

**ISCKMC 2022****International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****IDEA OF INDIVIDUAL IMMORTALITY IN TRANSHUMANISM:  
BASIC VALUE OR ANTIHUMAN UTOPIA**

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**Abstract**

The paper analyzes the philosophical and ethical status of the idea of transhumanism concerning the possibility of achieving practical individual immortality of a person in the public consciousness. This idea is studied within the framework of cryonics. The arguments to two opposite approaches are considered, within the framework of which this idea appears either as the basic value of modern civilization or an inhumane utopian attitude. Thus, the paper concludes on the adequacy of the latter approach. The authors conclude that the idea of implementing the project of practical immortality from an ethical point of view is quite doubtful, conflicting not only with traditional Christian values, but also with humanistic values that are generally valid for the global world. As such, this utopia relies on scientific hypotheses extrapolated into an uncertain future about the possibility of radical improvement of human nature, and in practice it turns out to be an economic exploitation of a person's natural psychological fear of death and only serves as an expression of a hedonistic worldview. Besides, its justification and implementation as a leading value faces intractable existential and ethical problems. The key unresolved problem underlying this utopia and retouching by faith in the future development of science and technology as a place of evaluation of the original hypothetical idea is the impossibility of preserving (restoring) the life of a holistic person after the biological death of an individual.

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*Keywords:* Cryonics, individual immortality, transhumanism, utopia

## 1. Introduction

In today's global world the development of science and technology is closely associated with value-based and worldview changes in human life and society. The expression of this is the formation and popularization of the social movement and the futurological philosophical concept of transhumanism, one of the leading goals of which is to stave off suffering, disease, aging and death of a person (Bostrom, 2005). Transhumanism as a special kind of influential futurological project, which, however, has not yet received its universal recognition in the scientific community, demonstrates faith in the future development of life extension and (or) revitalization technologies on the basis of modern local achievements, in particular, in the field of "growing" human tissues or creating artificial organs that replace natural organs, neuroprosthetics, influencing human reproductive abilities, spreading the practice of cryonics, etc. Overcoming death by achieving practical individual immortality is the ultimate ideological and value-based component of transhumanism, the implementation of which should become possible through the subsequent development of technologies, which will radically improve or reconstruct the human nature. The representatives of transhumanism confirm this with the eternal dream of humankind on immortality, which is present in the history of the spiritual experience and is expressed by individual thinkers and scientists. At the same time, in the modern world this dream can be embodied precisely by means of science and scientific technologies. Thus, one of the immediate predecessors of modern transhumanism is the Russian philosopher of the late 19th century N.F. Fedorov believed that the resurrection of ancestors is the main ideological motive of the spiritual experience of the Christian religion, which should be implemented by scientific and technological means. In the 20th century the ideas of achieving individual immortality through the future development of scientific technologies were supported by a number of scientists and philosophers, including one of the founders of transhumanism directions directly devoted to the idea of immortality, cryonics, physicist Robert Ettinger. In 2016, a number of modern scientists published an open letter in support of the scientific status and significance of cryonics believing that cryonics is "a legitimate, scientifically based desire to preserve people, especially the human brain using the best available technologies" and that "there is a credible possibility that with the help of future technologies, resuscitation of cryonized people is possible, during which patients can be restored as individuals" (Scientists' Open Letter on Cryonics, 2016). It should be admitted that the inclusion of the ideas of transhumanism into the mass social consciousness is very slow even if it increases every year. According to Levada Center surveys (2013–2016), about 20 % of Russians would like to live forever (while more than 65 % of respondents have the opposite opinion, motivating their position by the adherence to a religious worldview), and about 15 % are interested in cryonizing themselves or their relatives, although only a few actually dare to participate in the experiments on cryonics and have economic opportunities for this. At the same time, according to Levada Center survey conducted in 2012, 45 % of respondents voted for a response in favor of supporting a public association that advocates the radical extension of life (Levada Center Study: How long do Russians want to live, 2012). The idea of practical immortality of a person due to the technological improvement of human nature in its philosophical, scientific and ethical issues as a consequence of a thought experiment has become widespread in science fiction literature, art and cinema.

## 2. Problem Statement

The problem of the study is that, on the one hand, the implementation of the project of practical immortality of a person does not find sufficient actual confirmation in science in the possibility of its attainability, so some well-known modern scientists (Alexandrov, Menshanov, Siluyanova and others) attribute cryonics to a direction that does not have scientific confirmation and express doubt on the ethical viability of the project itself. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether the idea of the technological path to immortality is consistent with the spiritual values of world religions and generally traditional humanistic values of society, despite the fact that the well-known Manifesto of the Russian transhumanist movement claims transhumanism to be committed to a humanistic worldview with its ideal of the value of a separate human life and personal development.

In the first aspect, despite individual local successful experiments, the ultimate goal of the development of cryonics has not been achieved – so far no person has escaped natural death and has not been resurrected due to any scientific experiment. Recognizing that it is now impossible to solve the task of resurrection and that such a solution is the purpose of future technology development, transhumanists place the solution to the area of future probable possibilities. Thus, Uteshev, a researcher at the laboratory of the Institute of Cell Biophysics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, admits that there are still doubts on the feasibility of cryonics, and only after 30–50 years it might be possible to restore a person from a cryonized state. As a result, staying in this slim hope for new possibilities of future technologies turns into a very real danger that the existing laboratory experiments on cryonics are not just ethically doubtful economic enterprises, but also a kind of a cemetery of people and animals buried in liquid nitrogen. How to assess the degree of executability of the ultimate goal and the ethical (value-based) feasibility of this project?

In the second aspect, transhumanists themselves have different, even opposite points of view regarding the relation of the idea of practical immortality with traditional spiritual human values. So, one of the co-founders of the commercial Russian center KrioRus Udalova (Pride) believes that religious (Christian) attitudes in their original form are generally consistent with the practice of cryonics, since the disciples of Christ were even prescribed, among other imperatives, to resurrect people, but she denies the orthodox Christian idea of the posthumous existence of the soul, which is not accidental, since it contradicts the desire of the ideologists of cryonics to resurrect the body. At the same time, the well-known domestic representative of transhumanism, Professor Vishev (2015), defends the position that solving the problem of practical immortality is a scientific alternative to religious beliefs about transcendent personal immortality and should act as the main value of modern civilization.

It should be noted that it is difficult to substantiate the coherence between the practice of cryonics and religious attitudes, since the world religious doctrines were formed long before the emergence of scientist ideology and the development of modern technologies. In the second case, the justification of the “scientific alternative” to religious beliefs faces an obstacle to its adoption in modern society, for a significant part of which cultural values, historically and meaningfully rooted in a certain religious and spiritual experience continue to remain significant, despite significant worldview transformations and the entry of the latest technologies into the daily life of people. At the same time, transhumanism in its ideas

goes beyond the preaching of humanism, since “the transhumanism movement aims to overcome the human restrictions, to go beyond the limits of human existence, even to the point of stop being people in general” (Yudin, 2013, p. 31).

### **3. Research Questions**

The implementation of the transhumanist idea of practical immortality of a person as a subject field of study cannot be reduced to describing the problem of future expansion of scientific and technological capabilities and the fulfillment of some scientific alternative to the spiritual values of traditional society, since it is associated with a number of underlying problems of existential, social and ethical nature, such as the ethical feasibility of achieving individual immortality, personal identity, freedom of choice between life and death, etc. If we belong to a changing world of extensive expansion of technological capabilities concerning the fundamental parameters of human being (life – death, freedom – necessity, personality – nature, etc.), this does not mean that we still have to be determined by this process. If we do not have knowledge of all the negative ethical consequences of the expected achievement of individual immortality as the ultimate change in human nature, then why should this idea become a goal for society to strive for, unless the achievement of eternal life in itself is some axiomatic value.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to determine the philosophical and ethical status of the idea of practical immortality of a person in the public consciousness.

Is this idea a new fundamental value attitude for society, which is confirmed and implemented in the objective development of science and technology, a change in the worldview and social consciousness in the direction of “new anthropocosmic worldview” (Arshinov & Svirsky, 2011), or it appears only as one of the utopian attitudes of ideologists of transhumanism, doubtful from the point of view of ethics, justifying the prospect of “humanizing” a person in its extreme expression, which means that the transition “is not to superhumanism, but to antihumanism” (Yudin, 2013, p. 31).

### **5. Research Methods**

According to the criteria of modern scientific knowledge of a person as a complex human science, the study of the philosophical and ethical status of the idea of practical individual immortality requires an appropriate comparative analysis of the existing approaches to its justification and assessment in various fields of knowledge. Empirical data from various applied fields of scientific knowledge should receive a general theoretical (philosophical) understanding. The study also used a method of historical analysis, descriptive and problematic approaches to identify the most relevant questions on the considered topic and their open theoretical and practical significance.

## 6. Findings

The study of the alleged utopianism of transhumanism with its idea of achieving the practical immortality of a person should take into account the fact that the human consciousness has a desire for utopia as to achieve some ideal state (individual or society), but at the same time it must be recognized that by creating various kinds of utopias “we are not able to free ourselves from tradition” (Shatsky, 1990, p. 87) and the question is only how to resolve the contradiction typical for utopian consciousness between reality and ideal, extrapolation of the future as not yet former (which is not yet in reality), in the present, and what exactly is a tradition on a particular case. With regard to the idea of immortality, tradition acts as religious beliefs and spiritual practices of the “aspiration” of immortality, where a person appears as a holistic creature in a dual nature (mental-bodily), which has lost the ability to physical immortality, and the philosophical concepts of human nature, where the latter is defined in clearly fixed signs, and the person himself is able to improve within the capabilities of his nature, without its radical alteration, but with the possibility of overcoming the limitations of the mortal being through the social memory of generations, personal creativity, etc. In contrast to the “tradition” in the person of humanistic philosophy, the ideal of transhumanism is based on the idea of principled, ontological imperfections and incompleteness of human nature, on the possibilities of a new “technological” intervention in human development, the result of which should be its transformation until the appearance of the “post-human” with radically improved qualities, including devoid of experience of unintentional dying.

The answer to the question on whether the preservation of a person or his resurrection is a problem of Christian religious and spiritual experience is definitely negative, if we keep in mind the use of artificial technologies in relation to the restoration of a holistic personality in its dual spiritual and physical nature. In the Christian worldview, resurrection is understood in several aspects: first, as an exceptional act of self-resurrection of the God-man Christ; second, as a consequence of God’s special action in the eschatological perspective – the future post-historical “resurrection of the dead”, as a result of which the immortal souls of people will be reunited with their bodies in a renewed form; third, as the unique actions of Christ in His earthly life (the resurrection of Lazarus) and his faith – the followers of Christ – “by the power of God” in violation of the natural laws of the universe. At the same time, the “death” of a person is understood not only as the death of his individual biological organism, but also as the tragic law of the *dar al-fana*, which arose as a result of the fall of the first people, but at the same time creating value of earthly life is its uniqueness and significance as a spiritual and moral preparation for eternal “afterlife” in anticipation of a universal resurrection in the “next century”. Besides, there is still respect for the dead human body, excluding all mockery of it and artificial experimentation, and even – in relation to the bodies of Christian saints (“holy relics”) – there is their special worship. Respect even for the specific dead human body that the soul left after death, the memory of the dead and the prayerful treatment of them – these spiritual practices that connect the being of a person with its biological life, have become the basis of cultural traditions that matter to a significant part of the modern society. In the Christian sense, the body devoid of direct connection with the soul retains a certain sacred meaning, which does not allow it to be considered simply as a thing or mechanism that has become unusable. This attitude contradicts the “real” and functional understanding of the body as a certain collection of “spare

parts” of a person (Vishev, 2015), which can be restored and reconstructed. Resurrection in the spiritual practices of Christianity does not refer to the possibility of literal physical resurrection or re-construction of physical qualities and abilities, but to the inner spiritual life of a person, to the ability of a person to rebirth spiritually and morally (“conversion”) in the fight against evil in his own soul.

Spiritual and religious practices are replaced in transhumanism by the latest technologies of influencing certain psycho-physiological abilities of human nature, identifying the person, i.e., individual consciousness, memory, individual psycho-emotional qualities, assuming in the future the reality of preserving viability and brain transplantation as an information system, “freezing” the body before the start of its complete decomposition for future resurrection, etc. The activity of the mind and the functioning of consciousness are perceived in isolation from the unique and partly undetectable spiritual life of each person. The existentials of “life” and “death” are unjustifiably defined, technologized, because resurrection is described only as a “repair” of the body. A person in this understanding loses a number of existential personal parameters. Such loss is indicative of a simplification of a person’s identity. We find ourselves in a situation of significant ontological understatement and blurring of the signs of “human nature” recorded in science (Rozhkovsky, 2012). According to Dugin (2009), such “scientific anthropology” only perceives a person as a smart machine.

The key and fundamental point for justifying the idea of achieving practical individual immortality (resurrection) of a person with the help of future technologies is the question of the possibility of immortality (resurrection) of a person in principle not just as some individual biological functional components, but as a holistic person, a subject with unique life experience, including the experience of free and creative decisions, experience and awareness of life and death. The website of the most popular Russian cryonics company in Eurasia KrioRus (preserving the deceased in a state of deep cooling at ultra-low temperatures) contains the policy text “On Cryonics” with the landmark title of one of its chapters “Mind and Personality” stating that the existence of an individual is entirely ensured by the functioning of his brain and that it is the brain that “controls” the consciousness and personal characteristics of the individual, so to resurrect a person in the future it is enough to preserve personal data as information on neural connections in the brain of a particular person. Besides, what is conceptually significant within the framework of this policy article is the denial of the exceptional “instantaneous” experience of dying and the justification of the scientific assumption that the process of dying can be divided into some stages, where it is possible to ensure the reverse restoration of the vital characteristics of a biological organism. Naturalistically reducing the nature of personality and individual consciousness to the biological properties of the brain, one Western scientist argues that “the basis of consciousness ... can be preserved at cryogenic temperatures” (Best, 2008). However, can personality and its unique life experience be reduced to a set of individual functional characteristics of a biological organism? Is this an unjustified and hasty reduction of the ontology of the personality to some biological “prints” of its former life? Is it possible to reduce the experience and awareness of death by a person only to the gradual loss of cellular or neural memory? In our opinion, the answers to these questions will be negative.

In justifying the lack of confirmation of the possibility of resurrecting people by scientific facts, it is argued that the “extrapolation of indirect evidence and the construction of models based on it” is a quite adequate scientific method (Best, 2008). Such indirect evidence includes, in particular, the proof of the

irreversibility of death with cardiac arrest, the fixation of the efficiency of the body's vital functions for a different period of time after the death of the body recorded by conventional medical means and the possibility of their restoration due to regenerative medicine technologies, 3D printing of tissues and nanotechnology, and the likelihood of "assembly" of a bionic person from prostheses and artificial organs in general. It must be admitted that at present the scientific achievements make it possible to freeze and restore the functions of individual cells, organs and lower organisms.

However, the "indirect" evidence provided by the proponents of cryonics does not solve the main problem of the restoration of a person's integral personality in "its" biological body in the totality of its unique features. It is no coincidence that the critics of cryonics note that the restoration of certain external functions of the body will not allow preserving or restoring the personality with its character traits, emotional features and individual life experience.

## 7. Conclusion

The idea of implementing the project of practical immortality from an ethical point of view looks quite doubtful conflicting not only with traditional Christian values, and therefore is not recognized by part of society (believing community), but also with humanistic values that are generally important to the global world, since it entails the problem of social inequality (due to unequal access to relevant technological opportunities), the existential problem of the loneliness of the "chosen", the danger of substitution of "ordinary" people by people with the exclusive possibility of immortality in the future, but devoid of the limits of development of immoral qualities. In general, the idea of achieving individual practical immortality of a person through technological means of cryonics should be considered an indicative philosophical part of the antihuman utopia of transhumanism. As such, this utopia relies on scientific hypotheses extrapolated into an uncertain future about the possibility of radical improvement of human nature, and in practice it turns out to be an economic exploitation of a person's natural psychological fear of death and serves as an expression of a hedonistic worldview only. Besides, its justification and implementation as a leading value faces intractable existential and ethical problems. The key unresolved problem underlying this utopia and retouching by faith in the future development of science and technology as a place of evaluation of the original hypothetical idea is the impossibility of preserving (restoring) the life of a holistic person after the biological death of an individual. This problem is ignored due to the naturalistic scientific approach in understanding the ontology of personality simplifying the idea of a person in the entirety of his life experience, and therefore capable of becoming the basis for conducting antihuman scientific experiments thus impacting the human nature. Further application of the latest technologies in order to achieve individual immortality can become critically disproportionate to the humanistic values of human civilization.

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