



Institute For Theological Encounter With Science and Technology

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Spring 2021 Bulletin

Transhumanism, Post-Humanism, or Ultrahumanism?

Warmest greetings to all of our readers as we welcome warmer weather with new life in our part of the world!

This issue of the *ITEST Bulletin* introduces us to the topic of “transhumanism.” Hopefully what follows will clarify what this word means in a wider context than at first meets the eye, and then will be further clarified with a review of select literature currently available. As we move through this issue of the *ITEST Bulletin*, we will clarify several other terms in the literature such as cyborg, post human, and ultrahuman, as their understanding is important to the perspectives we will explore.

We will begin by visiting an author who will take us to a television series that ran from 2008 to 2013. Zak Bronson will draw insights from “The Multiple Worlds of Fringe,” a series of essays that explore the characters and values of *The Fringe* TV series. This will present us with one contemporary perspective on the primary question behind this issue and much of contemporary literature on transhumanism: What is human nature?



To provide a distinctly Catholic Christian perspective for our exploration we will then turn to a Franciscan systematic theologian from Villanova University, Dr. Ilia Delio. The information that she provides can be found in greater detail by readers on the IRAS (Institute for Religion in the Age of Science) [website](#) in the December 10, 2020 Webinar, “[New Materialism, Relational Holism and Post Human Life](#).” I will also offer a summary of some additional insights in Delio’s thought from two of her earlier publications.

These contrasting perspectives, first from our contemporary media marketplace, and then from a Catholic theologian drawing from the scientific world of quantum physics, will hopefully give us a base to hold a future webinar on this important topic. At least we will have an idea of two distinct approaches for our discussion.

First, a little philosophical sketch to get us into the material: Since the Enlightenment ‘shift to the subject’ of the 1750’s, philosophy has moved through several shifts of focus. We begin with Phenomenology, where the focus shifts from things to appearances. Next we move to Structuralism, where the shift is from parts to abstractions. Then comes Post-structuralism, and the shift from a network of signs to the signs themselves. Finally, in our day, we meet the New Materialists, who focus on real things based on science. For those of us trained in medieval metaphysics, the philosophical ground has indeed shifted, and we can feel ourselves indeed on a storm tossed boat. What follows will take us to a new world. It will open to us a new world of physics, specifically the new world of energy. We will meet the New Materialists. Does the hair rise on your neck as you suspect you will be dragged into the ‘naturalism’ den of iniquity? Stay tuned. We have no such intent. We may just end where we started...and really know the place for the first time. Read on...!

Sister Carla Mae Streeter, OP, Guest Editor

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Announcements

ITEST Webinars

ITEST recently hosted three excellent and timely webinars. Watch on-demand at the links below.

Is It Moral to Take the COVID-19 Vaccine? A Constructive Dialogue

<https://faithscience.org/covid-19-vaccine/>

Dr. Melissa Moschella and Dr. Stacy Trasancos

Male and Female He Created Them Understanding Gender Dysphoria

<https://faithscience.org/gender-dysphoria/>

Dr. Paul Hruz and Fr. Philip Bochanski

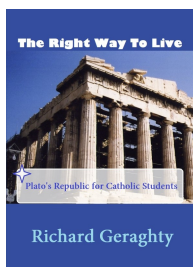
The Moral Arguments in the Embryo Adoption Debate

<https://faithscience.org/embryo-adoption/>

Dr. Charles Robertson and Dr. Elizabeth Rex

The Right Way to Live: Plato's Republic for Catholic Students

by Richard Geraghty



Plato's philosophical dialogues provide a solid understanding of Catholic moral principles. Geraghty shows within these pages how the truths of the old sage are both delightfully and challengingly perennial.

<https://enroutebooksandmedia.com/rightwaytolive/>

In Memoriam—ITEST Members

We ask your prayers for the following ITEST members who recently died and entered Eternal Life.

Rev. Robert Hogan, SJ 03/14/21

Robert Louis Morris 01/23/21

Jerry Hannan 10/26/20

Dr. John-Cyril Hanisko 06/07/20

We also ask your prayers for ITEST members who are ill. May they feel the restoring hand of the Lord.

The “Equality Act” — A Faith/Science Issue?

When this issue of the *ITEST Bulletin* went to press, the “Equality Act” had passed the House of Representatives in February, but faced an uphill battle for passage in the Senate. The so-called “Equality Act” has an enormous negative impact on Catholicism in America.

The Catholic Medical Association wrote a letter to the U.S. Senate regarding the Equality Act and its consequences for patients and health care professionals. Regarding medical and surgical interventions associated with “gender transition” they wrote, “if you pass H.R. 5, it will put our members who practice medicine in the terrible position of being forced to prescribe harmful medications and undertake life-altering surgical procedures without any scientific justification.” Regarding patients who request an abortion they wrote, “As written, our members would be guilty of ‘pregnancy discrimination’ if they refused to perform or refer for an abortion.” The letter ends with a plea to “enact legislation promoting the common good and upholding the dignity of all while defending without exception the constitutional rights of all Americans enshrined in our founding documents.” Read the full letter [here](#).

The webinar linked below focuses on the Equality Act and its repercussions for families, faith, and freedom. The event was facilitated by Ryan T. Anderson, whose book on gender ideology was recently censored by Amazon. Hear presentations from several speakers including Mary Hasson, Susan Muskett, and Gregory Baylor.

The Equality Act and What It Means for Catholics
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVkYnG7EY14>

Watch Mary Hasson's Senate testimony on the Equality Act (5:21 minutes) <https://vimeo.com/525103215>

View Abigail Shrier's Senate testimony on the Equality Act and girls sports (4:46 minutes) <https://1drv.ms/v/s!AnRJp1KF5yKwhvAF4By9-w0kDXQjhg>

Ask the Senate to oppose the Equality Act here:
www.votervoice.net/USCCB/Campaigns/80967/Respond

Yes, the “Equality Act” is indeed a faith/science issue.



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A Visit to the Media Marketplace

Zak Bronson

and

“We Were Trying to Make You More Than You Were”

The Singularity, Transhumanism and Shapeshifting

by Carla Mae Streeter, OP

In his essay, “We Were Trying to Make You More Than You Were,” Bronson writes:

“In 1993, computer scientist and science fiction author Vernor Vinge announced the end of humanity. With the rapid growth of technology, Vinge predicted that we were quickly approaching the moment in which technology would be able to outperform human intelligence, and at that moment, humanity would cease to exist. According to Vinge, within thirty years (sometime between 2005 and 2030) technology will become so complex that it will no longer be possible to predict its growth. This instant, which he calls “the Singularity...is a point where our old models must be discarded and a new reality rules.” At the moment of Singularity, technology will have developed the ability to reproduce itself so quickly that its intelligence will far surpass that of humans. More importantly, at this point, a new vision of humanity - what Vinge refers to as “superhumanity,” completely different than its current state – will take place. “We will be in the Post-Human era,” Vinge foretells, as the rapid changes in technology inspire a merging of human and machine, leading to the next stage of being.

In the years following Vinge’s predictions, a diverse range of scholars including researchers from computer science, mathematics, and philosophy have debated this next stage of human existence.... In recent years, the complex changes offered by new technologies, modifications, medications, and genetic engineering have raised profound questions about what it means to be human, or have at least begun to question exactly where the line is to be drawn between human and technological manipulation.... For viewers of “Fringe” (2008-2013), these narratives certainly seem familiar. Since its beginning, “Fringe’s” emphasis on the scientific manipulation of humanity has addressed the desire to transcend the limitations of human nature, moving into the so-called posthuman era. In doing so, the show reveals the complex changes wrought by experimentation, pointing to

both the human desire to remake and refashion the limits of the body, and the potential disaster that this manipulation may bring.... While transhumanism is often faulted for dismissing the body as mere background to human identity - an image apparent in the portrait of the shapeshifters - I suggest that, while addressing the changing nature of humanity in a world of advanced technology, the series negotiates tensions within current transhumanist rhetoric and attempts to grasp the complex entanglement of embodied subjectivity.”

Lest this short text go by us too quickly, I suggest it holds within it several key issues we will be addressing, so I list them here for us to keep them in mind as we move forward.

- These questions about human nature are not new
- The rapid advancement of technology as evident
- The meaning of ‘Singularity’ as a condition beyond human capacity to control
- The new vision of humanity, ‘superhumanity,’ as completely different
- The notion of ‘cyborg’ as the merging of human and machine
- The ethical line in human manipulation
- The complexity and possible disastrous results of this manipulation
- The desire to transcend the limits of human nature (illness, death, etc.)
- The complex entanglement of embodied subjectivity

It is important that we identify these issues here and keep them in mind, as we will be meeting them again as we explore Ilia Delio’s perspective on these issues as they relate to science.

In recent years, the complex changes offered by new technologies, modifications, medications, and genetic engineering have raised profound questions about what it means to be human...

The New Materialists and the Human Person In the Thought of Ilia Delio, OSF

Carla Mae Streeter, OP

As members of ITEST we will agree with our colleague, Don Boland, that our assessment of one group of New Materialists, the transhumanists, will depend on the view of the human person as we move forward. So, this will be the question we will bring not only to them, but to all the New Materialists. What kind of human are you considering? What is human nature and personhood in the world where we now know that matter and energy are interchangeable - where matter can come as a wave or a particle? What then is consciousness, when it is clear that animals have some form of it? Shall we settle for some kind of pan-psychism? What if matter itself is suggesting that the background of the universe is some kind of 'mind' or 'consciousness' that is orchestrating it all - a creator and governor of biological evolution? Matter/energy is pointing to a dynamic process going on, a type of fluidity, lawful nature at play if you will. And most mysterious of all, what is holding it all together?

The Human Person: A Dynamic View

The New Materialists will view human personhood as a set of dynamics, a center of identity that shapes the material world and is likewise shaped by it. Human personhood is no longer viewed as isolated and autonomous, as static, but whose identity is relationally interacting with the biological, social, political, and transcendent dynamics of the culture that surrounds it.

What is a 'Cyborg'?

The complexity of mind (consciousness)/matter in dynamic interplay has introduced the category of the *cyborg*. Drawn from a joining of the terms 'cybornetic' and 'organism,' the term refers to the

human as a hybrid of biological evolution and mechanical/electric interaction with fluid boundaries between the two. This interaction is already real in our experience whatever name we give it. (Readers can explore this topic in greater depth in Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*.)

This fluid and dynamic view of our species in creative interaction with every element of our culture, being shaped by it and shaping it, extends also to our developing understanding of gender, our embodiment, and how we read our western origin myths. It changes our very way of thinking about ourselves with no real fixities, but with constant becoming. It opens up categories beyond a bio-essentialism. In this new more dynamic understanding, our view, for example, of gender becomes post-gender as its boundaries become more fluid, opening up the possibility of viewing gender as more performative than fixed, and including biological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.

With these insights we are entering a world of dynamic connectivity. Our cognition itself, as even Thomas wrote of it, is dynamic (See *Summa theologiae*, ques. 85-89ff.), intelligence being known only in its *act*. Bernard Lonergan, SJ, takes Thomas further in his treatment of the agent intellect in *Insight*, revealing that it is a series of operations. In this new dynamic world, matter itself is not inert. It is dynamic, processing, and relational, responding to culture and shaping culture in its turn. It follows then that technology also is not neutral. It will be what we intend it to be. It is up to the choice of the human person what is to be fostered in this connectivity, and what is not.

Biography of this Issue's Guest Editor

Sister Carla Mae Streeter, O.P., Th.D., is presently Professor Emerita of Systematic Theology and Spirituality at Aquinas Institute of Theology. A Dominican sister, she completed doctoral studies with the Canadian Jesuits at Regis College at the University of Toronto School of Theology in 1986. She was co-recipient of the first Jean-Marc Laporte Scholarship Award for academic excellence, and the first woman to complete a theological doctorate at Regis College. She is the author of *Foundations of Spirituality: The Human and the Holy* and *Religious Love in Bernard Lonergan as Hermeneutical and Transcultural*. She serves on the Board of the Interfaith Partnership of Metropolitan St. Louis and the Board of ITEST.



Transhuman or Post Human?

Enter two important distinctions on how this humanness is to be enhanced and perfected: the transhuman and the post human. They are not the same. The transhumanist is convinced that technology is the key to enhancement, to making the human 'different' by living longer, happier, and smarter, even to the possibility of a 'mind transplant' resulting in immortality, and even a transhuman democracy bringing peace. The focus is on the individual and resembles the enlightenment enthronement of knowledge as power. It can border on what Delio calls 'bio-hacking,' the creation of the Nazi *ubermensch* or becoming god by technical means. Its vision has objective goals, uses objective knowledge as power, and it is autonomous and anthropocentric. Its voices are mainly male in the literature. The human becomes 'something else' beyond its biology.

The second forward move of humanness is advancement to the post human person. Its voice in the literature is mainly female. Instead of objective goals it will speak of 'emergence and extension.' Rather than knowledge as objective and as providing power, it will speak of a 'reflexive epistemology.' Instead of acting autonomously, it will speak of 'distributive cognition and extended embodiment.' It is post-anthropocentric, decentralized and communal, viewing subjectivity as extended and emergent. Humanness is a 'tool or node' or a prime actor in an entire interconnected network that affects it and which it affects.

For the New Materialist, mind is always material in its form as energy; matter/energy is interactive; nature and culture are interactive systems. The author Gilles Deleuze will view the subject as 'infecting and outfecting,' as being 'interior and exterior.' Matter has its own agency as it interacts. These new categories move beyond our usual 'binaries.' Rather than just being there, matter in its own way is creative. Matter matters, because of its agency and interactive capacity through relationality, affects, assemblages, and productiveness. (Lest we think this novel and even radical, we need to recall that Thomas was the master of the 'instrumental cause,' highly defending its actual causality in relation to the primary efficient cause.)

This view of matter as dynamic offers a new vital and relational ontology. Described as 'arboreal or rhizomatic' it is all about connections, prompting the

author and physicist Karen Barad to describe it as *agential realism*. (Lonergan refers to *dogmatic realism* as the approach of "Accept what I say because I have the authority/credentials to say it," and *critical realism* as "What I say is credible because I can explain this in relation to empirical evidence.") This intra-action reveals matter as no longer inert or passive; not the property of the human alone, but as having bilateral mutuality. Most important of all, in this ontology, *relationship is formative of existence*. Agency is what one is, not something one has. (Interestingly, this resembles Trinitarian theological language, where relationality is precisely the only distinction in God, actually *causing* a total unity or oneness, not opposing it.)

"Agential realism is not a manifesto, it does not take for granted that all is or will or can be made manifest. On the contrary, it is a call, a plea, a provocation, a cry, a passionate yearning for an appreciation of, attention to the tissue of ethicality that runs through the world."

— Karen Barad

This dynamic perspective of the human encourages nouns to become verbs. We are 'worlding' the world, and the world is 'worlding' us. Knowing leads to being, and to continual becoming. Our life becomes a continuous dynamic process rather than a static goal of some perfection to be achieved. We are never quite 'there' yet. The human subject is no longer materially embedded but 'nomatic.' The author Rosi Braidotti uses this term to describe the human as becoming within social-political transversal lines which she describes as 'autopoiesis,' tending toward a 'monistic philosophy and panpsychism,' and an 'expanded relational self: the 'nomatic subject.' The self is more like an assemblage, a cluster of embedded relationships, shifting our cognition from binaries to 'rhizomatics.' As distinctly human, we bring ethics, choices, values, to the mix. For those of us coming from our beloved and secure metaphysics, we are being led to a new look at an old familiar: the philosophical meaning of our humanness as pure *potency*.

Contrasting Perspectives: Transhuman or Ultrahuman?

Transhumanists can be reductionists. Delio wants to take us in another direction. Rather than being at odds with technology as imprisoning, Delio believes that ‘post humans’ have a healthy respect for technology as a part of this picture. We might refer to them as ‘spiritual cyborgs.’ Artificial Intelligence (AI) transhumanists in contrast among the New Materialists, can settle for the reductionism that offers technology as a solution because it (falsely) seems to have no limits. We might say that the term ‘post human’ provides a wider context and a much more positive and dynamic view of matter as a vital relational force, a planetary geocentric perspective that can be more inclusive, relating more to a vibrant and expansive incarnational theology and spirituality, provided that this created dynamism flows from an Uncreated Source, Expression and Gifting that we name as Tri-personal Love.

For us to say this is nothing but ‘naturalism’ can smack of a premature judgment on our part, keeping us in a world that insists on holding on to familiar binary categories. This more fluid view of matter and energy is reflective of Teilhard de Chardin’s writings, specifically his 1919 work *The Heart of Matter*. As an aside, Teilhard was under Roman *monitum* (warning) during his lifetime and forbidden to publish. He gave his writings to a woman in New York City. The woman published them after his death. I wrote the United States Apostolic Delegate in the ’70s asking what the state of the *monitum* on Teilhard was. He replied that the Church rarely removes a *monitum*. “It just moves beyond it.” Recently Benedict XVI is reported to have said, “Today, Teilhard is the one to read.”

Scientifically transhumanism is just not enough. Theologically we might be struggling to find new language for the New Jerusalem, and indeed human transfiguration.

Delio regards Teilhard as an early New Materialist of the post human type. He writes of matter→life→energy as revealing Presence→Wholeness→Plenitude. He posits spirit as the heart of matter’s potency, not its binary opposite. He writes not of the cosmos,

but of a cosmogenesis, with the Christic Word being the ‘what is holding it all together,’ a Christogenesis operating with a love energy that is ever transformational, ever coaxing matter to become all that it can be. This is a new hyper-physics, ‘spacetime-mattering.’ In this ontology union is first, and being comes from it in a becoming transfigured by the energy of a love that is at the very heart of all matter. This calls for a new synthesis. Deep at the heart of this unfolding is the love that Teilhard calls God Omega. God is no longer “out there” but at the very heart of atomic structure as the source of its unfolding.

As Delio explains it, this is no reduction of spirit to matter. This is creation that is continuous, incarnation that is on-going, transcendence at work in immanence, love bringing forth a transfigured cosmos. It is matter as a matrix of consciousness, providing a start for a “sublating,” a spirit-driven unfolding while never leaving behind whatever was before. It attempts to word a relational wholeness taking form and expression in matter, yet more than matter, and distinct yet not separate from matter, forever putting to rest the detached gnostic spiritualisms that have haunted religious traditions, including Catholic Christianity. This process will be completed in, through, and with, the human as embodied. Matter will not be ‘disposed’ of because only the transcendent is important. This ongoing transformation will be done by God’s magnetic power in and through our own human thought and responsible choice. The causal language to describe this ultra-human activity will begin with the reality of a *relationship*, its source in creative union at the heart of unfolding evolution. This organicity of collective magnitude will be nothing short of the transfiguration of matter. Scientifically transhumanism is just not enough. Theologically we might be struggling to find new language for the New Jerusalem, and indeed human transfiguration.

John Haight was the respondent to Delio in the [webinar](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8_eIpWW_dQ) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8_eIpWW_dQ) where these distinctions were made. His concern, well taken, was that human uniqueness not be lost, in particular the presence of the transcendental precepts Bernard Lonergan revealed as the dynamism operative in human consciousness: Be attentive to your experience; Be intelligent in your questioning for understanding; Be reasonable in your judgment of fact; Be responsible in your judgment of value and the action it prompts.

Other Input by Ilia Delio

In earlier publications by Ilia Delio, ("What would Teilhard say? Evolve or be annihilated," Global Sisters Report, *National Catholic Reporter*, 2017 and "Religion, Transhumanism and the Vision of Teilhard de Chardin," N.D.) we are challenged with an expansion of some of these insights.

The first of these, written in 2017, addresses a 1953 article by Teilhard titled "The Agony of our Age: A World that is Asphyxiating." Delio points out that already back then Teilhard saw that "...after eons of slow expansion, the human species has entered a phase of compression." Noting that "There are too many of us in too little room," he cautions that a drastic restriction of reproduction or a mass migration to another planet is not the answer. The answer lies in the one thing we as a human species hold together: the future, and we must allow this reality to *engage us together*. This will mean the shift to an evolutionary world view, that change is integral to life.

We are indeed becoming something that is not yet seen or known. We are not static or fixed. To live in evolution, Delio writes, is to let go of structures that prevent convergence and deepening of consciousness and assume new structures that are consonant with creativity, inspiration and development. Understanding that there is a constant urge in nature to transcend toward higher levels of complexity (degrees of relationship) and consciousness, Delio sees this as the way forward.

Convinced that we are only beginning to learn how to

think as people in evolution, she states that two main systems stifle this shift: religion and education. Dogmatic realism convinces many that we need to remain 'in the ways we have always done it' whether our faith systems are confined to old cosmologies and entrenched doctrines or operating in education on outdated scientific principles. It is no wonder, Delio says, that evolution frightens us if we are thinking out of old boxes and praying to old gods. Yet the younger generation, those born after 1985, are thinking differently. Because of their networks and social media sites they think in terms of connections and communication more than across the lines of the ontological distinctions we have preferred. They believe we can really use our gifts to change things. This is evolutionary thinking. Rather than remaining stable, fixed, tribal and nationalistic, they seek convergence, shared space, shared resources, shared policies and shared power.

Remarkably, the central key to this change is the quiet but steady dialogue going on among world religions. Delio believes, with Teilhard, that once religious boundaries become permeable, like human cells, a new consciousness is emerging of the oneness of the human community. This growing awareness is putting into effect a new spiritual dynamic toward solutions to world problems. Pope Francis is moving in this direction by his latest encyclical *Fratelli tutti* where he calls the world to a new sense of human community. Delio quotes the late Thomas Berry, who summed up the challenge of our times in a single sentence: "We will go in the future as a single sacred

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Ilia Delio, OSF, is a Franciscan Sister of Washington, D.C. and holds the Josephine C. Connelly Endowed Chair in Theology at Villanova University. A native of Newark, N.J., she earned doctorates in pharmacology from Rutgers University-School of Healthcare and Biomedical Sciences and in Historical theology from Fordham University, N.Y. She is the recipient of a Templeton Course in Science and Religion award and the author of twenty-two books. She lectures nationally and internationally on topics including evolution, artificial intelligence, consciousness, culture and religion. Dr. Delio's work in Science and Religion is influenced by the Jesuit scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) who devoted his spiritual writing to bridging Christianity and evolution. Like Teilhard, she sees the essential need to integrate Science and Religion toward a new way of thinking, consonant with evolution. Her research interests focus on exploring divine action in a world of evolution, complexity, emergence, quantum reality and artificial intelligence. Her work has a wide public audience and can be found on the website: www.christogenesis.org.



community or we will all perish in the desert.” And God? It is this Holy Mystery, at the heart of this unfolding toward what we shall be, that despite our fear is irresistibly drawing us into the future. This God *is* the future.

What Shall We Be?

The second and final source we will consider from Ilia Delio deals with a further clarification of Teilhard’s Christocentric view of the transhuman and its contrast with what is known as Artificial Intelligence (AI) Transhumanism.

Delio explains the source of the term ‘transhumanism’ as used first in 1950s by Julian Huxley, brother of Aldous Huxley. Aldous was a friend of Teilhard, although they differed greatly on whether evolution had a direction. Early use of the term before distinctions were made was the belief that humans needed to rescue their biology from evolution’s blind process by the use of science and technology to overcome biological limitations. The reason Julian could dialogue with Teilhard was his distinct corporate view of transhumanism. By 1979 he sees it as a positive step for the whole of humanity rather than as mere individual perfection or enhancement.

On the dark side, because evolution involves suffering and death, and because these early thinkers wanted to leave biological limitations behind and replace them with technological solutions, they were in fact aiming to end the evolution of organic life. They had lost the understanding that *techne* for the Greeks, was originally a domestic science that enhanced human life in its daily tasks. Delio points out that author David Noble stresses that technology and religion developed together. The human as *imago Dei* expressed this reality by an ongoing dialogue with the material universe. The goal of this dialogue was to provide more space for prayer as was sought in the monasteries.

Historians of transhumanism such as Nick Bostrom proclaim that modern science has dispensed with medieval religion. God became unnecessary. This inadequate view overlooks the immense contribution medieval figures made to the development of modern science. The work of Robert Grosseteste (d. 1253) and Roger Bacon (d. 1292) saw science as a service to theology, preparing the world for the Second Coming. The Black Death (1347-50) added to this conviction. The stark reality of suffering and death contributed to the development of practical science.

Technology advanced in light of religious beliefs rather than as a substitution for them.

In our own day, the prevalence of war and the steady rise of totalitarianism gave new rise to the development of technology. The computer appeared on the scene through the genius of Alan Turing, a British intelligence officer who developed it to break German codes. Within fifty years, computer-based technology has become the principal organizer of modern life. Again the critical question arises: Can technology now fulfill what religion promises? In the past the ancients wrestled with the question of being. Today we grapple with technology which is increasingly attempting to define being. Technology is more and more attempting to define the human person.

Critical in addressing this growing possibility is the application of technologies to improve individual human bodies. Thinkers such as Ray Kurzweil anticipate virtual life where the bodily presence of human being will become irrelevant. AI will prevail, even outwitting death, thus making us totally machine-dependent. We become software rather than hardware, our identity based on an evolving ‘mind-file.’ Margaret Wertheim writes of a philosophical shift: from reality constructed of matter and energy to reality constructed on information – a veritable reincarnation of medieval dualism, a *cybergnosticism*. The physical world is again impure or inefficient; information is purer and more spiritual. The seduction is complete. In biological evolution, nature mutually interacts with the species; in technological evolution, species controls nature.

In this twisted scenario, we who were once people of the earth have become people of the screen.

We are in danger of creating a new dualism of mind and body, matter and spirit that opposes the whole ecological movement of interrelatedness. Author Ron Cole-Turner calls this a pelagian lure that “offers the illusion of a managed grace.” It is a self that can fix itself up without changing itself. Technology is not out of control because it is a real power, Cole-Turner states, but because “we cannot control what is supposed to control it: namely, ourselves.” The clear presence of a selfish urge to control cannot be denied.

Alfred Kracher writes that nature offers healing even though it can also frighten. This fright serves the purpose of awakening in us our dependency on God, on the earth, and on other people.

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He also says that “a planet ruled by predictability where all contingency is eliminated is also a planet dominated by unchecked evil.” These AI transhumanists are willing to sacrifice the organic whole at the expense of perfecting the human. By artificially eliminating human limitation we cut ourselves off from the rich depths of evolving life.

Teilhard and the Christian Ultrahuman

Delio now offers an alternative. But she, along with authors Eric Steinhart and David Grumett, suggest that Teilhard can only be called a ‘transhumanist’ with careful qualifications. Two important points distinguish Teilhard from AI transhumanists:

- The location of transhumanism *within* evolution, and
- The vitality and openness of matter to spirit and ultimately, Uncreated Spirit.

These two differences not only distinguish Teilhard from all AI transhumanists but enable him to describe the evolutionary humanism that engages life for the whole cosmos. Understood correctly, these distinctions can not only bring depth to long held Christian beliefs, but dispel the threat of a new cybergnosticism or dualistic pelagianism. Delio develops each of the following positions from her vast knowledge of Teilhard de Chardin’s writings:

- The ongoing development of the human for Teilhard is an evolutionary process with religion at its core.
- Technology has an important role in the progression of evolution.
- Evolution is not a blind random process, but has meaning, purpose, and a direction.
- It is a process of creative union, a progression toward increasing consciousness active at all levels of reality.
- Matter and consciousness are not two substances or

two different modes of existence, but two aspects of the same energy/matter cosmic ‘stuff.’

- Evolution of the mind is linked with the concept of physical and psychic energy.
- The *within* is the mental aspect and the *without* is the physical aspect of the same cosmic ‘stuff.’
- Because we rise from the process, the human person is integrally part of evolution, but in *reflecting* on the process we stand apart from it.
- Reflection is “the power acquired by a consciousness to turn in upon itself, to take possession of itself *as an object*...no longer merely to know, but to know that one knows.”
- The human person is evolution become conscious of itself.
- The human person is “the point of emergence in nature, at which this deep cosmic evolution culminates and declares itself.”
- Evolution is the unfolding of consciousness through the dual process of complexification and convergence.
- The evolutionary vigor of humankind can wither away if we should lose our impulse, or worse, develop a distaste for ever-increased growth in complexity-consciousness.
- The risen Christ is the unifying influence in the whole evolutionary process, a centrating factor that holds the entire process together and moves it forward toward greater complexity and unity.
- Christ is the future fulfillment of the whole evolutionary process, the centrating principle, the pleroma, and the Omega Point where the individual and collective adventure of humanity finds its end and fulfillment; where the consummation of the world and the consummation of God converge.
- The future of evolution is “the mysterious synthesis

Continues on page 10



Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (1881-1955) was a French Jesuit, philosopher, paleontologist and geologist. He was well known as a religious writer, the author of *The Human Phenomenon* and *The Divine Milieu*, and other books. He was a fervent Christian mystic, a deeply caring pastor of souls, and a thinker who developed and projected forward the meaning of the Christian gospel in the light of modern science and evolution. Teilhard (pronounced “Tay-yah”) developed the concept of “the noosphere,” the emergence of a layer of thought and spirit that surrounds the globe. The noosphere embodies human influence and interaction, stimulating bonds of unity and “convergence” through increasing consciousness and “spiritualization” to an ultimate consummation in what he calls “Omega Point.”

Source: Teilhard.org.uk

of the uncreated and the created – the grand completion of the universe in God.”

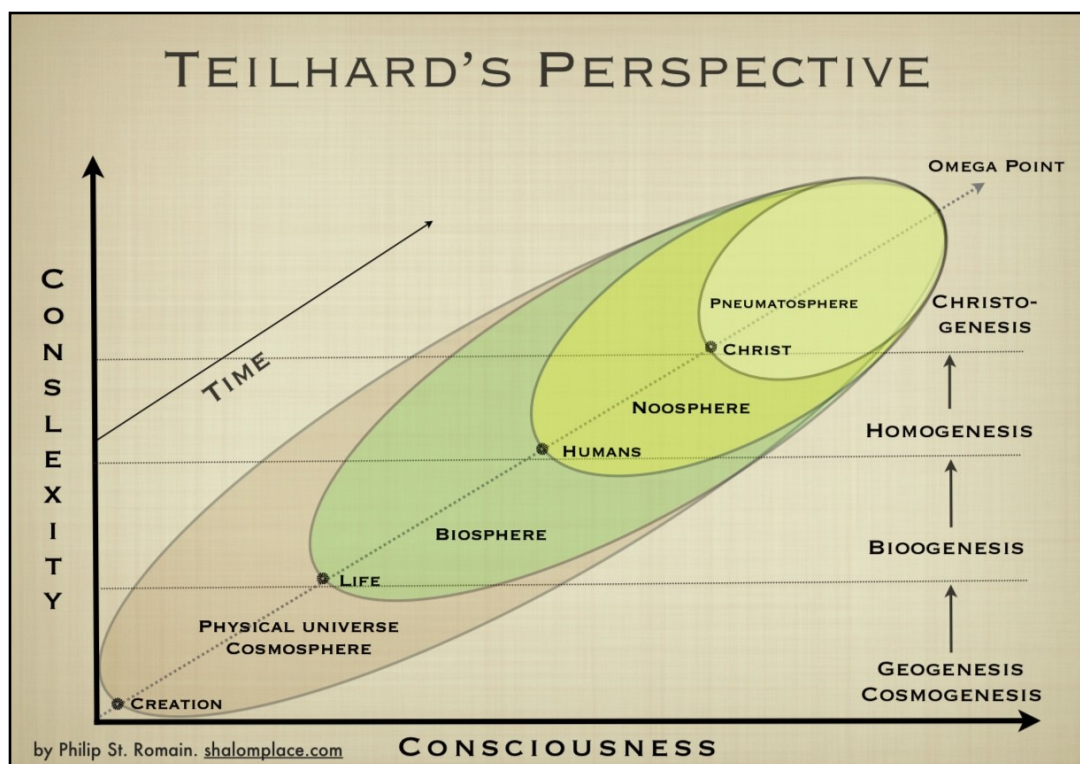
- Because of this goal and direction, transhumanism can only be considered adequately within this larger direction.
- Internal forces can thwart the direction of evolution toward the Omega Point.
- The solution is not “an improvement in living conditions” but that the inner pressures of history become a catalyst for evolution toward more being.
- The evolutionary ascent of human beings occurs in stages; we have reached the end of the “diversity” stage and are entering the contracting or “unifying” stage – that of mega-synthesis.
- Contrary to Darwin, this will not be determined by “survival of the fittest” but by our own capacity to converge and unify.
- A planetary neo-envelope will begin to emerge; the plurality of individual reflections grouping themselves together and reinforcing one another in the act of a single unanimous reflection.
- This noosphere is a psycho-social process *essentially linked with the biosphere* in which it has its root, yet is distinguished from it, a new stage for the renewal of life and not a radical break with biological life.
- Humankind’s combined achievements are forming a global network of collective mind, a collective consciousness which preserves and communicates everything precious, active and progressive contained in earth’s previous evolution, the natural culmination of biological evolution, not a termination of it, an organic whole, irreducible to its parts, and destined for some type of superconvergence and unification.
- Computer technology extends the outreach of human activity, but it depends on how humans direct psychic, spiritual energy needs and powers.
- The convergence of human and machine intelligence creatively completes the material and cerebral sphere of collective thought.
- Evolution effects a greater unification of the whole in and through the human person who is the growing tip of the evolutionary process.
- The perfection of being will not come through artificial means; not through well-being, but a hunger for *more being*; it is upon its point of spiritual concentration, not its material arrangement, that the equilibrium of humanity biologically

depends.

- Psychic energy advances to an ever more reflective state, giving rise to an ‘ultra’ humanity.
- The noosphere is a superconvergence of psychic energy, a higher form of complexity in which the human person becomes not *obsolete* but acquires more being through interconnectivity with others; a medium of collective consciousness that enhances more being. It is *hyperpersonal*.
- The value of science is only for the deepening of spirituality, since knowledge increases mind and mind deepens spirit; without this relationship science is insufficient to effect the transition to super-consciousness. What is needed is a heart to heart.
- Integral to the noosphere is the role of love and “the rise of our inward horizon of a cosmic spiritual center...the rise of God.”
- The evolution of noosphere brings forth a new collective consciousness that enables a more profound union in love and thus a deepening of being that reflects more unified soul and greater wholeness. Evolution is the process of unfolding consciousness. (For AI transhumanists, consciousness is a mere epiphenomenon in the evolutionary process.)
- Ultimate knowing is love which draws together and unites in such a way that new complexified being transcends individual being; it is the emerging body of Christ.
- The evolution of the noosphere and the emergent ultrahuman is fundamentally religious in nature. Christ is the Omega Point, the goal of the universe and the evolver in its convergence toward unity.
- The new level of global mind is the emergence of Christ because the human person is “the arrow pointing the way to the final unification of the world in terms of life.”
- Technology advances noogenesis but noogenesis continues Christogenesis, the possibility of a new global unity in love through a collectivization of consciousness.
- The noogenic Christ would in future bring about “a general convergence of religions upon a universal center of unity who fundamentally satisfies all religions.”
- The endpoint is not technology or techno sapiens; it is Omega, the total unification of being-in-love.
- The transhuman is the ultrahuman, the deepening of a being in love.

Graph credit: Philip St. Romain is a biologist and theologian, and the author of 25 books on prayer and spirituality, with a background in retreat work, spiritual direction, alcohol and drug abuse counseling, and biology.

Phil works at the Heartland Center for Spirituality in Great Bend, KS where he presents retreats, workshops, and provides spiritual direction. The graph is a final slide of a step-by-step stage of evolutionary unfolding with the Christic and Trinitarian dimensions not specified by Delio.



Final Thoughts

First, AI transhumanists seek to replace biological evolution and religious beliefs with technology. In doing so they disconnect matter and the life of the spirit. Because the Uncreated Spirit is the source of the energy that is the human spirit, evolution is religious to the core.

Second, because technology is the product of human intelligence, it serves a vital role in the present stage of human advancement. It will be vital as religions meet and dialogue, drawing closer together than they have ever before in human history. Yet the next stage of evolution is not dependent on technology but on the very power of those religions uniting.

Third, because evolution is not a mechanical process of inert matter but a dynamic unfolding of life, spirit and consciousness, organic matter becomes the means for the spirit to deepen and complexify. We are given a deeply incarnational view of the evolutionary process. **Once again, religion is not outside the realm of technology, but integral to its very purpose and development.** Evolution proceeds towards the Omega Point not by information or enhancement of the individual but by the convergence of humanity and the deepening of relationships in love.

With this synthesis, and with distinctions between AI transhumanists and ultra humanists, Delio has provided us an alternate perspective, a wider context to read current writings on transhumanism.

This conversation has just begun. It is our challenge to dialogue our way to an ever more clear understanding. We have begun, and perhaps with our coming webinar, we can take another step forward.

For after all, what is man in nature? A nothing in relation to infinity, all in relation to nothing, a central point between nothing and all, and infinitely far from understanding either. The ends of things and their beginnings are impregably concealed from him in an impenetrable secret. He is equally incapable of seeing the nothingness out of which he was drawn and the infinite in which he is engulfed.

— Blaise Pascal in *Pensées*

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