Aizelwood and Ruth Coates (eds), *Landmarks Revisited: The Vekhi Symposium One Hundred Years On* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013), pp. 287–307.
 3. See Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (eds), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007) and Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
 4. See Jeremy Pilch, ‘Breathing the Spirit with Both Lungs’: *Deification in the Work of Vladimir Solov’ev* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018).
 5. See Nikolai Berdyaev, ‘Concerning the Character of the Russian Religious Thought of the XIX Century’ (1930) [*Sovremennye zapiski*, 1930, no. 42, pp. 309–43], trans. Stephen Janos, retrieved from http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1930_345.html (accessed 1 August 2018).
 6. See Ruth Coates, *Deification in Russian Religious Thought: Between the Revolutions (1905–1917)* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press) (I am grateful to the author for sharing her work with me).
 7. See Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1: *Amb. 7* [PG 91.1084C-D], p. 107.

Mangodhood as both Satanic and pantheist: ‘Pure self-deification, the self-assertion of one’s createdness as an absolute is Satanism ... The self-assertion of man outside God has the character simply of a conscious divinization of the creature, pantheism or cosmotheism.’ It is Satanic precisely as it was both a deception of creation and a pantheistic divinisation of the world creating a false Saviour God (‘The unfolding potency, the unavoidable task of Mangodhood, is this individual man-god, in whom all of creation would have found its own apotheosis; this idea of an Anti-Christ/Superman’) seen in all forms of modern humanism from Voltaire and Comte to Feuerbach, Nietzsche and Marx.⁸

Mangodhood was and is the trick of the tempter in Genesis 3: that humans might have knowledge of reality (good and evil) immediately and without waiting, like God becoming as gods (3:4-5). This was forbidden not because that knowledge in itself was ultimately impossible for human beings, and, with it, a transformation into what is divine. Such knowledge could only come as a gift given, as we shall later argue, from the long trial of loving obedience and dependence of the creature on its Creator modelled in the person of Jesus Christ and the saints who shine with his face. Transhumanism is yet another human/satanic attempt at seizing divinity from God. One attempts to save and divinise oneself, but in the process one ends up tipping oneself back into the abyss of non-being from which we were created. You cannot become a god without receiving godhood as a gift. You cannot be so raised up without the one thing needful to assimilate the divine into the human: the cross.

There is a common misperception that the pre-modern Christian teaching of *theosis*, expressed distinctively in the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition, is somehow restated in a postmodern context in the ideology of transcendence and endless self-improvement which is transhumanism.⁹ Just as Christians, so the argument goes, have ever strived after a state beyond the human in which not only their fallenness—doing not what they want to do but what they hate to do (Rom. 7:15)—but their very creaturely limitations were transcended so too now in a contemporary context, using the aid of the latest technology, we strive to perfect the human being so that it might become a partaker (2 Pet 1:4), nay, a confector of the divine nature. In this article, I shall endeavour to distance the classic Eastern Christian Patristic teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy on *theosis* from this religious philosophy of transhumanism. I will describe critically the transhumanist religion of Mangodhood following it with an account of the very different Orthodox religion of Godmanhood.

Transhumanism: The Religion of Mangodhood

How do transhumanists generally see the cosmos? Mother Nature is something of a disappointment for many transhumanists. There is no sense of the numinous and the holy here, let alone ‘gift’ or ‘sacrament’ as we see in Christianity. The English philosopher and futurist Max More is typical here in his ‘A Letter to Mother Nature’ when he

8. Sergii Bulgakov, *Dva Grada: Issledovaniia o priroda obshchestvennykh idealov* (St Petersburg: Russian Christian Humanistic Institute Press, 1997), pp. 8–9.

9. See Ronald Cole-Turner (ed.), *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013).

writes to her that ‘with all due respect, we must say that you have in many ways done a poor job with the human constitution’ by making humans vulnerable to disease and damage, compelling them to age and die, allowing them to function only under narrow environmental conditions and by not giving them better capacity for language, memory etc. One needs to ‘amend the human constitution’ using biotech in at least seven areas ranging from ending ageing and death to not limiting human capacities ‘by remaining purely biological organisms’.¹⁰ In short, transhumanism is, like various species of Gnosticism before it, anti-body and anti-creation. It sees corporeality as that force which impedes its upwards trajectory, as transhumanist Simon Young argues: ‘As humanism freed us from the chains of superstition, let transhumanism free us from our biological chains.’¹¹ When pressed to define just what the ‘stuff’ of the cosmos might be, transhumanists describe it as ‘data’ understood as differentiated patterns of information which ultimately means that organisms are described as ‘biochemical algorithms’. The same mathematical laws apply to electronic and biochemical algorithms thereby collapsing the distinction between animal and machines:¹² ‘the idea that organisms are algorithms, and that giraffes, tomatoes and human beings are just different methods for processing data’.¹³ As the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari has observed, we are moving in this vision of the cosmos far beyond humanism, via the view that everything is data, ‘from a homo-centric to a data-centric view’.¹⁴ It would seem that creation, and indeed life itself, is just ‘data-processing’.¹⁵

‘Creation’, then, would be a misnomer for how transhumanism sees the universe, as to speak of ‘creation’ one needs a ‘Creator’ God/gods and most transhumanists deny there is any supernatural power or god beyond themselves.¹⁶ They do speak a great deal, for apparently convinced secularists, on ‘g/God’. However, ‘God’ for many transhumanists is a sort of superhuman state of ‘God-like powers’ that might well be attained by a supra-intelligent alien civilisation at certain points in its evolution. We humans, it is argued, are ever working/evolving towards going beyond ourselves as humans with no necessary reference to anything outside ourselves.¹⁷ Evolution is a project for transhumanists driven by the ‘will to power’ of humanity. Indeed, the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1944) have been an inspiration for two of the philosophical architects

10. Max More, ‘A Letter to Mother Nature’, in Max More and Natasha Vita-More (eds), *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and the Philosophy of the Human Future* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 449–50.

11. Simon Young, *Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006), p. 32 and see Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 374.

12. Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London: Vintage, 2017), p. 428.

13. Harari, *Homo Deus*, p. 429.

14. Harari, *Homo Deus*, p. 454.

15. Harari, *Homo Deus*, p. 462.

16. Russell Blackford, ‘The Great Transition: Ideas and Anxieties’, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 421.

17. Giulio Prisco, ‘Transcendent Engineering’, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, pp. 234–35.

of transhumanism: Max More and Ray Kurzweil.¹⁸ Evolution is nature transcending itself, for, as Nietzsche observed, ‘Man is something that shall be overcome’ attaining the *Übermensch*: ‘Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss.’¹⁹ The self wants to above all ‘create beyond itself’ by a ‘will to power’:²⁰

And life itself confided this secret to me: ‘Behold’, it said, ‘I am *that which must always overcome itself*. Indeed, you call it a will to procreate or a drive to an end, to something higher, farther, more manifold.’²¹

Very often this move from human to man-god or *Übermensch* is articulated in terms of an eccentric vision of evolution borrowing language from both technology and eschatology. Transhumanism’s account of evolution expands upon a Lamarckian conception of biological evolution as having a progressive driving force upwards in a sort of ladder of progress by seeing evolution as a conscious *willed* project of man overcoming nature in some distant *parousia*. In addition, the transformation of the human to the transhuman is often seen in terms of a future technological Kingdom of Mangodhood—Vernor Vinge and Kurzweil call it the ‘Singularity’²²—just beyond the horizon for which all ‘singularity-tarians’ must work to realise.²³ It is, as the eminent English cosmologist Martin Rees notes, a sort of futurist version of the Rapture.²⁴ Harari is here illustrative:

In the twenty-first century, the third big project of humankind will be to acquire for us divine powers of creation and destruction, and upgrade *Homo Sapiens* to *Homo deus* ... We want the ability to re-engineer our bodies and minds in order, above all, to escape old age, death, misery, but once we have it, who knows what else we might do with such ability? So we may well think of the new human agenda as consisting really of one project (with many branches) attaining divinity.²⁵

One needs, Harari opines, to think less of an ‘omnipotent biblical sky father’ and more in terms of the Greek or Hindu gods who capriciously love, hate, create and destroy like us albeit ‘on a much grander scale’.²⁶ In other words, transhumanists if they go in for

18. More, ‘The Philosophy of Transhumanism’, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 10 and Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, p. 373.

19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 124, 126 (these quotations appear in More and Kurzweil: see n. 18 above).

20. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 147, 225.

21. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 227, original emphasis.

22. Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, pp. 7–9 and More and Vita-More (eds), *The Transhumanist Reader*, pp. 361–417.

23. Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, pp. 369–90.

24. Martin Rees, *Our Final Hour: A Scientist’s Warning: How Terror, Error, and Environmental Disaster Threaten Humankind’s Future in This Century—On Earth and Beyond* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 19.

25. Harari, *Homo Deus*, pp. 53–54.

26. Harari, *Homo Deus*, p. 54.

religion or religious talk do not like any vision of deity that makes a sharp distinction between God and humankind, the uncreated and the created.²⁷

Divinity, Harari tells us, is not anything ‘metaphysical’ but practically, transhumanist ‘divinity’ means an exercise of the will through ‘specific super-abilities’ attained from technology. One acquires these superpowers so that the human being and nature itself can be transcended or even left wholly behind. The powers include the ability to design and create new beings, the capacity to transform one’s body into a cyborg, the knowledge to control the environment and the weather, an ability to read minds and communicate at a distance and, finally, the superman-like power that would allow one to travel at very high speeds, escape death and live indefinitely.²⁸ It almost seems as if many transhumanists spent too many hours as teenagers reading DC and Marvel superhero comic books. In envisioning the mangod or superman, the transhumanists argue not only for Intelligence Amplification (IA), perhaps through installing a chip in the brain (connected to wifi for updates), from more memory to better mathematical and linguistic skills, more ‘emotional intelligence’ and even as yet unimagined carnal facility. This is what has led to the American theological ethicist Gerald McKenny to speak of enhancement technologies as ‘technologies of desire’ *not* need, and thereby being ‘technologies of excess’.²⁹

Yet this focus on scientific and technological mastery of nature—as the path to divinity (or, at the very least, superman-like status)—has deep roots in the history of science. Francis Bacon (1561–1626) himself, one of the Fathers of the scientific method, saw the task of science as both ‘to establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe’ and that ‘the true and lawful goal of the sciences is none other than this: that human life be endowed with new discoveries and powers’, that is, ‘lay firmly the foundations and extend more widely the limits of the power and greatness of man’.³⁰

But the ultimate quest for transhumanists past and present has been to synthesise immortality. Indeed, Bacon, in his *The History of Life and Death* (1638), drew up a systematic history of corporeality in the quest to isolate relevant forms that might lead to immortality at best. More realistically he thought that future natural philosophers ‘will become the instruments and dispensers of God’s power and mercy in prolonging and renewing the life of man ... [and that] these our shoes and garments (I mean our frail bodies) are as little worn out as possible’.³¹ Later in the nineteenth century, the eccentric Russian philosopher Nikolai Fedorov (1828–1903) held that the general resurrection did not follow naturally from the resurrection of Christ. Instead, the general resurrection, he

27. More, ‘The Philosophy of Transhumanism’, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 8.

28. Harari, *Homo Deus*, p. 54.

29. Gerald P. McKenny, ‘Technologies of Desire: Theology, Ethics, and the Enhancement of Human Traits’, *Theology Today* 59.1 (April 2002), pp. 90–103 at p. 100.

30. Francis Bacon, *The New Organon and Related Writings*, ed. Fulton H. Anderson, trans. James Spedding *et al.* (New York; London: Macmillan/Library of Liberal Arts, 1960), p. 118 (I.CXXIX), p. 78 (I.LXXXI), p. 106 (I.CXVI); see Burdett, *Eschatology and the Technological Future*, pp. 12–18.

31. Bacon, *The History of Life and Death* in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. and trans. James Spedding *et al.*, 14 vols. (London: Longmans & Co., 1861 [1857–1874]), vol. V, p. 215.

argued, was the conscious ‘common task’ of humanity that constitutes the ‘essence of Christianity’ to bring about the self-consciousness of the Earth over the force of other celestial bodies and ‘involve them in a single life-giving force of resuscitation’ of all things in the universe³² thereby producing paradise or the Kingdom of God on earth.³³ In recent times, this ancient quest has resulted in a whole class of scientific transhumanists whose goal is to ‘Live Forever or Die Trying’ (the unofficial motto of the Reno-based biotech company Sierra Sciences led by American molecular biologist and gerontologist Bill Andrews which aims ‘to extend the human lifespan and healthspan’).³⁴ The flamboyant English but California-based anti-ageing activist and biomedical gerontologist Aubrey de Grey regularly cites 1000 years as the amount of time that people will live to ‘within decades’ (transhumanists often say their grand technological predictions will take place ‘in a decade’ or ‘within decades’).³⁵

Besides conquering death, transhumanists also have entertained ‘whole brain emulation’ or ‘uploading’ the content of one’s brain (‘mind’, ‘self’ etc.)—which assumes the brain is hardware and the mind is software—to computers and the internet.³⁶ Working out of the base of the power of ‘morphological freedom’,³⁷ one could, it is hypothesised, exist in the future not just in a biological mode but in a fashion where one can freely change one’s form virtually.³⁸ Kurzweil calls this mode of being, ‘human body 3.0’.³⁹ As the quest to live indefinitely seems to recede year on year despite all the technological applications, the safety net is to preserve human cadavers in low temperature preservation for future ‘reanimation’ (=cryonics)⁴⁰ when technology finally catches up with death. Transhumanism takes in various sciences including nanotechnology, biological engineering, cyborg engineering, the engineering of non-organic beings (these latter three take in biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science). All of these scientific areas presuppose the quest for AI which is

32. Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov, *The Philosophy of the Common Task* in Elisabeth Koutaissoff and Marilyn Minto (eds and trans.), *What was Man Created for?: The Philosophy of the Common Task* (Bath: Honeyglenn Publishing; /Lausanne: L’Age D’Homme, 1990), Part III, p. 80; cf. Burdett, *Eschatology and the Technological Future*, pp. 18–24.

33. Fedorov, ‘Supramoralism or General Synthesis (Universal Union)’, in *What was Man Created for?*, pp. 132–33.

34. ‘Sierra Science: Biotech for Enhanced Living’, retrieved from https://www.sierrasci.com/about_us (accessed 3 August 2018) and see the documentary, ‘The Immortalists’, retrieved from <http://theimmortalists.com/> (accessed 6 August 2018).

35. Kira Peikoff, ‘Anti-Aging Pioneer Aubrey de Grey: “People in Middle Age Now Have a Fair Chance”’, 30 January 2018, retrieved from <https://leapsmag.com/anti-aging-pioneer-aubrey-de-grey-people-middle-age-now-fair-chance/> (accessed 2 August 2018).

36. See Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 35–43; Ralph C. Merkle, ‘Uploading’, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, pp. 157–64 and Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, pp. 198–203.

37. ‘Transhumanist Declaration’ (2012) in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 55.

38. See More, ‘The Philosophy of Transhumanism’, pp. 7–8, 15.

39. Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, p. 310.

40. See ‘Alcor Life Extension Foundation: Cryonics’, retrieved from <https://alcor.org/> (accessed 2 August 2018).

now called machine ‘superintelligence’,⁴¹ which leads many commentators to use ‘bio-tech’ as a synonym for the transhumanist quest.

The relentless focus on ‘intelligence’, human or artificial, is ultimately what reveals the true diabolical shape of transhumanism. The religion of Mangodhood elevates the human being to the focus of everything as a sort of supreme divine Ego. Kurzweil envisions that in the Sixth and Final Epoch of evolution, human intelligence ‘will begin to saturate the matter and energy in its midst’ and spread out from the earth to take over all parts of the universe: ‘we will within this century be ready to infuse our solar system with our intelligence through self-replicating non-biological intelligence. It will then spread out to the rest of the universe.’⁴² This universe that will eventually become conscious is God for Kurzweil.⁴³ Transhumanism, echoing Bulgakov on Mangodhood, ends in pantheism. Harari calls it the religion of ‘Dataism’ with God as ‘the Internet-of-All-Things’.⁴⁴ But the deity being adored here is the human being as artificial god tricked once again by Satan into seizing its divine inheritance before it was ready for so great a responsibility.

Eastern Orthodox Christianity: The Religion of Godmanhood⁴⁵

But how does Eastern Orthodox Christianity, which understands itself as embodying the classical Patristic vision of Godmanhood, differ from the Mangodhood of transhumanism? If transhumanism begins with the perceived failure of creation to live up to the divine aspirations of humanity then Orthodoxy begins with gratitude for God’s gift of creation as a living ‘sacrament of the divine presence’ who is Jesus Christ, life in all its fullness (Jn 10:10).⁴⁶ Creation, moreover, as a gift need not have been created. God does not ‘need’ it. He could have acted otherwise than He has in fact acted. Creation is a surprise. Yet creation is also not ‘accidental’ or merely arbitrary, but is a gift that in some sense is to be expected as a freely given necessity from God as a God of love.⁴⁷ It is created as a fitting and appropriate (but wholly unequal) partner for God in an exchange of love and joy with its Creator who wishes to shower out his blessings upon another. Maximus the Confessor (580–662) expresses this well:

41. See Bostrum, *Superintelligence*, p. 26.

42. Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, pp. 21, 372; cf. Sergii Bulgakov (*The Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, trans. Catherine Evtuhov (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 303 n. 10) on Fichtean ideas of nature becoming reorganised by human intelligence.

43. Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, p. 390.

44. Harari, *Homo Deus*, pp. 428–62.

45. See further Brandon Gallaher, ‘Creativity, Covenant and Christ’, in Lucinda Mosher and David Marshall (eds), *God’s Creativity and Human Action: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017), pp. 79–99.

46. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd edn (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, [1963] 1988), p. 100.

47. See Brandon Gallaher, *Freedom and Necessity in Modern Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

God, full beyond all fullness, brought creatures into being not because He had need of anything, but so that they might participate in Him in proportion to their capacity and that He Himself might rejoice in His works (cf. Ps. 104:31), through seeing them joyful and ever filled to overflowing with His inexhaustible gifts.⁴⁸

There is, therefore, most certainly, unlike transhumanism, a firm distinction between the uncreated Creator God and the created creation whose pinnacle is the human being. However, Orthodoxy does not thereby alienate God from creation. Nor does it need to collapse the two—like transhumanism—ending in pantheism. The distinction of God and creation in practice is tension-filled because the creature is continually striving beyond its created capacity to participate in the divine and, in this process, as it strives, God graciously enlarges its created capacity thereby divinising it.⁴⁹ Thus we participate in God to a greater or lesser degree according to our God-given but not static-created capacity.⁵⁰ But how do we participate in him?

God creates, sustains and reveals himself in the cosmos not in any distant fashion but most intimately through his multiple divine uncreated energies. These energies are his dynamic and essential activity since energies are the activity of a nature (here the divine nature), as Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) writes: ‘God both is and is said to be the nature of all beings, in so far as all partake of Him and subsist by means of this participation: not, however, by participation in His nature—far from it—but by participation in His energy.’⁵¹ The energies are personal insofar as they are the eternal unified activity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but we can experience them in the world through the one through whom God works in all things and who utilises the energies: the Holy Spirit⁵² who is ‘everywhere present and filling all things’, as a well-known Eastern Orthodox daily prayer expresses it. These energies pervade the creation but are not identical with it and through them a creature can participate graciously, consciously and through ascetical labours in God, and become divinised. They are never separated from the divine essence because they are the personal activity of God in the world, but, while the energies, as they are ‘indivisibly divided and multiple’⁵³ in creation, are accessible, the essence is indivisible and therefore inaccessible and unknowable to creatures.⁵⁴

48. Maximus the Confessor, *400 Chapters on Love*, 3.46 [PG 90, 1029C] in *The Philokalia*, 5 vols., trans. G. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, vol. 2 (London: Faber & Faber, 1979–1995), p. 90 (final sixth volume is forthcoming).

49. See Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in Sacred Scripture: The Responses to Thalassios*, trans. Maximos Constatas (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 22.7, p. 153 and Brandon Gallaher, ‘Graced Creatureliness: Ontological Tension in the Uncreated/Created Distinction in the Sophiologies of Solov’ev, Bulgakov and Milbank’, *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 47.1-2 (2006), pp. 163–90 at 185–89.

50. Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral Ascetical Life: 150 Texts*, §69 in *The Philokalia*, 4, p. 378.

51. Palamas, *Topics*, §78, p. 382.

52. Palamas, *Topics*, §75, p. 380 and §129, p. 407.

53. Palamas, *Topics*, §69, p. 378.

54. Palamas, *Topics*, §74, p. 380.

For Orthodoxy, like transhumanism, the human being is the pinnacle of creation, the crown. However, this ‘kingship’ of creation assumes a special relationship of loving dependence on God the Creator which is something totally alien to transhumanism, founded as it is on hubristic autodivinisation. One of the traditional ways this uniqueness of humanity is expressed is by talking about the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27). The source of the potential ‘godhood’ of humankind, then, is a reference to another who is his source and on whom he always depends. The divine image has often been interpreted in terms of how the human being is given ‘the superiority of reason’⁵⁵ but reason was not just understood in terms of discursive rationality⁵⁶ but freedom and creativity.⁵⁷ It was thought to be paralleled by the fact that the human being of all animals was created upright so it might look up to see God, whom he resembled, worshipping him and acknowledging him as his source and origin and not ‘be dragged down to earth’: ‘his head is lifted high towards things above, that he may look up to what is akin to him’.⁵⁸

But to be made to be in free conscious communion and union with God is to be formed in, through, and for Jesus Christ (Col. 1:16) and it is for this reason that Irenaeus of Lyons (v. 130–c. 202) writes that the human being was made in the ‘image of Christ’.⁵⁹ Irenaeus, and other Greek Fathers after him, elaborated on this idea by distinguishing between the image and the likeness of God. For Irenaeus, Adam is created by Christ and for Christ in the initial position as body and soul animated by a breath of life from God’s Spirit.⁶⁰ He understands ‘image’ as in reference to the Son, as the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15),⁶¹ whereas ‘likeness’ he understands as in reference to the Spirit who is referred to as God’s ‘figure’.⁶² The image of God might be understood as free, rational and creative personhood with the innate possibility of partaking in conscious fellowship with God in Christ and the likeness of God is an achieved reality when the image, by

55. Basil of Caesarea, ‘First Homily: On the Origin of Humanity, Discourse 1: On that which is according to the Image’, in *On the Human Condition*, trans. Nonna Verna Harrison (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), §7, p. 36.

56. Augustine of Hippo, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis: Volume I [De genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus]*, 3.20.30, trans. John Hammond Taylor, ACW 41 (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 96.

57. See Basil of Caesarea, ‘Homily on Psalm 48’, §8, in *Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Agnes Way, FC 46 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), pp. 311–31 at 324–25 [PG 29b.449B–C] and John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith in St John of Damascus: Writings*, 2.30, trans. Frederic H. Chase (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981), pp. 264–65.

58. Basil of Caesarea, ‘Second Homily: On the Origin of Humanity, Discourse 2: On the Human Being’, in *On the Human Condition*, §15, p. 61.

59. Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching [=Dem.]*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), §22 and see 2 Cor. 4:4.

60. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus omnes Haereses [=AH]/Contre les Hérésies* (1965–1982), Sources Chrétiennes, trans. and ed. Adelin Rousseau *et al.* (Paris: Cerf, 1965–82), 5.1.3 and 12.1 (English translations adapted from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*).

61. *Dem.* 22 and *AH* 5.16.2 and cf. 2 Cor. 4:4.

62. *figuratio* (*AH* 4.7.4). *Ante Nicene Fathers* translates as *similitude*; cf. *AH* 5.6.1.

direct communion with the Person of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, is transformed into the finite image of the divine life.

The human being, then, was made, with creation, to be united with God in Jesus Christ. One way of putting this is to think of one united divine plan. Here there is no 'Plan A' and 'Plan B'. The human being, for Irenaeus, was made for salvation which is 'a second creation by means of His passion which is that [creation] out of death'.⁶³ Jesus Christ, as the eternal Word of God and Creator, not only precedes the created, but He precedes the created precisely as its Saviour, which means that the created is, not only at the end after the Fall, but at the beginning prior to the Fall, understood as that which will be saved, as Irenaeus put it: 'Since he pre-existed as one who saves, it was necessary that what might be saved also be created so that the one who saves might not be in vain.'⁶⁴

Maximus the Confessor understood this idea of humankind being foreordained for union with God differently by seeing one divine plan but with different modes. God, he argued, planned from before the ages that 'we should exist in Him' and through participation being 'imbued with the exact characteristics of His goodness'.⁶⁵ In this way, humankind might be a 'God by grace' through God coming to 'reside in all beings in a manner appropriate to each' by the many converging 'around the one human nature' so that '*God will be all things in everything*, encompassing all things and making them subsist in Himself'.⁶⁶ Adam was, therefore, called in this way to be a mediator of the different extremes of creation, synthesising them into unity and drawing them up into union with their Creator. It is precisely because humanity can unite the extremes that he was created last as a 'kind of natural bond mediating between the universal extremes through his parts'.⁶⁷ The human being, therefore, unlike transhumanism, is not only the king of creation but also a servant or caretaker of it and called to unify and perfect it in synergy with the Creator. Now, had this 'first covenant [of Adam] ... remained blameless, there would have been no occasion for a second' (with the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, ascension and second and glorious coming again) so that the mystery accomplished in Christ's incarnation is nothing other than 'proof and fulfilment of the mystery which our forefather failed to attain at the beginning of the age'.⁶⁸ In other words, God would have become incarnate even if there had been no Fall and with it the divine economy of the cross. The incarnation was the 'blessed end for which all things were brought into being' since 'for the sake of Christ—that is, for the whole mystery of Christ—that all the ages and the beings existing within those ages received their beginning and end in Christ'.⁶⁹

In the story of the Fall, the human being turned from this vocation of uniting heaven and earth in himself. Adam 'misused his freedom' turning in desire from the good which

63. *AH* 5.23.2.

64. 'Cum enim praecoxisteret saluans, oportebat et quod saluaretur fieri, uti non vacuum sit saluans' (*AH* 3.22.3).

65. Maximus, 1: *Amb.* 7 (*PG* 91.1097C), p. 133.

66. 1: *Amb.* 7 (*PG* 91.1092C), p. 121.

67. 2: *Amb.* 41 (*PG* 91.1304D–1305B), pp. 102–105.

68. 1: *Amb.* 7 (*PG* 91.1097D), p. 133.

69. Maximus, *Responses to Thalassios*, 60.3–4, pp. 428–29 and 22.2, p. 150.

was permissible ‘to what was inferior’, which was tasting of the forbidden fruit. He freely became estranged from the ‘divine and blessed goal’ of God for humanity which was for the human being to be a ‘God by grace’ and instead humankind ended up as ‘*a pile of dust*’.⁷⁰ It would be a mistake to think, however, that the religion of Godmanhood was somehow anti-science and anti-knowledge and wished humankind to know only what fits his lowly station in comparison to the religion of Mangodhood which celebrates human beings having the ultimate knowledge of reality as God (‘you will be like God, knowing good and evil’, Gen. 3:5). In fact, a variety of Fathers taught that there was nothing in and of itself wrong with Genesis 3’s ‘knowledge of good and evil’. What was wrong in the Fall story was seizing that knowledge before the human being was mature enough to assimilate it and without a loving obedience and dependence on God, which is precisely what we have argued is the mistake of transhumanism. That is indeed death as it was directly contrary to the express word of God (Gen 1:16-17; 3:2-3) and to be in communion with him was and is life. This was the ruse of Satan, as Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–373) writes:

He deceived the husbandman
 so that he plucked prematurely
 the fruit which gives forth its sweetness
 only in due season
 —a fruit that, out of season,
 proves bitter to him who plucks it.
 Through a ruse did the serpent
 reveal the truth,
 knowing well the result
 would be the opposite, because of their
 presumption;
 for blessing becomes a curse
 to him who seizes it in sin⁷¹

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is, Gregory Nazianzus (329–390) tells us, ‘contemplation’ and was not planted ‘in an evil way nor forbidden through envy’ (as the serpent opined) but contemplation ‘would be good if possessed at the right time’ and ‘only safe for those of perfect disposition’ but death for those who are simple and ‘greedy in their desire’.⁷² The tree, Maximus the Confessor likewise contends, when ‘spiritually contemplated’, possesses the knowledge of good but when received in a ‘corporeal manner’ leads to evil and death as it becomes ‘the teacher of passions, making them oblivious to divine realities’.⁷³ Had humanity rejected the serpent’s appeal then in time humanity would have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, it no longer being withheld from them, and

70. 1: *Amb.* 7 (PG 91.1092C–D).

71. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), Hymn XII. 3, p. 161.

72. Gregory Nazianzus, ‘Oration 45: On Holy Pascha’, in *Festal Orations*, trans. Nonna Verna Harrison (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 45.8, p. 167.

73. Maximus, *Responses to Thalassios*, ‘Introduction’, 1.2.18, p. 87.

from it they would have acquired, as transhumanism now seeks *without God* and *by its own will*, ‘infallible knowledge’ and from the Tree of Life ‘immortal life’ and they would have ‘acquired divinity in humanity’.⁷⁴ Having ‘already become God through divinisation’ humankind might have been able to examine ‘with God the creations of God’ and come to know them ‘not as man but as God’ since they would have had by grace the very ‘same wise and informed knowledge of beings that God has, on account of his intellect and powers of perception’.⁷⁵ The serpent, by convincing humanity to disobey God, ‘withheld divinity from them by means of the divinity which it promised them, and it brought about that those, to whom it had promised enlightenment from the Tree of Knowledge, should not have their eyes illumined by the Tree of Life as promised’.⁷⁶ This is precisely why we have argued that transhumanism is simply Satanic as it falls into the age-old ruse of the Evil One in seizing divinity for itself and thereby losing it forever.

This vocation of being ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1:4) is, Orthodoxy teaches, reattained in Jesus Christ and specifically in, by and through his life which culminated in his death and resurrection. Here we see yet another difference from transhumanism which attempts to eliminate death technologically. The religion of Godmanhood, in contrast, sees death in Christ as the only sure path to a truly eternal life through incorporation into his divinity. In the famous formula of Irenaeus, God in Christ ‘became what we are in order that He might make us what He is Himself’.⁷⁷ Christ both reopens the door and sets the pattern of our own divinisation. His own ‘unfathomable self-emptying’ in taking human flesh and obedience even unto death on a cross was ‘brought about for the deification of our nature’.⁷⁸ As Athanasius of Alexandria (296–373) famously put it: ‘For he became man that we might become divine; and he revealed himself through a body that we might receive an idea of the invisible Father; and he endured insults from men that we might inherit incorruption’.⁷⁹ Humans, in other words, are to ‘become partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1:4), adopted sons and daughters of God in Christ, as Cyril of Alexandria (378–444) says, ‘through grace by imitation’.⁸⁰ As one Byzantine hymn puts it: ‘That you might make those born of earth partakers in the divine nature, you took our flesh from the Virgin, and became poor. Holy are you, O Lord!’⁸¹ Here the idea is that God graciously condescends to become a human being, becoming, as Maximus the Confessor put it, a human being for the sake of human beings, and by exchanging His condition for our broken human condition reveals the power that

74. Ephrem, *The Commentary on Genesis*, section II, §23 in *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 214.

75. Maximus, *Responses to Thalassios*, ‘Introduction’, 1.2.18, p. 87.

76. Ephrem, *The Commentary on Genesis*, section II, §23, p. 214.

77. Irenaeus, *AH V*, pref.

78. Maximus the Confessor, ‘On the Lord’s Prayer’, in *The Philokalia*, 2, p. 286.

79. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, §54 in *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 269.

80. Cyril of Alexandria, ‘Commentary on John’, in Cyril of Alexandria, ed. and trans. Norman Russell (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), I.9, 89c, p. 101.

81. Oktoechos/Paraklitiki, Canon of the Theotokos at Matins on Sunday, Ode III, Tone Three, trans. Archim. Ephrem Lash, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20160322163734/http://anastasis.org.uk/sun3mc.htm> (accessed 8 August 2018).

elevates humanity to become God through his love for God and thereby brings God down to become a human being because of God's great love for humanity: 'by this blessed exchange, it renders God man by reason of the divinization of man, and man by reason of the Incarnation of God. For the Logos of God (who is God) wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment'.⁸²

Divinisation in no way makes us gods by nature, for the creature is not its Creator. The uncreated and the created are different, but forever exist in a creative tension. God has freely chosen to be God with the world to which he has bound himself. A starker difference from the pantheism of Mangodhood could not be imagined. Through Christ's life, death and resurrection we are given eternal life through participating in that deifying death and resurrection through our baptism into his body the Church and conforming to his cruciform and resurrected shape through his Spirit by our anointing in Chrismation (=Confirmation in the West). These sacraments are renewed every time we receive the Eucharist, consuming the body and blood of the crucified and resurrected Lord and thereby entering into the deifying mystery of life through death. The pattern of the life, death and resurrection is the pattern of our liberation from sin and death and our ultimate divinisation:

For through His passion He conferred dispassion, through suffering repose, and through death eternal life. By His privations in the flesh He re-established and renewed the human state, and by His own incarnation He bestowed on human nature the supranatural grace of deification.⁸³

Yet one cannot appropriate the deifying gift of Christ without obedience, humility and repentance, without profound acknowledgement of our dependence on God, 'for it is by warfare the soul makes progress': 'Give blood and receive the Spirit'.⁸⁴ The self-humiliation of God even unto death on the cross which leads to our deification sets the pattern of the whole spiritual life as an unceasing 'salvific labour of asceticism' or spiritual training for the life to come that involves 'extract[ing] the nails of desire, which fasten us to sensual pleasure' thereby learning 'self-mastery' and becoming 'genuine disciples of virtue' ever bent on the 'devotion to the Beautiful'.⁸⁵ In working upon the self ascetically one strives for a state of stillness before God, ceaselessly calling upon the name of Jesus in the Prayer of the Heart: 'Stillness is unceasing worship and waiting upon God. Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with each breath, and then you will know the value of stillness.'⁸⁶ Transhumanism, as we saw earlier, sees the transformation of the human being into a god as a purely external process of technical exertion of the will upon the

82. Maximus, 1: *Amb.* 7 (PG 91.1084C–D), p. 107.

83. Maximus the Confessor, 'Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice', in *The Philokalia*, 2: Fourth Century, §43, p. 246.

84. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, 2nd edn, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), John the Dwarf, §13, p. 88 and Longinus, §5, p. 123.

85. Maximus, 1: *Amb.* 13 (PG 91.1209A–B), p. 351.

86. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 2nd edn, trans. and ed. Lazarus Moore (Boston, MA: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2001), 27.60–61, p. 207.

self (seen in the most materialist fashion as the body and brain). There is no prayer and contemplation here. There is no calling on a Saviour. In stark contrast, Orthodoxy or the religion of Godmanhood sees salvation in light of a sort of prayerful science of self-transformation through interior self-work ever calling on God in Christ in faith with the heart (not the brain) as the focus.

As we said above, only repentance for our sins, obedience and humility lead to the ‘dispassion that deifies’ (*apatheia*).⁸⁷ The heart of cultivating dispassion is the cutting out or complete renunciation of your own will in all things—‘distrust of oneself in everything, however good it may be, right to the end of one’s life’—so that one’s will might be reborn in God’s will.⁸⁸ The monastic tradition saw this ‘tomb of the will and the resurrection of humility’⁸⁹ as only taking shape in our complete surrender to another in obedience, in this case, a spiritual Father or Mother, whose direction (i.e. will) is taken as being from God: ‘Blessed is he who mortifies his will to the end, and leaves the care of himself to his director in the Lord; for he will be placed at the right hand of the Crucified.’⁹⁰ The religion of Mangoodhood/transhumanism, in contrast, begins with the will to power over creation. John Climacus (579–649), typically, describes the ascetical ‘narrow way’ leading to deification as involving a complete self-mortification involving both stomach (fasting, vigils etc.) and the soul (silence when condemned, acceptance of humiliation in humility etc.).⁹¹

Conclusion

Two paths of divinisation are set before contemporary humanity. One is the way of death and evil, the technological *theosis* of transhumanism, symbolised by the brain. The other is the way of life and good, the *theosis* of classical Christianity and the Fathers enshrined in Eastern Orthodoxy, symbolised by the heart. I have argued that the transhumanist form of human biotechnological enhancement is the revelation of the horror of our own autodivination, our Mangoodhood, how we have transformed ourselves into an oversized and disembodied brain such as IT in *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L’Engle (1918–2007):

A disembodied brain. An oversized brain, just enough larger than normal to be completely revolting and terrifying. A living brain. A brain that pulsed and quivered, that seized and commanded. No wonder the brain was called IT. IT was the most horrible, the most repellent thing she had ever seen, far more nauseating than anything she had ever imagined with her conscious mind, or that had ever tormented her in her most terrible nightmares.⁹²

But there is another path and another vision than this living death: the pre-modern and pre-humanist vision of Godmanhood. This is the way of blessing. The heart or soul is the

87. St Theognostos, ‘On the Practice of the Virtues, Contemplation and the Priesthood’, in *The Philokalia*, 2, §25, p. 364.

88. John Climacus, *The Ladder*, 4.5, p. 22.

89. Climacus, *The Ladder*, 4.3, p. 21.

90. Climacus, *The Ladder*, 4.44, p. 38.

91. Climacus, *The Ladder*, 2.8, p. 13.

92. Madeleine L’Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time* (New York: Dell, 1962), p. 158.

focus of the religion of Godmanhood as we see famously in a passage from Pseudo-Macarius (fl. fourth century):

The heart itself is but a small vessel, yet there also are dragons and there are lions; there are poisonous beasts and all the treasures of evil. And there are rough and uneven roads; there are precipices. But there is also God, also the angels, the life and the kingdom, the light and the apostles, the treasures of grace—there are all things.⁹³

We are in no way cursed as moderns to follow the luciferian and brainiac fantasies of Mangodhood exemplified by contemporary transhumanism but which, as we have argued, are, in substance, as old as the book of Genesis. We *can* choose life so that we and our descendants can live.

We shall close with a call. If there is to be a form of biotechnological enhancement that leads to life and good and does not end in the Satanic lies of Mangodhood, death, then it will only come through the ancient wisdom of Godmanhood being both clearly articulated and then creatively put into critical conversation with the practitioners of the various techniques of biotech. Theologians need to talk to technologists. Mt Athos needs to meet Silicon Valley. The next step after distinguishing Mangodhood from Godmanhood is to think anew technologies beginning with the attention of the mind but then allowing it to descend into the heart. Only there, in the heart, where it meets its loving Creator, can a divine-human future lie, a future that neither scorns technology nor mistakes that power for its Creator.

93. Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, ed. and trans. George A. Maloney (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), Hom. 43.7, p. 222.