

The Anthropological Paradox of the Digital Age

by Diamantis Kryonidis

Ph.D. candidate of the School of Theology of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

translated by Nancy Rapti

As technology invades everyday life, human needs and goals are turned towards it. However, success in the technology field have established the belief that everything is possible, even interventions for the enhancement of the human self. Nonetheless, this viewpoint carries risks since it puts human aside. [pp. 147-151]

The Large Hadron Collider (LHC), the most ambitious experiment of European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) promises to assist us, after its restart,¹ with the breadth of experiments that will host, in the expansion of our knowledge of the universe, the control of the Standard Model,² and maybe eventually the formulation of an M-Theory. The research for the existence of “Higgs Boson”, i.e. the theoretical particle which explains why the matter has mass, also known as “God Particle”.³ constituted the cornerstone and source of many scientific discussions regarding the CERN experiment, In human history, the fantasy and scientific knowledge with technology as their maidservant encouraged human in bigger challenges each time. Within this framework, the research of the “God Particle” is registered as one more step in the constant human effort to perceive the surrounding world, an effort which is based on an almost deterministic necessity. As if there is something written inside him, the human looks for the cause and the aim of the world, but his acts often lead him to new “Towers of Babel”.⁴ Nowadays, the challenge is bigger though. Because, while in the common narration of the Bible people wanted to reach the sky through the use of new methods,⁵ technology now gives the opportunity to human to set even higher aims.

It is daily observed that via the contribution of science and technology the human has the power - for the first time so radically- to redefine the environment on his own terms according to his belief and exclude even nature’s restrictions. This results to the ‘reduction’ of the natural environment, which no longer plays the same role in the biological human evolution. Nowadays, human evolution is defined in an uniquely drastic way by the human self and his/her technological civilization. Given the existent dynamic we will witness in the near future significant new developments. From

biotechnology which envisages human body as having artificial members and implants of neuromimetic circuits, to genetics' suggestion for genetic human improvement, technology provides the opportunity for the design of the 'new human'.⁶

Contemporaneously, as technology invades everyday life, the human being, needs and goals are turned towards technology more and more. Technology defines not only his time, but also his professional options. And the novel applications of the digital age in the 'entertainment' field, which absorb human, keep him away from reality and substitute even human contact in some cases. Indeed, at this point there exists the paradox. Although technology and science achievements promise to serve human, eventually they seem to have subjected human to a 'material world' of an end in itself, which is dominated by a new faith that everything is feasible.

Thus, in a time where humanity is called to confront critical issues, one wonders whether the urbanized and recently digital environment constitutes a form of an overestimated cultural illusion for which man swaggers with excessive complacency. Since "the progress in human relations and welfare are not evidently consequences of technological progress [...], the communication and mutual understanding between people is problematic at the same degree" as in the Biblical era and generate valid concerns for the future of human civilization.⁷

The biblical narration of the Tower of Babel still reminds human, who wants to exceed all limits, the consequences of arrogance, of excessive trust in human abilities and of thirst for personal vindication and glory. Because often, and this is something that he realises when it is too late, the consequences of his choices lead him not to glory but downfall.⁸ We fail because what is missing from our 'developed' civilization is an interpretative approach "of the fact of human existence, the illumination of those aspects of the human being, which remain inapproachable in objective justification" and they are not restricted in a descriptive anthropology.⁹ And this is not a scientific matter, let alone technological. The unique, dissimilar and unrepeatable nature of the person, who participates organically in this world, is revealed, when the existence is carried out not in terms of necessities-restrictions of human nature but through the freedom of ecstatic love,¹⁰ which exceeds the limits of science and technology.

Under these conditions, the big bet is not the one between Higgs and Hawking, on whether the CERN experiment will discover the God Particle or not, but on whether human will stop searching for psychological certainties in the technological civilization. The self-centred stance of human against life deters us not only to confess our wrong

choices, but also admit the piecemeal approach of human existence, the alienation from our 'neighbour' and the rapture of our relations with the natural world. We continue as little adventurers-gods in a recreation of the human self and our world, but I'm afraid whether we realize our mistaken choices when it will be late. And then maybe we will not be able to simply change our life.¹¹

Endnotes

1. The function of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) was interrupted in October 2008, when the big quantity of helium liquid, which is used as refrigerant, leaked into the circular tunnel of LHC and the fire brigade had to intervene. Its restart is set in the early summer of 2009, according to an announcement from European Organization for Nuclear Research.
2. The Standard Model, i.e. the Big-Bang Theory, constitutes the main current theoretical model on the nature of the Universe. Its supporters have placed their faith in this experiment, since the criticism they accept is becoming more and more tense. See indicatively "An Open Letter to the Scientific Community", (22nd May 2004) New Scientist, also available in website <http://www.cosmologystatement.org/>.
3. This particle was suggested 40 years ago by the British physicist Peter Higgs as an integral part of the Standard Model of Particle Physics.
4. The word 'Babel' means confusion. The language confusion, which God brought to people in Babel because of their arrogance, resulted in not being able to communicate any more with each other and leave the project incomplete.
5. Genesis, 11, 3-4: "(3) [...] they started using adobes for stones and tar for mud. (4) Then they said "Let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach the heavens; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." THE HOLY BIBLE, (Athens: Greek Bible Society), (1997).
6. See indicatively Human Genetics Alert, <http://www.hgalert.org/> but also Theodore W. Berger, Dennis L. Glanzman (eds.), TOWARD REPLACEMENT PARTS FOR THE BRAIN, IMPLANTABLE BIOMIMETIC ELECTRONICS AS NEURAL PROSTHESES, (MIT), (2005).
7. M. Konstantinou, RIMA KYRIOY KRATAION, (Thessaloniki), (1990), p. 181.
8. M. Konstantinou, op.cit., p. 180.
9. Chr. Giannaras, ALFABITARI TIS PISTIS, (Athens; Damos), (1996), p. 85.
10. Chr. Giannaras, TO AINIGMA TOY KAKOU, (Athens; Ikaros), (2008), p. 76.
11. "Full of heart, full of wind, full of desire and passion we took our lives; wrong! And we changed life." G. Seferis, Arnisi.