

TRANSHUMANISM – A POST-CHRISTIAN UU PERSPECTIVE

By Paul Wildman and James Hills

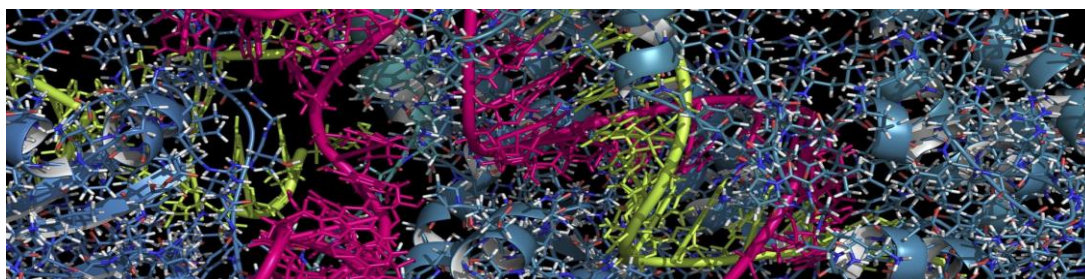
TransHumanism (TH or H+) can be defined as *the intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities. Transhumanism is a way of thinking about the future that is based on the premise that the human species in its current form does not represent the end of our development but rather a comparatively early phase.*¹

There are many humans enhanced by technology walking among us (scary, right)? We interact with them regularly; people who are significantly different to humans a century ago. These transhumans may even be related to you! Anyone with a knee replacement, an artery stent, or indeed a vaccination, is transhuman; a human enhanced from the natural state by technology. Some of the current ideas for enhancing the human go well beyond this and we will discuss these ideas in this article.

The changes people live with daily that we accept as normal have happened gradually and are generally seen as positive benefits. Other changes discussed later in the article may seem ‘out there’ today. However, we humans adapt quickly to changed ‘normal’ states so we may be more accepting in the future than how we feel now about such enhanced humans of the future. As Marshal McLuhan said, ‘We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future.’ Our futures are experienced and frequently determined by a past that few of us fully acknowledge or understand – including even McLuhan himself.

Transhumanism is often linked with the ‘techno-utopian’ idea that science and technology can be used to continually improve the human condition, enhancing human intelligence and ultimately merging the human with such technologies to give us first the TransHuman (now) and then the Post-Human (H2 by mid-2030s). This is part of the progressive aspect of the modernity, which came out of the Enlightenment of 18th Century Europe.

Examples of Transhumanism include our techno-utopian ideals of human augmentation, artificial intelligence (AI), cryogenics, cloning, medical implants, cyborgs, cognitive enhancement, life extension, defect elimination and so on. With its current momentum, TH is likely directly to affect our grandchildren well before 2030.



A model of the CRISPR-CAS9 gene-editing complex from *Streptococcus* genes²

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/humanityplus/> and <http://hplusmagazine.com/>. The TH/H+/Extropian revolution is really an outcome of the synergy between four primary component revolutions; viz., (1) Computer and Info Technology (CIT), (2) Artificial Intelligence (AI), (3) Genetics, Nanotechnology and Robotics (GNR), and (4) Gene editing to remove disability and custom design children using Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR, pronounced ‘crisper’). This has nothing to do with the spiritual take that some Christians have in trying to play catch up and saying ‘Christian as if Christ was always TH’. TH as outlined here is about hard Western science, which lauds the objective, empirical and experimental; it is not about Spirituality. It is crucial we do not conflate or confuse the two.

In this piece, TH has been abstracted somewhat from the other range of crises facing humanity from global warring and warming, overpopulation (by several billion), species extinction, ubiquitous surveillance/Big Brother (including IoT (Internet of Things), Weaponised AI Drones etc.), nascent AI/Algorithm aristocracy, perfidious income inequalities, terrorism and the like. For a positive take, see mind-controlled human artificial limbs:

<https://www.facebook.com/humanityplus/videos/10153117918616723/>

²**Source:** <https://cosmosmagazine.com/biology/what-crispr-and-what-does-it-mean-genetics> and vignette: Genetic Engineering, designer babies, etc., will change everything forever. Finally the challenge to Genetic Engineering of the ‘dignity of disability’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAhjPd4uNFY>. What, we ask is CRISPR’s logic base? Maybe a North Korean compulsory CRISPR!!? Those being engineered usually have the weakest voices and political lobbies, such as plants, fungi, bacteria, insects and cows for instance.

So who are the transhumanist explorers pushing the boundaries of what it means to be human? Some of them are wealthy people afraid to die and leave what they have accumulated. So if we could achieve the holy grail of eternal physical life, would this mean we might have to deal with the Donald Trump's eternally? Indeed, from our UU perspective, it is hoped that we can let go of our wealth and contribute meaningfully to assisting others after our careers and wealth-building activities are over. We doubt, yet dare to hope, that that this final act of 'benevolence' will in some way atone for the harm from a lifetime of capitalist externalisation of social and ecological impacts.

Singularity

Another related concept is the time of the Singularity, when Artificial Intelligence (AI) computing intelligence equals all that of all humans combined. The Singularity is a *hypothetical moment in time (circa. 2030) when artificial intelligence and other technologies have become so advanced that it exceeds that of humanity and both merge thereby undergoing a dramatic and irreversible change* According to the hypothesis, an upgradable intelligent agent (such as a computer running software-based artificial intelligence) would enter a 'runaway reaction' of self-improvement cycles, with each new and more intelligent generation appearing more and more rapidly, causing an intelligence explosion and resulting in a powerful superintelligence that would, qualitatively, far surpass all human intelligence.

The concept is explored more fully on the Singularity web site at: <https://su.org/> Consequences of the singularity and its potential benefit or harm to the human race have been hotly debated, and public figures such as Stephen Hawking, von Neumann and Elon Musk have all expressed concern that full artificial intelligence could result in human extinction. This could be when humans are deemed (by higher intelligence machines with a rational logic base) to be a blight on the face of earth with our continued degradation of the planet at the expense of all other life forms and ourselves, and the order, like the Daleks, is given to exterminate, exterminate – (us)!

Transhumanism is one of the factors leading to the Singularity that is projected to produce Post Humans (PH or H2) by mid this century. With the rate of technological change being several hundred thousand times that of social change and millions of times faster than biological change (evolution), humans could well become 'obsolescent' for at least mechanical labour tasks and quite possibly many intellectual labour tasks well before 2050 – human obsolescence in our grandchildren's lifetimes. The huge concern here is that as the Singularity approaches and technology becomes in some regards sentient, then transhumans may well include programmable Logic Base (LB), just as driverless cars and predator drones are being programmed with one.

Logic Base

Other organisms are now being engineered with a modified logic base, as you read this. A Logic Base comprises *precepts in a culturally endorsed meaning system*; e.g. those used in child raising, common law and now in AI. In Western Anglo countries this Logic Base includes the following principles drawn, for instance, from the logic base underlying Trump's election:

1. The world is a bad and dangerous place
2. (My) Might is (your) right
3. A saviour (Me/\$) is needed
4. Simplistic either/or thinking is all that is required
5. Obedience to the centre is key
6. Violence by me is ok
7. Prejudice is necessary for my triumph
8. Our earth is dispensable
9. Exclusive self-interest is morally superior
10. Arts and Crafts (humanities) are not worth supporting
11. Commodification of human relations and indeed our planet is inevitable and good
12. Free trade is a necessity
13. Capital is free to roam the planet; labour is padlocked to the Nation State
14. Growth is Go(o)d
15. Technology 'trumps' Nature
16. *Few too many* (whereas democracy is *many too few*)
17. Only the global, centrally (read US!) defined, news etc. matters while the periphery and 'others' such as women, the indigenous, LGBTI and local etc. are dispensable.³

³ <http://www.alternet.org/election-2016/trumps-worldview-mirrors-most-archaic-and-apocalyptic-christian-beliefs>
Marlene Winnell 15-10-2016. All this sounds like US Exceptionalism/President Trump's philosophy doesn't it?

How do we become fully human?

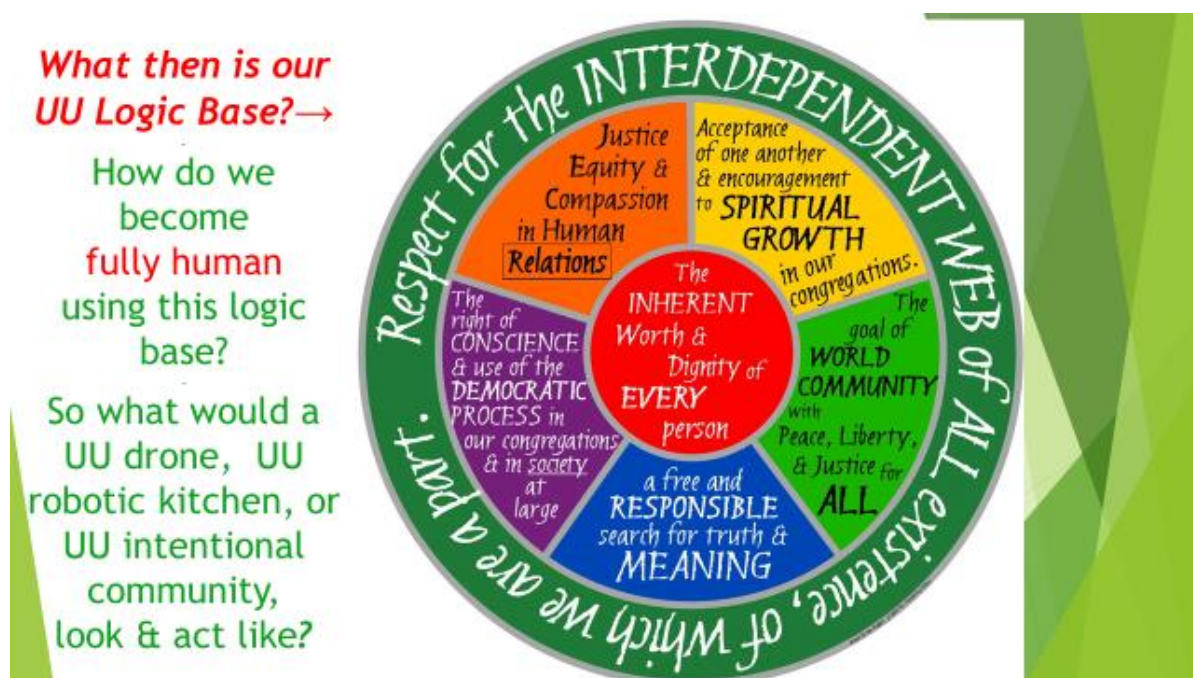
Here we have the greatest challenge of all – *how to be fully human?* This is a challenge that the Christian church and (incredibly) Progressive Christianity is all but silent on.

One possible future scenario is this: sometime in the not too distant future, jobs have collapsed with many replaced by robots, driverless cars and surgeon-less operations are commonplace, with surveillance by police drones a daily fear. More crucially for our grandchildren's futures, we run the risk of being in a Terminator style war with the Robots or even with ourselves between the haves and the have-nots. All the while, our information is being stored in 'the cloud' (heaven) massaged by AI (angels) and our consciousness will be able to be transferred from this heaven to other life forms (resurrection!!).

So over the next generation, we could possibly experience a Terminator war between AI and us (Terminator series), or the planet could be munched up by Nano-bots and we all become Nano-goo (von Neumann), or even slaves to AI (Elon Musk). So how can we possibly even grasp this imminent dystopian future, let alone handle the scenario? Well, we need to start from a different logic base – our UU logic base.

How then do we live?

Let us start with our UU logic base: towards a Mutual Aid Commonwealth as a counterpoint to a Trans-Humanist bureaucratic one.



Our intellect cannot bear mortality and finitude. It wants us to live forever. And it will use any available technology to do this such as Big Pharma, Nanotech, Robots, AI and Transhumanism. The 'logical' conclusion to this path could well be the suicidal elimination of the host; i.e., us. Instead, we need a 'deep humanity' to become 'fully human'; we need a deep practical unity instead of competing against each other for limited resources.

This is where the UU Logic Base comes in. We suggest that a path forward towards a 'deep humanity' here is for a 'secular post-Christian' stop–reset–go approach using our UU logic base.⁴

Towards a deep humanity

So we encourage us all to recognise:

- (1) The importance of understanding the enormity of this issue
- (2) Moving this recognition to understanding and learning in our UU congregations and beyond
- (3) Undertaking practical actions – with the theme of 'becoming fully human' say through workshopping in family groups, UU congregations and community group meetings with the aim of
- (4) Ultimately establishing a 'becoming fully human' UU international intentional community.

⁴ <https://stopresetgo.org/>

Finally it is our passionately held belief that a better-imagined future can be ours by applying this UU logic base to enable us as citizens, parents, entrepreneurs, activists, communities and UU members to participate in networked distributed bottom-up ‘fully human’ initiatives around the world. So we can come out of our silos, converge and effectively share our resources to help build a better future for humanity.

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Sources and Resources:

(A) Eric Steinhart (2008) on Teilhard de Chardin on Transhumanism

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (a Jesuit paleontologist, 1881 – 1955) was among the first to consider the future of human evolution. According to Steinhart, his work advocates both biotechnologies (e.g., genetic engineering) and intelligence technologies. He discusses the emergence of a global computation-communication system. He sees the development of Transhumanity and engages this with Christian theology, while advocating for the development of a global society. Teilhard is almost surely the first to discuss the acceleration of technological progress to a Singularity in which human intelligence will become super-intelligence. He discusses the spread of human intelligence into the universe and its amplification into a cosmic intelligence.

More recently, Barrow and Tipler, Tipler, Moravec, and Kurzweil* have taken up his work. Of course, Teilhard’s Omega Point Theory is deeply Christian, which may be difficult for secular transhumanists. However, transhumanism cannot avoid a fateful engagement with Christianity. Christian institutions may support or oppose transhumanism. Since Christianity is an extremely powerful cultural force in the West, it is imperative for Christianity to engage transhumanism carefully and proactively, and vice versa. A serious study of Teilhard can help that engagement and will thus be rewarding to both communities.

We encourage readers to consider Steinhart’s most excellent article in the *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, available at: <https://jetpress.org/v20/steinhart.htm>.

* This refers to the following books: (1) Barrow, J. and Tipler, F. (1986). *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*. New York: Oxford University Press; (2) Tipler, F. 1995. *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead*. New York: Anchor; (3) Moravec, H. (2000). *Robot: Mere Machine to Transcendent Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press; (4) Kurzweil, R. (2005). *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*. New York: Viking.

(B) Further sources and resources

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- Hughes, J. (2004). *Transhumanism and Unitarian Universalism: Beginning the Dialogue*. Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies. <https://ieet.org/index.php/IEET2/print/2442> mm
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- MTHA (2017). Mormon TransHumanist Association. <https://transfigurism.org/>
- Morton, Timothy (2016). *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (The Wellek Library Lectures) (p. 153). Columbia University Press. Kindle Edition.
- Steinhart, E. (2008). ‘Teilhard de Chardin and Transhumanism’; *Journal of Evolution and Technology*. 20(1): pp. 1–22.
- Sterling, B. (2017). *The Future: History that hasn’t happened yet*. <https://soundcloud.com/officialsxsw/the-future-history-that-hasnt-happened-yet-sxsw-2017>. A brilliant 1hr my-fi cyberpunk rant on Transhumanism – well worth a listen.
- Wildman, P. <http://crafters-circle.com/craft4.html> on ‘Transhumanism’ and <http://www.crafters-connect.com/craft-issue-10/> on ‘Becoming Fully Human.’
- Wong, Gien. (2018). *Cape Town water hackathon and Stop-Reset-Go*. <https://stopresetgo.org/>. I have been working with Gien and others in a globally networked response, in particular to the water shortage facing Cape Town and a half dozen other South African towns, as well as Syria, Egypt, and Libya. *Stop Reset Go* is a South African initiative with its Deep Humanity, among other things, about becoming fully human by appreciating death while vibrantly alive and expressing this through helping others. I (PW) met Gien through this hackathon.

I am the very model of a Singularitarian
I'm combination Transhuman, Immortalist, Extropian,
Aggressively I'm changing all my body's biochemistry
Because my body's heritage is obsolete genetically,
Replacing all the cells each month it's here just temporarily
The pattern of my brain and body's where there's continuity,
I'll try to improve these patterns with optimal biology,
("But how will I do that? I need to be smarter. Ah, yes...")
I'll expand my mental faculties by merging with technology,
Expand his mental faculties by merging with technology,
Expand his mental faculties by merging with technology,
Expand his mental faculties by merging with technology

And with our new technology, renewable clean energy,
Remove our pathogens and overcome hunger and poverty
In short I am a Transhuman, Immortalist, Extropian
I am the very model of a Singularitarian
In short he is a Transhuman, Immortalist, Extropian
He is the very model of a Singularitarian

[Charlie Kam](#) was the author and singer of this song and is Conference Chairman of [TransVision 2007](#), [Sustaining Donor](#) for the Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence, and President of [Greenpack Construction](#) in Chicago, building state-of-the-art, solar powered homes that implement all types of recycling.

A Chicago native, Charlie is a renowned singer/song writer and entrepreneur as well as a member of the World Transhumanist Association, Immortalist Institute, World Future Society, Singularity Institute, and Alcor.

He is best known for his musical parody of Ray Kurzweil's Singularity, "I am the very model of a Singularitarian" which has been a favorite among transhumanist and futurist community blogs. IEEE Explore magazine recently [compared](#) his song to Kurzweil's definitive work, [The Singularity is Near](#) suggesting that you can just listen to his song if you don't have time to read Kurzweil's 600+ word tome. Charlie boasts a number one ranking on Last FM online radio, "the social music revolution" and a video version of the Singularitarian song on YouTube.



Source: Meme Collection: *The Future sounds bleak* 12-04-2018. <http://memecollection.net/the-future-sounds-bleak/>

Wildman, P. (2017). *TransHumanism and Post Christianity: The potential of the UU logic base to assist us in becoming Fully-Human before we look at becoming Trans-, & ultimately Post-, Human*. The Kalgrove Institute: 90 slides (PPT presentation).

This article has been developed by the authors for publication in the Australian UU magazine in the second half of 2018. See <https://www.uua.org/publications/uuworld> & <https://www.uuworld.org/about>