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Kostas Theologou

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In the quest of a novel BTI (bio-technical identity) Beyond the ontology of the human person

Kostas Theologou
National Technical University of Athens
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3883-601X

Abstract: The intuitions and imagination of human visionaries about the infinite possibilities of scientific research and technology are creatively haunting the quest of our species to expand knowledge in the micro-cosmos and the vast space. Since 19th century French writer Jules Verne (1828-1905) and English writer Mary Shelley (1797-1851) had already traced the path to our days and beyond.They were followed by an infinite series of great *intuitionists*, who were not mere futurists like H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Isaac Asimov, Arthur Clarke, John Brunner and many more. Scientific endeavors and achievements transform the qualities of life and foster social institutions in various ways. The paper deals with a prevailing technological phenomenon, the *scientific capacity of gene-editing*, promoting thus the emergence of *a virtual novel identity*. The new achievements in sciences encourage the expression of human free-will allowing for physical and other enhancements or alterations, in reference to biological and technological features that may lead to a *new* bio-techno-identity (let us call it BTI). The paper reflects on the issue of "enhancing" the established concepts for defining a human being and a human person; it also puts forward the possibility of conducting a theoretical and field research examining -and evaluating- the issue and the mechanisms of BTI formation, reassessing all traditional qualities and novel characteristics attributed to humans by the applications of Biotechnology.The issue is eventually approached under the standpoints of Ethical Philosophy, Sociology, Biology, Orthodox Theology and Law. The analysis discusses intuitions in sci-fi literature and cinematography in comparison to reality i.e. the multitude of assisted reproduction technologies, embryonic and genetic labs, implants and even cloning in Western Societies.

Keywords: identity; biotechnology; intuition, humans; person; legal status

I. Introduction

Since the epoch of Alchemy and alchemist doctor *Victor Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley's tragic hero in her eponymous book (1818/1823)[1] two centuries have gone by however the anxious curiosity and quest of the scientific research to conquer life's secrets forges ahead relentlessly. British film director Ridley Scott (1937-) dramatizes

wonderfully this successful and multifarious quest in his cyberpunk/techfilm-noir *Blade Runner* (1982) that takes place in a futuristic dystopia of Los Angeles; in doing this he adapted American writer's Philip K. Dick's (1928-1982) novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). Scott's epic cinematographyalso takes us to outer galaxies in *Prometheus* (2012) while seeking the genetic origins of human kind.Technology enhances the liquidity of modernity, of postmodernity, of late modernity or its ending.

It is rather surprising to see how many of these then-absurd notions have become acknowledged truths, and is equally disheartening to realize that many of the most optimistic appraisals of our future civilization are still very far from being realized. Technology is but a product and sibling of the uncontrollable, unrestrained and unaccountable scientific research, as research should be, without barriers and with no limits, this technology forwards the likely possibilities for alternative versions in everyday life, in life-style, in *identities* acquired by individuals or by specific collectivities; these identities are being chosen virtually, intuitively, temporarily or merely impulsively.

II. The conceptual toolkit

Despite the fact that scientific research is limitless, still the technological applications are not eagerly accepted as equally limitless, and thus Applied Ethics emerges to shape the field of morality in reference to criteria and the potential use of scientific research.When research is conducted in genetics and biomedicine, generates biotechnological products and in the same time configures social, political and cultural arrangements in order to collectively adjust ourselves in these novel data, bioethics as an applied branch of philosophy stands always alert, so that it attracts our moral attention and modifies our institutional and legal framework. These are almost self-understood by the *suspicious* society groups and even more by the scientific and philosophical *avant-garde*. Since, there is a specific area of research, in Biomedicine and Biotechnology, dealing with the *interference* to human genetics (*gene editing*) and this entire domain of research is comprehensively called as *cell intervention*[2]. This interfering can modify chromosomal qualities, in order to rectify or simply change the genetic code of an embryo or configure the conditions for giving birth to children from more than two, three or more parents or by unknown parents under the technological instruction of a highly skilled lab scientist. Nevertheless, *gene editing* consists of a Siamese sibling of technological interference that can entice operations of particulate, bionic, positron or of any other kind, meaning in brief any biotechnological alternative interfering.

In my practical reasoning I put forward the *premise* that in a *society of persons* there are individuals with various and different characteristics. A multitude is made up by individuals, but every single individual is also a person. Individual as a term is used in the sense of attributing singular characteristics to a person. By these conceptual meanings of *individual* and *person* one can identify the rest of their features, i.e. those attributing rights and obligations and render them into legal, social or subjects

of another kind.When gene editing is ascertained, aiming to modify gene qualities (chromosomal or other), this editing also effects the physical making of the human being both as a person and as an individual. Is an individual produced by technological interference or operation a *natural person*? To what extent is it really a natural person, under which criteria should we admit it as such and, what might be the direct sociological perspective of such an operation? Do implants of technical or bionic "parts" alter a human being and its natural identity features?

Now is the appropriate time to think of the possibility to broaden the ontological, theological, sociological and legal meaning of the human person, and the identity features of all beings produced by procreation out of physical intercourse, i.e. assisted in a in a small or greater degree of biological reproduction.In this line of thinking one may detect organizations such as the IEET (*Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies*)[3] focusing on the idea that some non-human animals are eligible for being a legal entity or person and consequently they are entitled to specific right and thus to legal *protection*. Examples of non-human animals and non-human beings are plenty in the imaginative intuitions of literature and science fiction; first there is a Lieutenant with an unrivalled positron brain[4], named *Data;* he was born in 1987[5], in the televised world of youth culture, titled *Star Trek: The Next Generation* series. Another example is the *Bicentennial Man* (1976) a novel by a Russian born American writer and Biochemistry professor in Boston University Isaac Asimov (1920-1992) l the novel was dramatized as a movie in 1999, (*the Bicentennial Man*) with starring actor Robin Williams as an android, wishing for …mortality in order to be human; another exemplary android is the child robot of Mecha Co., in *Artificial Intelligence* (A.I., 2001) by Stanley Kubrick and Steven Spielberg, based on the novel*Super-Toys Last All Summer Long*(1965) by English writer Brian Aldiss (1925); in this case the *super-toy*android *child* wishes to attain maternal love, since his *mother* detests him for being a *machine*!

Besides our ID data and our legal identity status it seems rather appropriate to cite our bio-tech characteristics or *parts*, so that we don't get completely lost or even be assimilated either *partly* or *entirely* as products of a society that transmutes us either *eagerly* or *reluctantly* in reference to our values or identity; and society itself is equally being altered and transmuted either eagerly or reluctantly in a vast *mutual-perichoresis*[6], of the relatively brief and -in the same time- lifelong marital *congress* with technology.

III. A virtual research on Sci-Fi intuitions and reality

Let us pay some tribute to certain pioneers like William Ford Gibson (1948-) an American-Canadian speculative fiction writer and essayist, who pioneered the science fiction subgenre known as *cyberpunk*; Gibson also notably coined the term *cyberspace* in his short story *Burning Chrome* (1982) and later popularized the concept in his acclaimed debut novel *Neuromancer* (1984). In 1994 New Yorker writer, columnist, lecturer, graphic novelist, and documentarian Douglas Rushkoff (1961-) published his novel *Cyberia*[7] offering an early survival guide in cyberspace that was then under

…construction. He claims that *Cyberia* is about a very special moment in our recent history, a moment when anything seemed possible". In the early 90s cyberspace[8] was shaping an entirely new subculture and made all of us look like *novices* at a rave trying virtual reality for the first time. Rushkoff responded to the challenge of potentially marrying the latest computer technologies with the most intimately held dreams and the most ancient spiritual truths. Already since then, technological revolution was an all-promising universe. Rushkoff referred to an *invisible sovereignty* of which only one side is identified with *physical* reality; he also referred to the need for a *neologism* that could express this invisible sovereignty, this new world: in his novel he calls it *Cyberia*, while we name it *Bio-techno-identity* (BIT).

Technology never ceased developing and constantly transforming our lives. In that novel we learned about *strange attractors*, individuals in a state of reverie who could access the broad network of artificial worlds, about metaphysical hackers drawing illegally, exotic or unapproachable data and about cyborgs, cyber-creatures and man-machines.This sovereignty consists of an innovative filed of intuition. A research in Bioethics about the issues mentioned above might focus on the emergence of bio-techno-identity (BTI), of all new qualities potentially offered to humans by the scientific applications, e.g. in Biotechnology (gene-editing) and Orthopedics (artificial implants); these applications either offered as a prenatal interference or as prosthetic work make part of the entire identity characteristics of us humans: the biotechnological together with biometrics and civic identity features are part of our accomplished identity. Ethics, Social Sciences, Medicine, Biology and Law may collaborate in a fruitful analytical research.

In first place, the research will collect thehistorical and scientific intuitions about the concept of merging humans and robots (nature with artificial or technical equipment) as performed in literature and the movies. The trailhead for this quest might be *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818/1823) by Mary Shelley and some of these exemplary dramatizations of such intuitions are already cited above. Secondly, the research will map the contemporary reality in a western country (e.g. in Greece) through a bibliographical review and statistical data (e.g. from Greece and other countries for comparative reasons); quality research is also a must, therefore, interviews should with biologists, geneticists, doctors and a random population sample should frame the statistics.The case studies/applications under examination are potentially the following:

Genetic interference

-Of preventive or therapeutic cause

-Of perfection or enhancement of various characteristics (eugenics)

-Of cloning and small or large scale assisted reproduction

The knowledge schemes to be examined in reference to their ethical or sociological substance contain -and are also being contained by- the manifold endeavours of Biotechnology. More specifically, in these intuitions Bio-robotics holds a prevailing part; Bio-robotics as a subfield of Robotics by equally combining the physical body with the machine examines the way robots may copy, imitate or mechanically as-

similate the intelligence of biological organisms and the way biological organisms may either *be* or consist part of a robot. In this framework *Bionics* is about applying biological methods and natural systems in studying and designing ultra-modern mechanical systems. In this field of contemporary reality Genetic Engineering and its research ramifications seem as the major field of *action*, enhancing, in other words, the direct interference in an organism's genome- or in a set of genes- by use of biotechnological advancements.

Most people understand the implications of modern technologies on our civilizations and socio-cultural phenomena, on our intellectual and thought systems, on our spiritual or other beliefs, and even on our biological evolution or the ontology of being human. These implications stand as optimistic and forward-thinking appraisers of the entire civilization's fate. Scientific research is limitless but the findings of lab research are not to be applied as technological products worldwide or without a prior ethical assessment. In order to do so we have already called on Applied Ethics. As we draw ever nearer to the consensually hallucinatory reality for which science, technology, visionaries and intuitionists drew the blueprints we clearly realize that their perceptions and impressions of life *on the edge* become even more relevant for the entire humankind, since they make more sense. Let us then see the scope of questions indicatively entangled in a BTI research:

a) Is the individual or being produced by technological interference a natural person? In what extent, on what basis we might accept as such, and what is the direct socio-political future of this *novel* ontology?

b) Artificial or bionic implants to a human body alter the physical-biometric or other identity characteristics?

c) Which are the challenges of these processes in everyday life against Ethics and which is the virtual future of humankind on philosophical, sociological, political and legal basis?

d) Is a kind of BTI sub-culture being created, with a classification of the proportion of physical and technological parts of humans?

e) Does gene-editing, in reference to genome or chromosomal modifications effects the *physical features* of human being as a *person*? Which are these serious ontological issues?

f) An individual or en "entity" produced by technological interference may still physically be a *naturalperson*? If not what is the impact and the repercussions to the *homogeneity* of humanity?

g) Does trans-human feel any pain? When does a neuron network begins having consciousness, when do we consider such a neuron network as a brain, when is it entitled to legal or moral rights and consequently we are restrained by ethical questions? Which is the limit of our interference and connection of computers to a human brain so that the perception of his *ego* and his consciousness are not irreparably altered? When must computers connected to us be considered as parts of ourselves and thus should be legally protected like our physical self? In brief, do we have to constitute a chart of rights and restrictions in reference to

virtual connection of our physical self to computers? What about the possibility of inflicting pain to a large and complicated neuron network?

IV. The ontology of the human person vs. the novelties of BTI

We should also investigate the suffocating influence on behalf of Biotechnology urging towards an innovative conceptualization of the *human person*, from a doctrinal and ontological point of view; this novel approach of the *human person* consists an epistemological innovation. An integrated investigation of the ontology of the human person would successfully contribute to the interpretative clarity of modern-Greek culture and society and would reflectively enrich the discussion on two significant issues of Social Anthropology and Ethics.

The relational substance of the human person clarifies the particularities and partly the idiosyncrasies of modern-Greek institutional or *societal* formation. Presumably it connects two philosophical traditions, the ancient Greek thought and the patristic or ecclesiastic theology. By preamble admit on a pragmatic basis the dominance *if not supremacy* of technology over human civilization and I also consider that acknowledging or admitting the relational substance of the human person offers a crucial parameter and criterion in the discussion of human *relationship* and *communication* per se. Two areas that can be inseminated by this reflection are:

a) Bioethics, specifically meaning the relation of Technology and Medicine, the Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) or Medically Assisted Reproduction(MAR), but also other parameters that can establish *new definitions* about *human beings*, the bionic man, or *trans-human*, leading to a global *meta-reality* of producing hybrid-holders of a bio-techno-identity and

b) The communication networks or/and the Social Media Networks (SMN) that obviously and inescapably alter the dynamic structure and interaction of a living *interpersonal relation*.

To perceive human as a person fundamentally requires the fact of being in *relation* with others, because only under this condition the *person* meets with the unique prerequisite for existing within a relation[9]. The meaning of the person has been investigated and systematically studied by the fathers and thinkers of the Christian Orthodox thought, like e.g. former-Abbot Vassilios Gontikakis[10], father and psychiatrist Vassilios Thermos (1957-)[11], Metropolitan of Diokleia Kallistos Ware (1934-)[12], emeritus professor Christos Yiannaras (1935-)[13], theology Dr. Yorgos Siskos[14], Georges Florofsky (1893-1979)[15], his student Bishop of Pergamos Ioannis Zissioulas[16] and critics of the latter like philosopher Stelios Ramphos (1939)[17] and the Bishop of Nafpaktos Aghios Vlasios Ierotheos (1945-)[18], *et al*. I think that this systematic theoretical research contributed to broader and more integrated perception about the concept of *being a human person* and in the same time suggests a *personal modus vivendi* compared to an *individualized* way of living under the directives and commands of the Western (to us Greeks) European Enlightenment. The ontological investigation of the *human person* will show us to an innovative -yet crucial and urgent- conceptualization of *humanness*, of the human being and the human characteristics

in the interests of a non-anthropocentric acknowledgment of the biotech features of trans-humans[19].

Epilogue

Trans-human will continue the human being as the inevitable hybrid generated by technological advancements; probably this already fledging hybrid will be much different than the human individuals we have known so far. He might be living much longer, will be smarter and virtually happier. An extreme version of this hybrid might be the possibility of transferring our *personality* to an advance and highly resilient software, being able for various connections with the outer world. Trans-human himself is of course aware about the eventual conflict of such a perspective with the global problems afflicting Earth, e.g. overpopulation, climate change and exhaustion of the natural resources. Are there any right for establishing a legitimate connection -or merge- of humans with computers and which are the restrictions? *Which life is appropriate to us humans? What does being human means?* By posing all these questions even in the virtual perspective of becoming tremendously resilient in diseases and spectacularly skillful and intelligent, not being helplessly aged and old etc., we try to prevent the fact of allowing the creation of a cosmos utterly constructed by uncontrollable super-institutions, enhancing and scaling up novel social discriminations.

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3. https://ieet.org/ (accessed on May, 3 2017)

4. Positron (Ps) was discovered by MIT Physics professor Martin Deutsch (1917–2002) and was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1956.

5. Data has self-conscience, is wise, sensitive, and anatomically fully functional android serving as a second in rank officer and chief of operations in the Starfleet of the Confederation, in USS Enterprise-D και USS Enterprise-E his positron brain offers him impressive calculating abilities and skills. During his early life years he had experienced various difficulties in reference to understanding the multifaceted human behavior and he was incompetent of having emotions or comprehend human idiosyncrasy, something that urged him to seek for his own humanness. He was incarnated by American actor Brent Spiner (1949-) who also declared that Data was expressing the *chaplinesque characteristics* of a sad, tragic clown.

6. The attempt of one to exist inside the other, without the first losing his personal characteristics, his idiosyncrasy and without being assimilated by the latter. It is a rather *tough* concept on the relation between technology and society, a relationship found in the core of our civilization.

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