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## II TRANSHUMANISM AS A GLIMPSE IN THE BEYOND: A CASE FOR ITS VENTRILOQUY AND NARRATIVE SUBSTITUTION

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**Abstract:** In this presentation, we will look at the genesis in our European scientific development of projects already hinting at a crossing of the mortality barrier. We will show the aspects of the humanistic ideal that were found dissatisfying. The protest against limitations will be set against this background as well. The particular disavowal of contingencies and limitations will be evaluated and criticised, but we will not do it without underscoring the paradox of a human "nature" even in a theological anthropological outlook. As such, it will be our goal to identify, analyse, and situate the elements of the transhumanist outlook that could be transposed into a contemporary quest for salvation open to the immanent transcendence shown in the technoscientific project, which turns into one of the possible forms of the human stewardship on creation.

**Keywords:** perduration, AI project, human mind, *Imago Dei*, secular salvation of man, the resemblance, freedom, metamorphosis

### 1. A couple paradoxes

It is almost inevitable to say, upon first inspection, that the salvation within a transhumanist perspective is only technological; it seems that they have for option nothing other than the extension or the stretching, in an indefinite way, of our life as we know it. Herein lies a certain paradox, because what is dreamt of is a life without weaknesses, interactions, contingencies, and quite simply human frailty. Yet this is not a condition we've known as such. It is a condition that we extract from reality, where we feel comfortable, and that we deem desirable. If what is extended is "saveable" on a different support, it is by the same token *not mine*, it is shall

we say “multiply realizable” in the sense of the much-discussed thesis of Hilary Putnam in philosophy of science.<sup>1</sup>

The highly individualized story of a nervous system, the encounters that have made it what it is, are for the largest part *epigenetic*, and would not have obtained without the inscription in a body. So herein comes another paradox, since many have criticized transhumanism for inventing a salvation that's in fact an extraction from *my* embodiment, and that only concerns the ego: it is me, saving myself, and extending a happiness of detachment which is autarkic, self-referenced, and not in need of anything from anyone.

We can only fail to grasp our core content if we want for “it,” whatever that turns out being, to be extractable as an informational signature. What is *deictic*, in other words what points to concrete and to lived-out experiences (*Erlebnissen*) is contained at best in redundancy from this perspective; it is not in any surprise-producing signal, nor can it become Shannon's entropy function labeled *H*.<sup>2</sup>

All the properties that would thus be saved belong not to individuals, but to “dividuals” if you suppress the “in”, as it is placed there in particular since Boethius, to refer to a non-composable continuum that runs across all the abstractions.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the text of Bill Joy, which remains one of the foundational ones for transhumanism, “The future does not need us,” does not seem to see this point.<sup>4</sup> Its fear is that a new eugenism would prevail, but the complete resorption of ourselves in the way I just described is an even graver matter. So, in summary, the salvation of the transhumanists is not a salvation “toward,” it is a being saved “from,” and in this the body is seen as an obstacle, and death is also seen as an obstacle.

<sup>1</sup> See, anthologised in *Philosophical Papers, 2, Mind, Language, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997 [1975]) “Brains and Behavior,” and “Mind and Machines”; see also *Representation and Reality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> I elaborate on this in a submitted paper titled “Are Sustainability and Governance Grounded in Any World?” presented at the XIX<sup>th</sup> ESSSAT Conference in Ålesund, Norway, on May 7, 2022. Due to appear in *Reviews in Science, Religion, and Theology*.

<sup>3</sup> See Michaela Ott, *Dividuations: Theories of Participation* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> “Why the Future Doesn't Need Us” reprinted in *Technology and the Future*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed, Albert H. Teich (ed.) (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2003), pp. 295-317.

## 2. What of perduration, and what of the mind in it?

Now, another point that we need to make is that, as I remember hearing in an impressive video interview, and then reading as a text that put it on paper, from Albert Jacquard, – who was a French population geneticist and an excellent popular science writer, also self-proclaimed agnostic, – we could not make any sense of our experiences in their current form, as a simple perduration.<sup>5</sup> Not expecting the resurrection, or any transformation where we survive this aeon, Jacquard will nevertheless recognise that our merely continued life, in its same condition, has something absurd to it. Indeed, from his perspective of population genetics, too many things were simply bypassed and lightly bypassed in a vision like the one we just characterised.

So there seems to be some important questions to ponder upon, for instance: would it not be more logical to propound a dissolution of everything in everything, under the guise of a flame as was done by Pierre Levy when he wrote: “the contemporary body resembles a flame, it entwines itself with the public body and burns with the same heat, shines with the same light as other body flames.”<sup>6</sup> In this case at least, we would be clearly in the context of cosmological and even anthropological monopsychism, a mind that's one for all, but also, as in the writings of Luciano Floridi, one of the popularisers of information philosophy, a body – not a mind – but a body that's *one for all*, that is informational, and as such which has no fleshly referent. But then, why put everything under mind, if we are in a materialistic vision? And indeed if Averroes, or Ibn Rochd from Córdoba, pulled toward a “one soul for all” model which we already referred to, that's in part because he first admitted Aristotle's rational psychology.

### 2.1 The AI project behind the cognitivist grasp of man's nature in “mind”

Now, if we were to delve into this, we would find that cognitive science and AI have tried to grasp man as part of nature, and when they speak of

<sup>5</sup> In *Autrement*, special issue on *La mort à vivre*, J. Bataille and C. Baschet (eds.), No 87, February 1987.

<sup>6</sup> *Becoming Virtual: Reality in the Digital Age* trans. R. Bononno (New York/London: Plenum, 1998), p. 44.

cognition rather than knowledge, it is not innocent: it is precisely that they want to avoid flights into spiritualist connotations that are almost inseparable from a word like "knowledge." So we have a sort of *desideratum* of the naturalistic explanation of this cognition, and it will be done with a focus on the relationship between an organism that falls under the knowledge of biology, and an environment that falls under the knowledge of physics. What we can observe is that the adoption of the computationalist paradigm inserts right away in this naturalistic orientation, a model of thought as logical thought and as a calculus which is much older than this naturalist reduction, and largely – and that's the paradox – independent of it.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the tools that the computo-representationalist paradigm has given itself are first-order logic, predicate logic, as well as the theory of calculability, and one can only find that these elements are rigidly tied to mathematical thought in its process of self-elucidation between Hilbert and Turing. As such, those tools resemble the contemporary formal expression of a very old and deep conception of reason, and it would seem that mathematics remains the greatest accomplishment for such a reason.

What we see is that the computo-representationalist paradigm, in the context of a research program toward a naturalistic theorisation of the mind, would have imposed, as a model for it, the instrumental form of a very traditional norm of the mind. If we read things in this way, triumphalistic AI, which transfers to the fact of human cognition softwares that it would have conceived, would only be *giving back* to man something that is the flipside of what it *took from him*, in other words its calculating deductive regime, and would therefore expect of said man procedures of description that he *ought* to follow when he executes this or that task.

There is yet another paradox when one finds that, in cognitive science, in a clandestine and implicit way, there is a negative objectivation of what is human, in other words, we determine *a priori* man's intelligence as that which we *know not how to simulate* by means of a program; so the computationalist objectivisation of the work of the mind which is done *a priori* would be working alongside a silent negation of its very program, because

<sup>7</sup> In this section, I have drawn from J.-M. Salanskis in A. Piette & J.-M. Salanskis, *L'humain impensé* (Paris, Presses universitaires de Paris-Ouest, 2016), p. 66-70; worth consulting is B. Cantwell-Smith, "The owl and the electric encyclopedia," *Artificial Intelligence*, Vol. 47, Nos 1-3, 1991: pp. 251-288.

a transcendental decision would fix the properly human and its functionings as that which escapes any form given to it by the paradigm.

### 3. *The tradition of the Imago Dei*

Now if we call onto a theme that for Orthodox in particular would be central, that of the image of God, let us recall how the image of God in us cannot be destroyed, and this is what's at stake. If we look at man to know what man is, we already have on our hands an inversion. There is an apophatic character to man, since the quality we bestow on him of being alive with the living separate his quest from a mere action of standing in existence; if he is "ensouled" like all the living, his soul can be apprehended as either *psychic* or *noetic*.<sup>8</sup>

The statement that this *imago Dei* is indestructible, that it cannot be wiped away, has been a provocation to further its meaning, but it has also had its moment of attempts at de-creation. If one looks at European culture in general, and remembers the surrealist movement for instance, one could see this active already in Lautréamont (pen name for Isidore Ducasse) and his *Chants de Maldoror*, published posthumously but rediscovered by the surrealists (he died at 24): he describes the performance of the most immoral and criminal acts he could think of, bringing (before Antonin Artaud and others) a theatricality to cruelty.<sup>9</sup> Even though it is imaginary (*onirique* as French would have it), he tells of putting his nails into the flesh of a baby and to just rip it apart, with the blood flowing, and will claim that he would at least in this way keep affirming creation with all its *horrific* content, and put it in the face of the creator somehow to punish him, and even to revulse him. Such a stance toward a nature evil-doer one would not only find in poets, but even in a logician like John Stuart Mill or an epistemologist like Karl Popper. The posture is almost to instill in God regret over having created us.

We should also call in what stands unnamed under a lot of the scientific endeavour, a science that does not need vitalism, since it has somehow

<sup>8</sup> See M.-A. Costa de Beauregard, *Le sacrement de l'homme* (Paris: Cerf, 2021), pp. 119-130 on the "antinomic" being of man.

<sup>9</sup> *The Songs of Maldoror*, trans. R. J. Dent (Chicago: Solar Books, 2011).

internalised it. This we could understand as the great Lamarckian project, something that you won't find in much literature about transhumanism – we don't go into the assumptions enough – but that is there at the heart of some strands of Western or European efforts to further human dignity in front of a cosmos that Hegel once captured as supremely indifferent to our fate, when he was looking at the Alps and said “*es ist so*” or “it just is.”

This immanence of a dark will entwined in nature's depths, which has no regard for this short duration of our lives, is what I would call the “metaphysics of the oceanic sentiment” (an expression from Romain Rolland who corresponded with Freud).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in front of such a grand scenery that seems to be supremely indifferent to our fate, is the idea that our efforts, even though they would be overwhelmingly surpassed by the massive resisting forces of the universe, *still would matter*. This does not bode well with the humble affirmation of human mortality, on the contrary one will find efforts at directing the course of things with the mind, or perceiving and controlling correlations; one can recall the very interesting expression of Ilya Prigogine in *La nouvelle alliance*,<sup>11</sup> where he says in substance: “if we don't control correlations we can expect in science to control collisions.” In other words, through knowing synchronicities, one would edge one's bet on the side of mind *against* matter. Indeed, you will find these books by Carl Gustav Jung on synchronicity and coincidence, and even Wolfgang Pauli, the great physicist, was led into the conversation.<sup>12</sup> We also have to factor in examples such as Paul Kammerer with his Lamarck-inspired experiments, about which Arthur Koestler wrote an interesting book *The case of the midwife toad*, or even Trofim Lyssenko, with his Lamarckian inducement of stress on plants and organisms, as seemingly they could by their own effort overcome them and become stronger. All

<sup>10</sup> After reading *The Future of an Illusion*, in a letter dated December 5, 1927, Romain Rolland wrote to Freud about “...the simple and direct fact of a feeling of “the eternal” (which may very well not be eternal, but simply without perceptible limits, and as if oceanic).” This particular experience of the numinous, can also serve to refer to the impersonal feeling of the whole holding together in supreme indifference of man's fate.

<sup>11</sup> See the English translation, *Order Out of Chaos* (New York: Bantam, 1984), pp. 250-251; 285.

<sup>12</sup> See *Atom and Archetype: The Pauli/Jung Letters, 1932-1958*, C. A. Meier (ed.), D. Roscoe trans., rev. ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); C. G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); and A. Koestler, *The Roots of Coincidence* (London: Pan Books, 1972).

of this is not generally adduced to transhumanist proposals, but nevertheless it paves the way for a *secular salvation of man*, and, if one more token was needed, one would find, in a letter of Freud to Georg Groddeck, the claim that his psychoanalytical work is to be inscribed in this great Lamarckian tradition.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.1 The resemblance

I have called in a theological referent, to remind us that the Word creates us in the image of God, and the Spirit to the resemblance, at least that's Irenaeus two hands of the Father, an important inspiration for theological anthropology. The image cannot be lost as we saw, but resemblance becomes the great project. To counter what I said you have one option out there, and it would be to destroy man, to get rid of his humanity as we know it, and the question would be: would you *then* destroy the image? Alluding back to Bill Joy and to “The future does not need us,” a text originally published in *Wired*, it is striking that any notion of a communion and salvation seems indeed to be destroyed. One can see it by consulting those founding texts, it's an emblem of this movement, and right away the problem we are led into is that of the selection of the elite who is going to be augmented and transformed beyond humanity. Joy cites, in a very striking way, Theodore Kaczynski, and the quote is quite dramatic – this is the Unabomber for those who know US criminal history – and so in a striking and dramatic quote that's also recycled by Ray Kurzweil in *The age of spiritual machines*, the idea becomes: we are losing to the machines, by having let them manage too much, they are sort of intertwined with us; so now we will need to create an elite to regain control. And here I hark back to what I said before: it's a salvation for myself, or for this totalized collective elite.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Georg Groddeck, June 5, 1917 in *The Letters of Sigmund Freud*, E. L. Freud (ed.), trans. T. & J. Stern (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 176.

#### 4. A suggestion from Catholic spiritual (and philosophical) theology

If if one now looks at the modernist crisis in the Roman Catholic tradition, on the way to Vatican II, one thing that is striking is that thinkers such as Maurice Blondel, Édouard Leroy, and others that were indeed suspected of modernism, had seen how we were misled by a form of apologetics that claimed it could convert by simple deductions from premises, of from some drop of the hat, or by traces of God simply discoverable from cosmological and moral experience empirically surveyed with some kind of evidence. In Christian circles, in particular in neo-scholastic trends, clinging to a religious philosophy with a realistic bent, most at the same time failed to emphasize that what we believe is what *ought* to be, that we are not modeling ourselves simply on what *is*.

Among all these names, and I mentioned a couple, I would now want to call in Fr. Auguste Valensin, who corresponded directly with Maurice Blondel and had his life transformed when, still young, he read Blondel's *L'action*, in the latter part of the 1890s. Fr. Valensin wrote in his intimate notes that "if I knew the truth of Jesus Christ in another way than faith, my faith would not have to make of it its object."<sup>14</sup> In other words, he was defending the will part of the act of faith, and he wrote something that made me quite marvel the first time I read it, and which is worth translating here: "If, he says, *per impossibile* at my death bed it would be manifested to me with perfect evidence, that I erred, that there is no survival, that there is even no God, I would not regret to have believed it. I would even think that I honored myself in believing it, and that if the universe is something idiotic and contemptible, it is too bad for it, and that the blame ought not to be in me for having thought that God is, but in God for not being."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> A. Valensin, *Textes et documents inédits* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1961), p. 389.

<sup>15</sup> *Autour de ma foi. Dialogues avec moi-même* (Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1948), p. 56. The French goes: "Si, *par impossible*, à mon lit de mort, il m'était manifesté avec une évidence parfaite que je me suis trompé, qu'il n'y a pas de survie, que même il n'y a pas de Dieu, je ne regretterais pas de l'avoir cru; je penserais que je me suis honoré en le croyant, que si l'univers est quelque chose d'idiot et de méprisable, c'est tant pis pour lui, que le tort n'est pas en moi, d'avoir pensé que Dieu est, mais en Dieu, de n'être pas."

One wonders if we don't have here a version of the ontological argument applied to the *self*, in other words, one could make a simple case for the preservation of consciousness; for instance you could say "All right, I can conceive of the organic machinery of my body starting to have mishaps, making errors of copying, breaking down, but what is not conceivable is one's annihilation, the very moment one thinks of one's perpetuation." Our consciousness *requires* to exist; now in the ontological argument classically understood, perfection, the *greatest* (or maximal) perfection, would have been *idea plus existence* in reality. Anselm's quest is not just after the greatest idea I can conceive of, and Gaunilo's objection was quite ridiculous I think, since when everything is considered, it is that the greatest idea precisely *ought to exist* because otherwise there would be a greater one that would *also* be what I'm thinking *and* that would exist. Of course, what's missing between the two renditions that I'm trying to build here, is the *required* preservation of consciousness, and there is a similar insight where they coincide, indeed in the one case we have perfection predicated of anything existent, but then what is it to exist? Where would we find it other than in Existence? So against Quine's dictum, "to be is to be the value of a bound variable," one would have to assert with William Vallicella among others, that Existence itself exists, what Vallicella calls the "thick theory of existence" as opposed to the "thin" one.<sup>16</sup>

#### 5. A still-to-come conclusion that may center around freedom

So if we recapitulate, I pointed to a few things that seem to me, from the viewpoint for instance of population genetics, rather lightly appreciated by the transhumanist proposals. If you go and read again another foundational text that's not all that long, from Max More, "Letter to Mother Nature," what you will see is that the process that is pictured as being evolutionary requires apparently a next step, – and the author says "perhaps" which is to be appreciated – that would be *on us* to achieve.<sup>17</sup> In his amendment

<sup>16</sup> See W. Vallicella, "Existence: Two Dogmas of Analysis" in *Neo-Aristotelian Perspectives in Metaphysics*, D. Novotný & L. Novák (eds.) (New York/London: Routledge, 2014), mostly §3, pp. 46-48.

<sup>17</sup> M. More, "Letter to Mother Nature" in M. More & N. Vita-More (eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader* (Malden/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 449-450.

number five, since after a short text there's a bunch of amendments, seven of them, it is said that we will *fix* individuals' and species' defects left by natural selection. This is quite interesting because I recently lectured in Vendée in a conference devoted to chance and evolution, and thus already warned about what is in the end a "chance fairy" reconstrual of Darwin's work, as is so common, because we forget how Darwin upheld Laplacian determinism. We would fix errors made by natural selection, which is quite an interesting affirmation, after we've also read from the author that there is distributed intelligence – whatever that means – in the process of evolutionary becoming. So each will decide how long they will live, we will increase our perceptual abilities, and then we read in amendment number six, that we will remove emotional barriers to rational self-correction. In other words there's too much emotion messing with our minds, but where does this mind concept, this reason concept, even come from? It seems to be assumed, and I think that the remarks I made about AI and the cognitivist project and paradigm earlier would have to be called to play a role here as well.

It seems that we come across a problem that is far from new if we look at it from the perspective of the philosophy of religion: the problem is said to be the problem of evil in a lot of textbooks, and it's the clincher that has apparently terminated the faith of so many people honestly undergoing an inquiry into it. If we are to address this seriously and thoroughly, we need to get rid of anthropomorphic images of God. The fact of the matter is that, as Aquinas makes plain in the *Summa Theologiae*,<sup>18</sup> when he is asking what are the ideas that are in God, his reply is: *et ideo malum non habet in Deo ideam*. In other words, God has no idea of evil.<sup>19</sup> So therefore the claim that one can revert the "horrendous evils" (I borrow the terminology from Marilyn McCord Adams) onto God, slap him back with them, to embarrass God himself, must be denied, since God could only be said to bear them and suffer with us. It would rather be the opposite: in front of them, God will bear on him those shortcomings even before we do, something about which Alfred North Whitehead had a keen insight, as he presents a God fellow-sufferer at the end of *Process and Reality*.<sup>20</sup> So to claim that nature

<sup>18</sup> Prima pars, question 15, article 3, *ad primum*.

<sup>19</sup> See the interesting book by J.M. Garrigues, *Dieu sans idée du mal*, new & rev. ed. (Paris: Desclée, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corr. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1978), p. 351; see also John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Harper & Row: New York, 1966), pp. 234; 262.

is ill-conceived, as we saw in the "Letter to Mother Nature," seems to be a tricky wicket, since the trillion cells (that are even mentioned by Max More in his text), of about 250 types, some of which perform every second thousands of operations, this is all unaccounted for, it's simply thrown into the initial conditions so to speak.

This whole vision comes from people used to working on computer programs, and they clearly here underestimate the complexity of our biology, there is never a sense of just looking at what there is and marveling at it because the only concept of reason that is called to the fore is what you would call in French "*l'entendement*," if you prefer deductive logical reason, but this has to be put against another understanding. If God does not calculate like us, if God has no idea of evil, of deceit, of trickery, it is possible to widen the scope of the problem and to see just how there is a sort of "thou seest me always" (as in Fr. Boulgakov's famous prayer) that is used incorrectly to claim that there could be a competition between the freedom of men, and that of God. A God who seeks to promote, to make free, does not and cannot lay traps on the way of man to show his superiority in requiring obedience.<sup>21</sup> I think Fr. Alexander Schmemmann had a fabulous insight in a text about this, where he stresses that if you take this premise, you can only end up – he would not speak of transhumanism at the time since it was written in the 60s – in problems such as we have on our hands now.<sup>22</sup>

So finally to validate what was said earlier, I do not think that transhumanism is to be attacked, denied, or dismantled, without first looking at the assumptions that have gone into it, and as a final token I will state this example: I worked for my masters on a French philosopher and theologian, Claude Tresmontant,<sup>23</sup> who like everyone else in France in the day had to do a long dissertation and a shorter one to get the Doctorat ès lettres, and for his short dissertation he edited the correspondence of two tremendous Catholic metaphysicians, Fr. Lucien Laberthonnière, and Maurice Blondel. What is striking is that these friends – who were both suspected

<sup>21</sup> See the conclusion of my *La théologie de la nature et la science à l'ère de l'information* (Paris/Montreal: Cerf/Fides, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> A. Schmemmann, "Freedom in the Church" in *The Word in History: The St. Xavier Symposium*, T. Patrick Burke (ed.), (London: Collins, 1968), pp. 120-132.

<sup>23</sup> The proceedings of the 2019 study day on his thought have been published under the title *Claude Tresmontant (1925-1997), métaphysicien de l'inachevé*, in the series "Cahiers Disputatio," No 7 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2022).



of modernism which caused them to hold together and encourage each other –, ended up parting ways on an issue where Laberthonnière thought that the images of God, of a God who makes us suffer for redemption, were unworthy of a God who, in his understanding, on the contrary, being true love would not do anything that would put his beloved under Him: he rather would put the beloved even *before himself*, never would he humiliate, or constrain or impose his will in a violent way. To this Blondel objected that it is an anthropomorphic and almost Fichtean moralisation of the problem, and that in God – because God is greater than us and because what awaits us cannot be intuited in any other way than through what he called a *denuo nasci*, a dispossession of any image and analogy and an obedience of faith walking in the night, – we had to simply trust that the transformation, the *metamorphosis* as in Paul's language, expected of us cannot be grasped entirely.<sup>24</sup>

I find that one could put these debates side-by-side with the assumptions that go in the transhumanist reasoning, and find that indeed, it is a challenge for us to simply through faith – the theological virtue of faith – trust that God has made this corporeal body, our embodied beings, for a profound reason. If one can readily admit that there is not just one word for body, that indeed the New Testament uses two different Greek words (and classical Greek uses yet a third one),<sup>25</sup> it remains that any spiritualization obtained on the cheap is suspicious from an orthodox Christian viewpoint (in the restricted and the large sense of orthodox!). Our bodies are transformed into glory; is it the same body? Yes, but a body can be, as I just alluded to, *σαρχ, σωμα, or δεμας*. With more space we could develop the Neoplatonic understanding of this within the Christian tradition to show how it does not belittle the body as much as it inscribes a route of spirituality from matter to mind, but I think that every objection we make to the transhumanist proposals, when we look back at our own debates, could be said to elicit such a mirror re-narration where we can see traces of what could lead there; I think that we need to have an attitude

<sup>24</sup> See a summary that is more recent than Tresmontant's still excellent introduction (in M. Blondel & L. Laberthonnière, *Correspondance philosophique*, Paris, Seuil, 1961), in Clémence Rouvier, "La divinisation de l'être. Le différend Blondel (1861-1949) – Laberthonnière (1860-1932)," *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, Vol. 104, No 1, 2016: pp. 77-95.

<sup>25</sup> Something that was presented in our Chair in Lille by Vincent Grégoire-Delory, whom I thank here.

of openness and try listen to what it means for us when we utter judgments on such a project.

### 5.1 Image and resemblance toppled

As we saw, the transhumanists will preach a deliverance from our old flesh, that is considered so weak and so easily corruptible. If we would really transcend our humanity, and it wasn't anymore at all human nature we were talking about, perhaps we could not continue affirming that this is God under the form of the image, the ineliminable image that is rejected. As Günther Anders had seen quite well, we are at discomfort with the idea of having evolved; we would have to reflect on our tendency to reject the condition of a being that has evolved and is therefore a summary of so many accidents on the way or mutations.<sup>26</sup>

Are we seeing therefore a complete reversal of the idea of "playing God," since meddling with this or that process, to bring it toward selfish needs and visions, is not godly and yet the only thing that is deemed so for a transhumanist? In fact, what God did is to retire, to give space, to allow distance so much so that, in the great Neoplatonic tradition, of which Fr. Stanilas Breton was a long time student, the axiom above all others was "the Principle is nothing of that which proceeds from it."<sup>27</sup>

So if we do have a tradition that tries to make God and being coincide (and uses analogy to achieve this), we have another one that does not seek such an equation, and that rather sees God as absolute value (from an expression of Illyd Trethowan).<sup>28</sup>

What is man? What is he capable of? Anthropologists will look at man, but theologians will recall that the only answer is: this creature is *capax dei* and nothing short of this communion with God can truly answer the "why" that lurks beyond the different "hows" that the techno-scientific project has made itself wont of answering.

<sup>26</sup> *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen, I, Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> *Du Principe. L'organisation contemporaine du pensable* (Paris: Cerf, 2011 [1971]).

<sup>28</sup> I. Trethowan, *Absolute Value* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970).