

3.1 Transhumanism, the Human Genome, and Cloning

“Transhumanists hope that by responsible use of science, technology, and other rational means we shall eventually manage to become post-human, beings with vastly greater capacities than present human beings have.”¹ Nick Bostrom

With this quotation from the co-founder of the World Transhumanist Association,² Nick Bostrom, we can see that at the heart of transhumanism there is a clear plan, a 21st-century form of Eugenics. With a degree from the London School of Economics Bostrom teaches at Oxford University as Director of Future of Humanity Institute and of the Programme on the Impacts of Future Technology. Others in the field include Gregory Stock, author of the best-seller *Redesigning Humans: Our Inevitable Genetic Future* (Stock, 2002); Nicholas Agar, Bioethicist who promotes in his book *Liberal Eugenics. In Defense of Human Enhancement* (Agar, 2004) a form of liberal eugenics via the use of new reproductive technologies; and John Harris from the University of Manchester, who in his book *Enhancing Evolution* (Harris, 2007) considers it not simply profitable but a moral obligation to “augment man.”

These transhumanists hope that man become stronger, more intelligent, and happier. When they say “stronger” they mean an elaboration of a body that is more resistant to diseases, to stress, and is able to have better sense capacities. This self-made man, stronger than the one God made, is like a version 2.0 of man, and we see this in cyber soldiers which do not seem too far off of the Terminator sci-fi movies. This man is also more intelligent than man today, and we see this already with medication like Ritalin but more specifically in the technologically-advanced “brain boosters.” While one can be stronger and more intelligent, does that make him happier? After all, St. Thomas Aquinas defines the good as “that which all desire” and which brings them to perfection; this rest of the desire in the final perfection is happiness in rational, intelligent creatures like men. At least that is the way the logic would work.³ Clearly, these thinkers are not thinking along the lines of St. Thomas Aquinas because they hope to “produce” happiness from the outside with medication. At least that is what we read in David Pearce’s *Hedonist Manifesto* from 2006.

Clearly, among the first victims of such a philosophy are the down babies. Jean-Marie Le Méné, President of the Fondation Jérôme Lejeune, writes in his book *Les premières victimes du transhumanisme* that 96% of all down babies are aborted. It may appear like something kind to do to the poor children who would have to suffer their pathologies all of their lives, but this is just another form of Eugenics. Generally speaking, Transhumanism stems from the belief that man is a failed experiment, an idea that is tied to evolutionism. From this, according to Le Méné, we see a market of medicine which is willing to be used to bring about death as well as to fabricate human life in an industrial sort of way. Coupled with legal positivism, which sees law as something changeable according to the needs and not as tied to what is fundamentally just, we find ourselves with a deadly recipe for humanity and for the weakest among us, especially infants in the womb and elderly awaiting their deaths. Le Méné sees how the procreative industry, i.e. that intimately tied to IVF, represents an anticipation of transhumanism, much like abortion, euthanasia and trisomy or “down” screening.

We are basically faced with a regression into barbarism where we shall see supermen impose themselves on subhumans. Such a scenario can only signal the end of our human race, as is very well evinced in a pro-life Superman movie called *Man of Steel*, released on

¹ Bostrom, Nick, “Transhumanism FAQ: A General Introduction, version 2.1”, 2003 on line: <http://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-faq/>

² Founded in 1998, the WTA was renamed Humanity+ in 2008.

³ Cfr. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae* II, 9 and *STI* q. 59, a. 1.

June 14, 2013. The opening scene of this movie shows how Superman's mother is giving birth to Superman naturally in a world where natural birth is illegal and which is now literally falling apart. It is for this reason that Superman gets sent off to another far-off planet, our own. This is not to mention another movie from a few years earlier, *Children of Men* (2006), which described a world where no one could get pregnant, except one unfortunate lady who was sought after with ferocity throughout the movie. While these sci-fi movies seem crazy, they are pointing out something that is happening in real science. Let us not forget that *Man of Steel* came shortly after the May 2013 article in the journal *Cell* which described the successful experiment of cloned human embryos carried through by Shoukhrat Mitalipov and his team at the Oregon Health & Science University.

At the core of this is the immanentism common to Modern Philosophy which basically wants to resolve all our issues humanly. This is what Fr. James Schall makes abundantly clear in his 2017 Holy Week article, "Body and soul: the Resurrection of Christ answers our desire to live forever."⁴ Linking the Jewish Passover to the Christian Easter, Fr. Schall, SJ, attests to the central and absolutely critical belief that Christ rose from the dead in the body. The companion belief – that we ourselves are destined to share in "the resurrection of the body and life everlasting," as the Creed says – has been affirmed in different ways even by Marxist thinkers and transhumanists, Fr Schall notes:

The truth the transhumanists have grasped is that we do wish to live forever as the unique persons we are. The truth that the Marxist philosophers grasp is that, even in our sins, we are not complete as human beings without the unity of body and soul.

Even so, the resurrection is a challenging doctrine and has always been so. In a beautiful reflection on the gospel account of "doubting Thomas", Presbyterian Pastor Campbell Markham⁵ points out that this is not, in the end, about a lack of evidence:

There is nothing illogical about believing in the resurrected Jesus. There is nothing unscientific about believing this—if God is there, then of course he can raise his Son to life! The problem is not evidential: there is abundant reliable eyewitness evidence, and colossal circumstantial evidence, for the resurrection of Jesus. The problem is that we don't want to believe.

One can think that if we really *want* more people to believe, we have to show them that it makes us better, happier, more attractive people. Witnesses to the faith that is in us. If the sceptics can believe in us, they could believe in a whole lot more.

Transhumanism, Bioconservatism or a Third Way

Of course, there are those who look for the betterment of man but who do not hold to the positions of Mitalipov and others in the modality of making man better. Rather, these thinkers look to conserve people as much as is biologically possible. There are the simple bioconservatives. As Nicolas Le Dévédec and Fany Guis explain in an article from November 19, 2013, "L'humain augmenté, un enjeu social," there are three conceptual

⁴ <https://www.mercatornet.com/mobile/view/body-and-soul-the-resurrection-of-christ-answers-our-desire-to-live-forever>

⁵ <https://www.mercatornet.com/mobile/view/unbelieving-the-resurrection>

approaches we face today in the academic world : transhumanism, bioconservatism, and a bioethical third way which they describe in their article.⁶ After all, it is not that strange for us to consider the alteration of mankind today if we but think of the fact that many people are on mood-altering medications of one sort or another. The debate between the Transhumanists and the Bioconservatives emerged at the beginning of the 21st-century. For the transhumanist movement human augmentation represents the opportunity for the human being to become an “artisan” of his own evolution. According to these transhumanist enthusiasts the convergence of technological revolutions marks the beginning of a new Renaissance. The Bioconservatives, instead, see these technological advancements with much more caution. In fact, according to Le Dévédec and Guis, such technological progress is seen as an attack on human nature and on the most fundamental human values. Let us say that I tend to side with the bioconservatives, especially in an epoch when money and other utilitarian-based interests dominate the scene.

Among these bioconservatives, we can think of Francis Fukuyama, Leon Kass, and Michael Sandel in this group. All members of President’s Council on Bioethics created in 2001 by President George W. Bush, their 2003 report *Beyond Therapy*, can be considered a bioconservative approach to Transhumanism. They basically seek to re-establish health in individuals who have undergone major injuries on the workplace. They are looking out for the rights of man. They see the risks of Transhumanism and stress how the human being defines himself according to his nature in the biological sense of the term, and they link this with the religious experience. Sandel’s *The Case Against Perfection* shows the risks of a promethean desire to control nature, especially human nature. He stresses the importance of looking at life as a gift. He writes:

“I do not think the main problem with enhancement and genetic engineering is that they undermine effort and erode human agency. The deeper danger is that they represent a kind of hyperagency – a Promethean aspiration to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires. The problem is not the drift to mechanism but the drive to mastery. And what the drive to mastery misses and may even destroy is an appreciation of the gifted character of human powers and achievements.”⁷

According to this perspective, medicine cannot substitute nature. Rather, its role is to accompany nature, to be therapeutic in helping nature reestablish its proper order. However, what is the distinction between therapy and betterment? This is where the debate stems, as we read in philosophers like George Canguilhem. Another matter that such philosophers consider is the distinction between the individual and the common good. They often show that transhumanism is the result of a strong individualism which does not take into consideration the negative effects such measures have on society as a whole. We have but to consider Fritz Allhoff and his colleagues at the National Science Foundation who stress the betterment of man and his freedom. However, who is to judge this? Would what Lance Armstrong’s doping to better his performance be considered ethical? If we were to follow these transhumanist positions, we could not deny him his right to take steroids, but something about the justice of the matter in sportsmanship stops

⁶ Nicolas Le Dévédec et Fany Guis, « L’humain augmenté, un enjeu social », *SociologieS* [En ligne], Premiers textes, mis en ligne le 19 novembre 2013, consulté le 26 janvier 2017. URL : <http://sociologies.revues.org/4409>. Here is the citation on the first page : D’un côté, l’opposition entre « transhumanistes » et « bioconservateurs » procède d’une conception naturalisée de l’humain. De l’autre, la position des penseurs bioéthiciens se revendiquant d’une « troisième voie » pragmatique relève d’une approche gestionnaire.

⁷ Michael Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection*, Belknap, Cambridge, 2009, pp. 26-27.

us from going there. This is where we must always consider the effects—even extreme—of our premises to see the validity of these premises, and Aristotle makes this abundantly clear in a number of his works. In other words, some regulation is necessary, and we go back to the big moral debate of today by showing yet again that freedom cannot be absolute.

In terms of drugs, we cannot simply stop at the problem of steroids, but we see that psychological medications that alter or augment our human capacities are quite normal today, but what are the real necessities and side-effects of such drugs? Are economic reasons pushing them too far? This happens in many cases of people who do not even need such drugs, and the studies to prove this are plethora. At the root of these problems one can consider the very large definition of health proposed by the World Health Organization in 1946: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and does not only consist of an absence of disease or infirmity.” With such a large definition, it is no wonder that we now find ourselves in disagreement about the limits of well-being. In such a context, people have the false freedom to choose whatever such health indicates. For instance, we think of the pharmaceutical company Pfizer using the slogan “Better than well.” We see the abuse people make of Ritalin. Why not simply try to reduce one’s many activities, especially in children? This is where traditional norms of virtues like temperance fall in. Granted, sometimes it is needed, but it cannot become the only means to “normality.”

As we know, this also clearly connects with prenatal diagnostics and everything else that implies. We begin to choose how we want our children to be, and this is just the starting point. There is no telling how far these elastic moral principles will take us. This is what is scary about Transhumanism. As Rachel Hurst correctly sums up, “*The cultural and political ideologies underpinning the new genetics work to a medical model of disability, seeing disabled people as solely consisting of their impairments – not their intrinsic humanity.*”⁸

Transhumanism and the Human Genome Project

On June 2nd, 2016, Joel Achenbach wrote an article for The Washington Post entitled “After secret Harvard meeting, scientists announce plans for synthetic human genomes.” Basically, Achenbach talks about a group of 130 scientists and policy leaders discussing the creation of an entire human genome in the laboratory.⁹ The claim that they are launching a project to reduce considerably the cost of synthesizing genomes. In a more recent editorial by Salvino Leone in the Italian journal *Bio-ethos* we read how Professor Church, a geneticist at Harvard Medical School and one of the four leading organizers of the secret meeting, explains that this would allow doctors to grow human organs for transplants.¹⁰ In other words, it would be the creation of the genetic information of the individual person sequenced in the chromosomes. The first cell would be synthetically cloned, then the development that follows would be natural. While one can say that the artificial synthesis of a few genetic characters is not in itself morally negative, just as one can say that such

⁸ Rachel Hurst, “The Perfect Crime”, in J. Wilsdon & P. Miller (dir.), *Better Humans? The Politics of Human Enhancement and Life Extension*, London, Demos 2006, pp. 114-121. This quote is found in p. 117.

⁹ Achenbach, Joel, “After secret Harvard meeting, scientists announce plans for synthetic human genomes,” The Washington Post, June 2, 2016.

¹⁰ Leone, Salvino, “È stato davvero creato in laboratorio il Genoma Umano?” *Bio-ethos*, n. 27 maggio-agosto 2016, pp. 5-6. In this editorial we also read that there were 150 scientists, not 130 as Achenbach writes, but that is a very secondary detail.

organ transplants do not seem morally dubious, there is clearly much more to this than meets the eye. Given the gender ideology that pervades today, the critical observer has to be suspicious. In fact, the controversial point is that this could lead to the situation where from one cell we get a new individual completely detached from the father and the mother, completely detached from the reproductive process. If detachment from the parents is already happening with IVF, bettering this technology can only lead to more detachment of the parents from the reproductive process—and obviously from the educative process—of the child. When we look at it this way, we have to see the negative moral implications involved.

Craig Venter of the Human Genome Project explains in an interview the complexities of creating an entirely human genome. While the genes in a bacteria, for instance, are in the 400s, those in man are in the 20,000s, so the money involved in such research is objectively much higher, especially since one has to work with more than one person.¹¹ Apart from such technicalities, I ask myself other questions. Suppose that such projects are technically and economically feasible. What would the advantage be of creating life in a laboratory? Mind you, this is not your standard in-vitro fertilization. Would it not simply be sufficient to synthesize single healthy genes to substitute the unhealthy ones? After all, these new techniques are always sold to us with the claim that it would somehow better our health. What we do know from all such human interventions in life is that they are very frequently fundamentally disrespectful of the very life they claim to defend. No matter what instrumental or final end they have in mind, they are not looking at human life with sacred respect, and when such is the starting point there is no telling what monsters we shall create in the long-run. In a number of his logical works, Aristotle makes it clear that if one wishes to know the worth of an idea, he should consider the logical consequence of the given idea. This is why one cannot help but turn to the logical consequence of the promethean creation of the Frankenstein monster when one reads of such studies, and one is not wrong to go down that logical route. One has only to think of the recent article in *Cell* magazine, where the hybrid between a human and a pig has been created at the Salk Institute of Biological Studies, to see what I mean.¹² American scientists have injected human stem cells into the embryo of a pig, implanting it in the uterus of a sow to allow it to grow. After four weeks, the stem cells were developed in the precursors of various types of tissues, including heart, liver and neurons.¹³

Even though Salvino Leone does not believe it possible that we can unveil all of the secrets of God and nature with any such technology, his concerns are shared by others. At one point, Achenbach writes, “The promoters of synthetic genomes envision a project that would eventually be on the same scale as the Human Genome Project of the 1990s, which led to the sequencing of the first human genomes. The difference this time would be that,

¹¹ <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/408606/craig-venters-genome/>

¹² [http://www.cell.com/cell/fulltext/S0092-8674\(16\)31752-4](http://www.cell.com/cell/fulltext/S0092-8674(16)31752-4)

¹³ There were Transplantable organs, for instance. “This is a very important first step towards the development of animal embryos with human organs functioning,” said lead researcher Juan Carlos Izpisua Belmonte, a professor in the Salk Institute of Biological Studies. “The ultimate goal is to produce transplantable tissues or functioning organs, but we are still far from this,” he added. The other element of study included was is called The embryo chimera. The embryo called “chimera” (recalling the mythical creature with a lion's head, goat's body and serpent's tail) was “highly inefficient.” For this reason scientists have suppressed it before any human-animal mix could be born. The research has examined 1,500 pig embryos for four years; this is a period of time much longer than expected, due to the complex nature of the experiments. The ethical aspect . Clearly, creating human-animal hybrids is a controversial issue, which poses enormous ethical questions, particularly if the experiment can theoretically lead to the emergence of animals with human qualities and, even with “superior” intelligence. However, Ju Wu, of the Salk Institute, pointed out that the level of human contribution to pig embryos was “low” and did not include a brain cell precursor.

instead of “reading” genetic codes, which is what sequencing does, the scientists would be “writing” them. They have dubbed this the “Genome Project-write.” So, man’s playing God as Prometheus has definitely entered the picture here. Certainly, they would never put it this way. In their report, they write, “[T]he goal of HGP-write is to reduce the costs of engineering and testing large genomes, including a human genome, in cell lines, more than 1,000-fold within ten years, while developing new technologies and an ethical framework for genome-scale engineering as well as transformative medical applications.”¹⁴

The plan drew a negative response from the head of the National Institutes of Health, Francis Collins, who had led the earlier Human Genome Project. Collins correctly stated, “There are only limited ethical concerns about synthesizing segments of DNA for laboratory experiments. But whole-genome, whole-organism synthesis projects extend far beyond current scientific capabilities, and immediately raise numerous ethical and philosophical red flags.” Achenbach seems to find this too drastic when he writes, “No one is talking about creating human beings from scratch. One application of cheaper genome synthesis, according to geneticist George Church, one of the authors of the Science article, would be to create cells that are resistant to viruses. These would not be cells used directly in human therapies, but rather in cell lines grown by the pharmaceutical industry for developing drugs. Such processes are vulnerable now to viral contamination.” However, for the sceptics among us, Achenbach may appear too hopeful and naive because we have all seen how nefarious projects of all sorts get passed with innocuous-sounding language. We are all well too aware of this. The fact there was secrecy in the meeting does not help their cause very much, and Drew Endy, an associate professor of Bioengineering at Stanford University, agrees. In fact, he tweeted this comment: “If you need secrecy to discuss your proposed research (synthesizing a human genome), you are doing something wrong.”¹⁵ Other professors have expressed concern as well. Endy and Laurie Zoloth, professors of medical ethics and humanities at Northwestern University, published an essay in which they said that, although this technology has promising applications, “it is easy to make up far stranger uses of human genome synthesis capacities.”¹⁶ Endy Zoloth, in fact, does not appreciate how the group is proceeding without approval of the broader scientific community. Something is odd about such research.

Theological and Philosophical conclusions

Theologically speaking, if the human becomes trans-human or post-human, then this would mean that the false Gnostic illusion that man can come to salvation by knowing or doing something particular has come to prevail, Archbishop Giampaolo Crepaldi reminds us in an editorial he writes for the *Bollettino di Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa*.¹⁷ The Archbishop continues by affirming that technology, or more specifically the “techne” mentality, which ends up overcoming and denying nature, cannot be where man finds his salvation. The alarm bell about which His Excellency warns is precisely the number of currents that finance and sustain such transhumanism with enormous financial resources. The Church can rightfully see this problem because it is not new. Not only do we have the Titan Prometheus in Greek Mythology, but we have the Tower of Babel in Genesis. Basically, it is man trying to be God, and this is given a philosophical order in Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* comes to mind.

¹⁴ Achenbach, Joel, “After secret Harvard meeting, scientists announce plans for synthetic human genomes,” *The Washington Post*, June 2, 2016.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ <https://cosmosmagazine.com/society/should-we-synthesise-a-human-genome>. (In the Achenbach article).

¹⁷ Crepaldi, Giampaolo, “All’inizio non era la gnosi ma il Verbo,” *Bollettino di Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa*, no. 2, anno xii, aprile-giugno 2016, p. 45.

In his book *Peace among the Willows*, published in 1968, Howard B. White analyzed Bacon's *New Atlantis*¹⁸ claiming that this work provides the fullest sense of Bacon's political theory, especially regarding what he calls the secularization of politics and the glorification of the power of science to serve the interests of the secular state. Looking at Bacon's use of religious themes, White sees how Bacon manipulates them "in order to subvert Christian ideas and transform them into a culturally acceptable justification for a preoccupation with luxury and materialism." This is basically the transformation of man's quest from the search for the "heavenly city" to the quest to create his own earthly city. This would entail a change in the philosophical quest from an effort to understand God, His Creation, and man's place in this Creation to a pursuit to understand what men can make on their own. Others take the same position. For example, Jerry Weinberger, Marina Leslie, and David Innes are considered in this group. Studies by Charles Whitney, Amy Boesky and others see Bacon's thought as the primary source for political ideologies that underlie different forms of nationalism and imperialism. While Bacon's thinking can certainly be seen along these lines, others like Steven McKnight argue that "Bacon's program of utopian reform, as presented in *New Atlantis* is grounded in genuinely and deeply felt religious convictions, which serve as the foundation for his program of political and social prosperity through the advancement of learning."¹⁹ McKnight compares Bacon's version of the myth of Atlantis to the one found in Plato's *Critias* and *Timaeus*. He claims that "Bacon uses this primordial history to portray a golden age that has been virtually lost from memory; as a result, humanity has been left with a truncated account of its past achievements. Bacon refers to an ancient wisdom that has been lost and replaced by impotent, inferior philosophies. Yet the purpose of the Platonic myth in "New Atlantis" is to instill hope that this knowledge can be recovered and the state of civilizational excellence restored."²⁰

Notwithstanding McKnight's very persuasive argument, we cannot fail to see that there are other interpretations of Bacon's work, and many historians who cover the field of the history of ideas see the epochal shift which has taken place since the Enlightenment. One has only to think of Paul Hazard and Christopher Dawson to see this. We can also think of the recent 2014 work by Charles T. Rubin, *The Eclipse of Man* or C.S. Lewis' famous *The Abolition of Man* to think that there is a justification for concern when one sees the secularization of man tied to his own destruction. The use of science as a merely efficient cause without bearing in mind the importance of final causality is what is particularly dangerous because it is blind use of power. It is like putting certain perfectly normal instruments in the hands of someone unable to use them. Any mother can say that the knife she uses to cut the meat which feeds her child could be the very knife the child uses to harm himself. It does not take much to understand such a self-evident truth.

As Salvino Leone correctly asserts at the end of his editorial piece, we are dealing with an ethical perspective that is evermore related to metaphysics. He writes that it is a line that is always more difficult to define as we approach the infinitely which is at the origins of mankind. He correctly writes: "Di fatto l'uomo non sarà più oggetto passivo, quasi spettatore dell'evoluzione su se stesso ma artifice diretto, protagonista, soggetto, potendola determinare e orientare in un senso o nell'altro. Non occorrerà solo scienza e coscienza ma anche e soprattutto sapienza."²¹ Indeed these are wise words! It is with these words that I turn to a recent article by Prof. Giovanni Turco, professor of political philosophy.

¹⁸McKnight, Stephen, "Francis Bacon's God," *The New Atlantis*, Fall 2005.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Leone, Salvino, *ibid.*, p. 6.

Turco stresses how this is all the natural consequence of modern philosophy. We have gone from René Descartes and Francis Bacon to Darwin, Nietzsche, and Teilhard de Chardin, from the theories of eugenic betterment to those that deal with the cybernetic intellect. The last phase is precisely this phase of going beyond man himself, even using cybernetics to do so. It is the admixture of man and non-man to make a superman. It is all constructed and artificial, of course, and what is crazy about all of this is that while in the 19th-century, the Church had to fight for the supernatural against outright naturalism, she is now finding herself having to defend natural law. The cause for this is clearly the move away from God. Once one forgets God, one will eventually forget his creature, man. According to the Fathers, after the sin, man is still in the image of God but has lost his likeness to God. Now, it appears that we are trying to eliminate even the image, and man is becoming a brute, much like what St. Thomas describes in the *De Veritate* q. 24. However, even in the *Summa Theologiae*, the Angelic Doctor thinks of such a key distinction. The Angelic Doctor further made a distinction between the brute and man saying: “The souls of brute animals have no *per se* operations they are not subsistent. For the operation of anything follows the mode of its being.”²² This implies that the soul of man is subsistent since God directly created it and that of brute animal is contingent for it has no life after this life. Is this what we are seeking to do with Transhumanism? Is this even possible? Are we just dealing with the body? Does not this have an influence on the soul? These are the questions that loom in the background as we confront such Transhumanism that tries to dominate nature and man in this epoch of the primacy of praxis which wants to render the eschaton immanent. In such a context freedom becomes a freedom from nature and being itself. What are the implications? Is what is left of man after such experiments even human anymore?

Turco shows how the Cartesian binomial *res cogitans-res extensa* is at the root of this ideology and that the body in such a philosophical approach is no longer harmonious with the mind but an object that can be malleable according to the whims and wishes of the mind. This is the extreme conclusion of such an approach. In a classic worldview, rather, we see the rational soul (guided by the intellect) which in turn orders the animal and vegetative souls. The closer the rational soul is to God and the Truth, the more ordered the other “parts” become. This is by no means a mechanistic vision. After such a mechanistic vision, even matter is surpassed as we are now seeing in the postmodern world, a world in which we see Sartre’s primacy of existence over being coming to its logical conclusion. No wonder Simone de Beauvoir who was so influential in the new gender theories so close to someone whose philosophy would easily confirm what we are now seeing in the Transhumanist perspective which unites many modern philosophers, from Descartes and Bacon to Spinoza, Hume, and Bentham. After all, for Spinoza, Turco affirms, nothing is determined any longer because of the one substance, and for Hume we are nothing but a bundle of perceptions. Bentham is then the practical, utilitarian, and legal positivistic conclusion to such a vision of man. If knowledge is power, as Bacon would stress, then the limits of this power grow ever more as technology permits. Turco shows how all of this has Gnostic roots in man’s desire to save himself.

The Family as a solution...

On January 12th, 2017, John Horvat II published an interesting article in Crisis Magazine entitled “Why do people do such barbarous things?” He expressed in dismay that “Hardly a day passes when some barbarous act does not jump to the headlines...” He continues listing what he is considering, “whether it be the sadistic torturing, terrorist beheadings, mass shootings or truck ramming murder sprees (not to mention genocide and war), these

²² *STI* q. 75, a. 3.

acts are becoming ever more common.” He concludes, “There is something inexplicable and sinister in such behavior since it seems to go against human nature.”

Clearly, man is not becoming more human or even transhuman. Man is reverting to become a brute. Horvat correctly observes that many people “simply shake their heads and write off such brutal acts of violence as sad testimonies to man’s inhumanity to man. They dare not delve deeper since it might unearth unsettling questions about our society in general.” Clearly, Horvat shows that we not only must address this problem but that we must delve deeper into its causes.

By *via negative* of the same argument, Horvat says that people normally do not do barbarous things because the most fundamental desires of the human heart go in the opposite direction. After all, by nature, we tend to search out all that is good, true, and beautiful. It is an impulse that sets in motion powerful movements inside our souls, and Horvat links this to Aristotle’s *to kalon*, that is, our passionate concern for all that is elevated, dignified, and noble. It is something he recognized as universally present in the spiritual core of each human being. Such very high aspirations of rational and free beings make us capable of acts of loyalty, devotion, and sacrifice for causes perceived as just. When the *to kalon* is in order, Horvat concludes with Aristotle, people do not do barbarous things. They seek after the high standards of perfection, beauty or excellence proper to human nature, giving rise to a vision of life that inspires civilizations. We need only study the lives of the great saints, heroes, and martyrs. By their lives they converted the Barbarians from doing barbarous things because they introduced the Barbarians to the high Christian ideals that appealed to this fundamental impulse.

Horvat then continues by addressing the second human impulse as our desire for plenitude, i.e. a sense of satisfaction, wholeness or completeness. So, not only do we seek the fullness of the good, true and beautiful, but we seek the fullest manifestation of these desires. The desire for perfection is in our hearts. Just as our religion shows that we cannot be minimalist but maximalist, as we see in Our Lord’s command to be perfect as Our Heavenly Father is, so our souls are also strongly attracted to that which moves us towards plenitude. We rejoice in this plenitude, and we never tire in seeking it. St. Thomas makes this abundantly clear in his Treatise on Happiness in the first five questions of ST I-II.

On a natural level, i.e. in the senses, we note that it is proper for our eyes to see, but we are nonetheless most drawn to very beautiful objects. When we hear, we experience greater delight by listening to the most beautiful harmonies. Horvat writes that even “infants in their primitive reactions shun the ordinary, drably colored ball to go after the Christmas tree ornament that dazzles and sparkles.” So, by nature we tend to the most expressive plenitude of our legitimate desires, and these are the very foundation of culture, as we see in literature, visual arts, music, and philosophy itself. So, we can contrast such culture to barbarism because when this desire for plenitude is in order, people do not do barbarous things. Rather they do marvelous works.

Horvat concludes that the key to controlling these two impulses is the virtue of temperance, and it is indeed true because this virtue regulates our natural appetites and passions in accordance with the norms prescribed by Faith and Reason. Temperance teaches us to desire that which is proper for us and naturally leads to balance, proportion, and magnificence. It allows us to pursue the true, the good, and the beautiful without falling into dangerous fantasies, mental unbalance or errors. Overall, it certainly helps us to strive with deep conviction and love toward the plenitude of these desires without being enslaved by unrestrained passion. As St. Thomas summarizes, it “withdraws man from

things which seduce the appetite from obeying reason.”²³ Thus, temperance not only restrains but it also frees the person to pursue the fundamental desires of the human heart.

When the virtue of temperance is in order, people do not do barbarous things, but, theologically, we know that at the root of intemperance and disorder is sin. After all, it is sin that destroys the equilibrium inside souls seeking after the good, true and beautiful, and we live in sinful, intemperate and very abnormal times in which people claim the right to unrestricted freedom to do whatever they desire, regardless of the consequences. The majority of people are fascinated by intemperance of fleeting pleasures and worldly interests that is so much a part of our culture. The unbridled love of sensual pleasures darkens the inner eye of the soul, and it brings down all its aspirations. People hate the temperance that seeks to restrain them.

As a result, Horvat concludes, people wilfully refuse to fix their thoughts on Aristotle’s *to kalon* that naturally beckons to them. They no longer seek the plenitude of sublime things. Rather it can be said of our generation what the prophet Daniel said of similar people of his time: “They suppressed their consciences; they would not allow their eyes to look to heaven, and did not keep in mind God’s just judgments” (Dan.13:9).

Since the human heart cannot remain long without an object of its desires, it replaces a true good with a false good. If we will not attach ourselves to the principal considerations for which we were made, then we will latch on to others for which we were not made. When temperance no longer rules, people lose their moral bearings, find false absolutes to follow and eventually embrace the false, bad and hideous. Even if the desire for plenitude persists, it will be misdirected toward the insatiable appetites of vices and passions that are ultimately self-destructive. We will seek out ever stronger sensations of pleasure that gradually become brutal and barbarous.

Thus, if we delve deeper into the problem of why people do barbarous things, we find a culture of frenzied intemperance that favors a return to barbarian times. Sometimes, it manifests itself only in bad manners, vulgarity and loose living; other times it breaks out into violence, cruel torture and sadistic killing that lead to man’s inhumanity to man.

When we search for that which is most elevated, dignified, and noble, we inevitably find God who is Truth, Beauty, and Goodness itself. When we temperately seek plenitude, we are inevitably led to finding it in our Infinite God who alone can satisfy the longings of our hearts for all eternity. So, the real reason people do barbarous things is that they have rejected God and his law.

A part of Psalm 13 helps us to elucidate this further.

Psalmus 13

13:1 Dixit insíprens in corde suo: * non est Deus.

13:2 Corrupti sunt, et abominábiles facti sunt in stúdiis suis: * non est qui fáciat bonum, non est usque ad unum.

13:3 Dóminus de cælo prospéxit super filios hóminum, * ut vídeat si est intélligens, aut requírens Deum.

13:4 Omnes declinavérunt, simul inútiles facti sunt: * non est qui fáciat bonum, non est usque ad unum.

It is like the first sin of Satan being due to a non-consideration of God, as St. Thomas shows in ST I q. 63, a. 1. People have gone so far off in their non-consideration of God that they have revolted against the order for which we are made. It is no wonder that inhuman and sinister acts keep happening. Indeed, we are made for God, and our hearts will not

²³ ST II-II q. 141, a. 2.

find peace, as Saint Augustine reminds us, until they rest in him. St. Thomas teaches that the capital sin of the devil, pride, is at the root of the non-consideration of God which in turn caused his fall because, while there is no potentiality in his nature, there is in his intuitive intellect,²⁴ and it was in this capacity's non-consideration of God and His will that sin occurred. Adam's first sin is very much for the same reason. In a society that is constantly distracting us, how much are we turning from God and from our true actualization? We read in Wayne Wu's *Attention* just how important attention is from a philosophical and psychological perspective.²⁵ I would venture to say that it is fundamental from a spiritual perspective, and a reparation for it is not medication but a balanced life, one that only a family can provide.

Instead, now we read about Sologamy and people dating robots.²⁶ The young no longer even date but vaguely "frequent" each other so as not to commit to anyone for any time period. John Horvat writes: "It consists of a person marrying one's self. It sounds bizarre, but the fact is that these same-self "marriages" are now happening, although not on a mass scale. People—mostly women at this phase—are holding public ceremonies in which they say "I do" to themselves, and celebrate, complete with ring, wedding dress, cake and reception. Predictably, trendy writers, artists and life coaches, who already live in an unreal world, are the ones not tying the knot."²⁷ Just when we think that it is good news to hear that young people are not having as much sex as they did 20 years ago, we learn that it is because they are not even interested in sex because they get their satisfaction from pornography, so they find themselves more alienated than ever before.²⁸ We find ourselves in a truly hell-like environment, much like that described by C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce*.

People are separated from one another. They live together like the Cyclops described in the *Odyssey*. Mitchell Kalpakgian describes it as such: "They live as individuals or outcasts responsible to no kings, contribute nothing to the common good of an entire people, and pass their time merely eating, drinking, and sleeping with gluttonous appetite. On an island where Odysseus seeks food, several Cyclops live in proximity, but they live without unity, a common purpose, or in a state of mutual cooperation."²⁹ Clearly, in order for a society to function properly as such, there needs to be a common purpose that unites the diversities.

It is about the common good. What is that common good today if we are talking about sologamy? What is the common good today if such contrasting religions as Christianity,

²⁴ Cfr. ST I q. 63, a. 1 ad 1.

²⁵ Wayne Wu, *Attention*, Routledge, London, 2014.

²⁶ Tommaso Scandroglio, "Amore di latta: fidanzarsi con un robot," in *La Nuova Bussola Quotidiana*, February 16, 2017.

²⁷ John Horvat, "The Sexual Revolution's Unhappy Result: Self-Marriage," in *Crisis Magazine*, <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2016/sexual-revolutions-unhappy-result-self-marriage>, December 16, 2016.

²⁸ Hans Fiene, "Why It's Terrible News That Millennials Are Having Less Sex," in *The Federalist*, <http://thefederalist.com/2017/02/08/need-millennials-start-trying-sex/>, February 8, 2017. At one point, Fiene writes: "In the same way, as a pastor who teaches and believes that sex is a gift God has given to take place only within the confines of marriage, I would rejoice if America's youth were becoming less sexually active because they're finding God. There is, however, nothing to celebrate when they're becoming less sexually active because they're losing their humanity." This Lutheran pastor concludes very well by writing, "But for those millennials stuck in the porn and social media tar pit, in particular millennial men, it's not too late to rediscover what's been lost. Shut your laptop. Turn off your phone. Go outside. Meet a girl. Ask her on a date. Pray for strength to avoid the seedy corners of the internet as you learn what it means to cherish the gems of her heart, gems that will continue shining even after the luster of her youth has faded. Ask her to marry you. Make your vows before God. Be fruitful and multiply, and be at peace."

²⁹ Mitchell Kalpakgian, "The Lonely World of Contemporary Life," in HLI's Truth and Charity Forum (<http://truthandcharityforum.org/the-lonely-world-of-contemporary-life/>), October 12, 2016, Front Royal, VA.

Secularism, and Islam are supposed to somehow live together? This is where Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI were directing our thoughts about the family, piety, religion, and culture in encyclicals like *Immortale Dei* (1885) and *Quas Primas* (1925). As Mitchell Kalpakgian writes more recently in another article: “A moral society and a virtuous person make choices on the basis of the common good, the good of the whole, and the best interests of children and the future generations. While every person has personal wishes and special desires, these must be subordinated to the larger considerations of the good of all—the larger good of the family, of society, and of the Church. When a person’s private good and individual interests acquire greater importance than the common good, the entire social order suffers as the idea of a universal good based on happiness or justice or the Ten Commandments no longer provides a moral standard that applies to all people.”³⁰ This requires people to live, to communicate, and to cooperate together for a final good. If we are not focused on each other because of the screens that make us live in a virtual reality, how can we expect to build family and society?

Again, Mitchell Kalpakgian has an insightful article on this: “The young have substituted vicarious or secondary experience in place of the primary contact with the real, the tangible, and the concrete. Many students relate to the world around them through mobile devices and social media that lack the actual presence of another person with whom to interact and converse person to person, friend to friend, and heart to heart. Even when people are physically present in the body or in the same room, they may be remote, staring into a screen or preoccupied with some form of electronic device...Human beings are not designed to be disembodied, inert objects unaware of another people or insensitive to social amenities”³¹

The ability to concentrate and focus on one book, one essay, and one homework assignment dwindles as distractions and diversions always crowd every moment of every day. The life of the mind soon becomes fragmented as it loses its ability to dwell on one important task at a time until it reaches completion or perfection. The mind loses its consciousness of the surroundings, people, and events that are immediately present and wanders away from the important, the essential, and the obligatory.

Family life, academic life, and spiritual life all demand the complete bodily presence of the other person in all his alertness. Conversations never begin when the mind is fixed on a machine or a screen. No one wants to feel he is imposing on a person busy at his task. No one can sense the emotional or mental state of other persons without the leisurely interaction that a person’s relaxed availability encourages. Children need available, attentive parents sensitive to their needs, questions, and thoughts. Spouses need constant communication to be in touch with each other’s lives, emotions, and dispositions. Only the right atmosphere and a state of detachment from media make possible the willingness to discuss serious and delicate matters without interruptions and short attention spans. Conversation, the most human and pleasurable of arts, suffers neglect because of the hyperactivity and restlessness that messaging entails.

Academic life also requires a margin of silence and an atmosphere of quiet conducive to reflection, contemplation, and concentration. The mind cannot think when outside

³⁰ Mitchell Kalpakgian, “The Common Good and Individualistic Wishes,” in HLI’s Truth and Charity Forum <http://truthandcharityforum.org/the-common-good-and-individualistic-wishes/>, February 10, 2017, Front Royal, VA.

³¹ Mitchell Kalpakgian, “Contact with the real: the foundation of family, education, and spirituality,” <http://truthandcharityforum.org/contact-with-the-real-the-foundation-of-family-education-and-spirituality/>, December 26, 2016, Front Royal, VA.

messages inundate it and urge responses. To read a classic, to do a mathematical problem, to translate a Latin passage, to write an essay, or to study for a test all demand a single-mindedness of purpose to allow for depth of comprehension. The attention span of a large percentage of high school students who have ears but do not hear poses a great impediment to serious learning. Although the teacher is bodily present, students lack the acquired habit of listening because of the endlessly interrupted nature of their daily lives with its steady stream of messages urging immediate responses. Every free moment before, during, and after school is spent consulting some device for the latest communications. Teachers who also instruct habitually with computers on the desk or who always check their phones throughout the day only add to the problem because they model the same disconnectedness from people.

Spiritual life also suffers from the fragmentation of the mental and emotional life. Ann Morrow Lindberg writes in *Gift from the Sea*, “Certain springs are tapped only when we are alone,” and she warns of the dangers that constant distractions pose: “This is not the life of simplicity but the life of multiplicity that the wise men warn us of. It leads not to unification but to fragmentation. It does not bring grace; it destroys the soul.” A person must safeguard against “too much”—too much time alone with mobile devices, too much time wasted on frivolous exchanges of unnecessary information, too many distractions and interruptions, too much attachment to gadgetry. She writes that the saint or the child possesses the ability to live in the immediate present with the full awareness of the five senses and all the human sensibilities: “One lives like a child or a saint in the immediacy of here and now.” To be emotionally desensitized by attachment to devices or to be physically disconnected from other persons because of the lack of normal interaction stunts the inner life.

Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem “As Kingfishers Catch Fire” depicts human beings as persons of depth with an inner life that needs release and expression to act as a channel of grace to others by the way they move, speak, and act—by the way they imitate Christ’s goodness, reflect Christ’s words, and transfigure the world in their coming and going by their interaction and response to others in a visible, concrete, bodily way:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself.

How can a person “selve” himself, that is, speak from the soul, act with the heart, or offer the best version of himself as a source of graciousness, charity, kindness, or amiability when he spends much of his day disconnected from others, insensitive to his surroundings and the people around him, or uninterested in the life of the family, the life of the mind, or the spiritual life that command total, absolute availability—not occasional interest.

Defend Marriage to save the Family, safe-haven of man

Since the procreative end is the *proprium* of what belongs to marriage and no other union, when this end is questioned, the marriage institution itself—and society thereafter—begins its slide down the slippery slope that we are witnessing before our very eyes today. For example, it was soon after *Humanae Vitae* that we had *Roe vs. Wade* (1973); in fact, it was only five years thereafter. In some ways *Humanae Vitae* was novel in that it placed the unitive end of marriage at par with the procreative end.³² Notwithstanding this novelty, what Pope Bl. Paul VI had foreseen was not that far ahead. A Pandora’s box had been opened where human life is devalued, cheapened, and even redefined, much like Aldous Huxley had written in his novel *Brave New World*. In this deterministic world in which

³² Cfr. *Humanae Vitae* 12.

people are fit to size when in their embryonic phase, there are strict class structures which basically enslave everyone. For instance, we read what Mr. Foster says towards the beginning of the novel:

“We also predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future .” He was going to say “future World controllers,” but correcting himself, said “future Directors of Hatcheries,” instead.”³³

C.S. Lewis' *The Abolition of Man* also foresaw the gradual coarsening of societal ethics to the point where the person is degraded and cheapened beyond recognition. According to Lewis, each individual is made up of his head (the intellect), his chest (the spirit or heart where natural law is engraved and receptive to being formed as is needed in the conscience), and his stomach (the good and bad instinctive desires). Without the chest, the head has uncontrolled power over the stomach. There is no conscience in between the two. So, society would be governed by “men without chests,” and vices once prohibited by the mores of society—such as abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, etc.—would become commonplace because the chest would no longer exist to inhibit the lusts of the stomach.³⁴ Lewis shows that everyone is, in effect, a victim to this new system, even the so-called controllers. As man seeks to conquest nature, which is what applied science has as an end, he has to consider that each new power won by man is also a power over man. Those who throw bombs can also be bombed, like those who control births have their own births controlled as well. With the power of eugenics, after all, comes the result that the fruits of eugenics are the patients of the very same power that produced them. So, the human race becomes not only “the general who triumphs” over nature but “also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car.” In other words, Man's conquest of nature will have brought about nature's conquest of man, i.e. the abolition of man.³⁵

With the issue of ends in mind, it has always seemed obvious to me that the primary end of marriage is procreative. I have only to consider the recent June 26, 2015 ruling by the Supreme Court on so-called “homosexual marriage.” We read in a *Catholic World News* article from the day: “Claiming that the institution of marriage has “evolved over time,” Justice Kennedy wrote that the essence of the marital bond is a sharing of intimacy, which does not require partners of opposite sexes. He argued that the plaintiffs in the *Obergefell* case were not undermining the institution of marriage, but showing their respect for that institution by seeking to participate in it. The majority opinion reasoned that the ability to marry would help to stabilize same-sex unions, and benefit the children raised by homosexual partners. Justice Kennedy explicitly rejected the notion that marriage is intrinsically oriented to procreation, writing: “An ability, desire, or promise to procreate is not and has not been a prerequisite for a valid marriage in any state.””³⁶ With the stress on the end or good of union, we are seeing these sorts of results, so it only confirms me in stressing the procreative end as the *proprium* of marriage.

At the same time, *Fredrik deBoer* writes: “the notion that procreation and child-rearing are the natural justification for marriage has been dealt a terminal injury. We don't, after all, ban marriage for those who can't conceive, or annul marriages that don't result in children, or make couples pinkie swear that they'll have kids not too long after they get married. We have insisted instead that the institution exists to enshrine in law a special kind of long-term commitment, and to extend certain essential logistical and legal benefits

³³ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, Harper Perennial Classics Edition, New York, 2006, p. 11.

³⁴ Cfr. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, Harper Collins, New York, 2001, chapter 1.

³⁵ Cfr. C.S. Lewis, *Ibid.*, Harper Collins, New York, 2001, chapter 3.

³⁶ *Catholic World News*, June 26, 2015.

to those who make that commitment.”³⁷ Even if there are clearly these exceptions, as in cases of infertility, that still does not eliminate procreation as a primary end. I see how difficult it is for couples who are infertile, in fact. Naturally, one gets married to form a family.

To sum it up, we have to prioritize the procreative end of marriage because it is the distinctive, proper and privative end of marriage. It does not exist in any other kind of human union, and it belongs to the very nature of marriage itself. At the same time, the unitive end of marriage is very important because it is willed by God and because parents cannot be good educators of their children if they are not properly united. You will notice that I am not saying this merely because the Church teaches it. Even if we as faithful believe Mother Church’s teaching, our reasons for doing so are also substantiated by natural law. We do not simply adhere to a teaching in a nominalist sort of way. We adhere to a teaching because of its compelling truth, a truth which the Church naturally defends. Notwithstanding what I say about the procreative end having priority over the unitive end, the issue remains that the procreative end cannot be artificially interrupted and that the unitive end is like a context of sorts for the procreative end. The question is about the finality of an act, and one cannot use a technological-medical means about whatever that finality is.

³⁷ Fredrik deBoer, “It’s time to legalize polygamy,” *PoliticoMagazine*, June 26, 2015.