

# CETR

CENTRAL  
EUROPEAN  
THEOLOGICAL  
REVIEW

Special Issue  
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## **CETR**

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## EDITORIAL

Albert Schweitzer, Van Rensselaer Potter, André Hellegers, and Peter Singer: these are all bioethicists whose lives are as distinctive as their thought. In fact, one can easily find connections between the two. Building on this idea, the conference “The Personal Behind Our Bioethics – Bioethical Inquiry and Biographical Focus” was held on April 1, 2025, in Pécs, at the Hall of the Regional Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The event was organized through the collaboration of the Episcopal Theological College of Pécs, the Institute of Behavioural Sciences at the University of Pécs Medical School, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, and the Theological Working Group of the Regional Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The bioethicists invited to the conference were asked to speak about their scientific research from a personal perspective: to what extent did their life stories determine their choice of topics and research perspectives? What is personal about their results? What have they learned from their own bioethical work regarding their own lives? The current issue of the Central European Theological Review was born from these presentations, featuring studies on topics as diverse as the speakers themselves.

**Beáta Laki** explores human enhancement as the central organizing principle connecting diverse topics like transhumanism, artificial intelligence, and reproductive medicine. She argues that bioethics is not merely a restrictive field but an advocacy-oriented discipline that illuminates the hidden dangers of rapid scientific progress. **Darija Rupčić Kelam**, through her personal history with dance, seeks to move away from traditional Western philosophy and its mind-body dualism by reintroducing the embodied subject through the medium of dance. Based on personal experience, she explores how trauma disconnects the self from the body and how dance movement

therapy serves as a tool for restoration and reclaiming one's narrative. **Veronika Kuti** explains how ecotheology is practiced by describing the details of transforming a monoculture field into a biodiverse habitat, viewing the act of gardening as a theological dialogue with our common home. **Adam Tamas Tuboly** connects dietetics and therapy, arguing that maintaining health is a moral obligation involving self-knowledge and moderation; he suggests that contemporary therapy should look toward life-practices rather than just calorie-counting. **Marek Lis** explores the ethical dimension in cinematic narratives and analyzes how filmmakers like Kieślowski use biblical foundations and audiovisual narratives to challenge viewers' perceptions of life, family, and the death penalty. **Tibor Szolcsányi** examines the differences and similarities between robots and humans, proposing a cautious, scientifically grounded framework for attributing human-like traits to AI, differentiating it from naive anthropomorphism. **Gusztáv Kovács** uses Gábor Máté's "spinning plates" simile and Byung-Chul Han's critical theory to describe ADHD as a plastic metaphor for the fragmented, hyper-connected experience of 21st-century life. Although it does not appear in this volume, the conference's opening lecture was delivered by **Lisa Sowle Cahill**, a professor at Boston College who is intimately familiar with the North American origins of bioethics. The title of her lecture - "Bioethics is Social Ethics" - perfectly summarized her life's work as a bioethicist.

For the first time in the journal's history, linguistic editorial tasks were conducted using both human expertise and artificial intelligence, specifically the publicly available versions of ChatGPT and Gemini. It is our hope that the responsible integration of new technologies will further elevate the linguistic quality and editorial excellence of the journal.

As editors of this special issue of CETR, I hope that readers will discover not only the relevance of bioethics today, but also the profound connection between personal experience and academic inquiry!

*The Editor*

# GENETHICS – THE DRIVE

**Beáta Laki**

*Department of Behavioural Sciences, Medical School, University of Pécs, Pécs*

## ■ ABSTRACT

The path as a bioethicist began with questions around genetics and human enhancement. This journey – rooted in personal and professional curiosity—led me to explore how we might strive for betterment in ways that remain ethically sound, human, and humane. This paper briefly reflects on that professional trajectory.

**Key words:** human enhancement, genetics, bioethics, Jennifer Doudna

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The code of life? The organizing power of the double helix? Are we capable of intervening in it? Is it ethically permissible? If yes, how, to what extent, and why? Why is it important to do it at all?

While posing these questions is straightforward, providing comprehensive answers presents a significant challenge. In my research trajectory, I focused on such questions that helped me recognize how complex such apparently simple issues are—often attributed to ‘yes or no’ questions—yet they are not that plain. As one becomes increasingly familiar with how processes work and what they can impact, their multifaceted and often morally questionable nature becomes clear. My research engagement with genetics and bioethics began with these dilemmas.

I encountered the field of bioethics during the final years of my undergraduate studies. Under the mentorship of Professor Tibor Szolcsányi, I had the opportunity to study bioethics in depth and integrate it into my scholarly perspective and also complete my thesis work (“Free Will and Euthanasia”) and later my doctoral dissertation (“Moral Issues of Human Enhancement and Transhumanism”).

As I became acquainted with applied ethics and delved more deeply into its complexities, I felt a calling and realized this is the core of both my scholarly focus and professional motivation. My exploration led me to genetics and its associated moral issues, which led me to other topics that may appear as bioethics-related intersecting areas, such as

transhumanism, the idea of uploading human consciousness/mind into artificial environments, artificial reproductive technologies, end-of-life issues, and, more recently, artificial intelligence. Although these topics are not always obviously connected, they share a specific common underlying organizing power from my perspective. The invitation to reflect on “The Personal Behind Our Bioethics” led me to contemplate my researcher journey and observe it from a broader perspective, which led to the recognition that this and also my internal organizing principle is: enhancement. I do not know whether the topics led me to this underlying essence or just the other way around, it was an intuition that drove me toward these areas of bioethics. It’s not that important really. My aim is to contribute substantively to our understanding of ethically grounded pathways for human enhancement. As the history of science and the scientific community demonstrates, it is necessary to draw boundaries and set criteria when technology and science are used to refine human life. For instance, the first Asilomar conference in 1975 was held because of the novel, uncertain or potential effects and consequences of the recombinant DNA technology. (Berg 2008) Jennifer Doudna, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2020 for her work on CRISPR technology, co-authored with her former PhD student *A Crack in Creation: Gene Editing and the Unthinkable Power to Control Evolution*, discussing the development of the technology, its potential, and critically, the

ethical responsibilities of researchers concerning CRISPR and technological innovation in general. Fortunately, nowadays numerous other examples further illustrate this trend.

Bioethics emerges as a seemingly restrictive, yet in reality, a more advocacy-oriented scientific field that consciously seeks to draw attention to challenges and dangers that may not be immediately obvious, illuminating the path of progress and development from multiple perspectives.

This may relate to the wider environment – how human activity affects it, how its impact can be reduced, and strategies for maintaining ecological balance and mitigating the risk of climate disaster, while simultaneously respecting the natural environment, all while respecting the living environment (reports of the Club of Rome, e.g. the first: Meadows et al. 1972). But even if we focus solely on human-to-human interactions and the role of science in them - especially concerning human personal wellbeing not just in the context of healing but also enhancement - it is essential to take responsibility and represent both individual and societal interests (Beauchamp 2019). At the same time, it is crucial to adhere to the core moral principles of bioethics to remain both human and humane.

As a bioethicist, I strive to represent holistic and complex perspectives, and my objective is to explore how individuals can enhance themselves if they choose to, while ensuring that societal and personal differences remain manageable and morally acceptable. These enhancement techniques are not limited to artificial interventions but also include “what can I do for myself” forms of self-enhancement – non-invasive and widely available ones as well.

My continued focus on bioethics reflects its integral role in shaping scientific methods, diagnostic practices, and therapeutic innovations beyond the wider issues of applied ethics.

Looking back at the history and toward the future of my research and its aims, my intention is to identify, clarify, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages, and gather all possible and relevant aspects – to represent the interests of individuals and societies, while also proactively considering the broader environment. All of this serves to prevent the unwanted and unintended consequences of using science and technology. This is an interdisciplinary task to which I contribute not only my professional knowledge but also my passion.

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# PHILOSOPHY IN MOTION/ DANCING THE PHILOSOPHY

**Darija Rupčić Kelam**

*University of J. J. Strossmayer,*

*Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy*

## ■ ABSTRACT

The paper starts from the assumption that the Western philosophical tradition has largely privileged the mind, abstraction and discursive thinking, often neglecting the body as a fundamental dimension of human experience and cognition. The intention of the paper is to explore the concept of philosophy in motion through the idea of dancing philosophy, whereby the body is viewed not as a passive carrier of consciousness, but as an active, embodied subject of thought, meaning and relationship with the world. The paper seeks to highlight how movement, dance and bodily practice can act as legitimate forms of philosophical inquiry and expression. The basic theses of the paper are that thought is always embodied and that cognition does not occur exclusively at the level of rational mind, but through bodily experience, that movement and dance represent epistemological practices that produce knowledge differently, but equally, in relation to language and text, that dance philosophy and philosophy of dance opens up space for understanding the subject as a dynamic, relational, and situated being, and that the body has ethical and political dimensions, because the way in which bodies move, are seen, and are regulated reflects broader social power structures. Methodologically, the paper relies on an interdisciplinary approach that connects phenomenology, especially Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body, Foucault's concept of heterotopia, contemporary theories of embodiment, dance philosophy, and aesthetic theory. The scientific contribution of the paper is manifested in the articulation of dance and movement as relevant philosophical methods, thereby expanding the concept of philosophical thinking beyond the traditional logocentric framework.

**Keywords:** body, dance, philosophy of dance, bodily based knowledge, movement, different voices, embodiment

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My personal story behind the topics that I try to address in bioethics has to do with my life choices, passions, and experiences. It has to do with my artistic inclinations, longings, and passions. It also has to do with my desire to make philosophy more humane, warmer, more corporeal, and more feminine; to bring back to philosophy the embodied subject and a different voice—the voice of those who are silenced, marginalized, forgotten, and those who have no power.

The reference point and main idea of this essay, *The Personal Behind Our Bioethics*, was my consideration of the value of the “other” and the “different voice,” as well as considerations about the contributions and profound meaning of feminine voices in philosophy and bioethics. As a woman in philosophy, I ask myself how and what a feminine voice—a different voice—can give and offer to a Western, traditional, patriarchal, masculine philosophy oriented toward the rational as the only moral and correct path, thus differentiating the body from the mind and neglecting the body. I ask myself how someone who deals with the body through dance and movement can offer an embodied subject to philosophy and make philosophy more feminine, warmer, softer, and more caring.

Therefore, while writing my dissertation (PhD), I decided to focus all my efforts on the ethics of care and dance movement therapy. How can I connect the body and mind, philosophy, art, dance, and bioethics? How can I dance the static image of the body and philosophy? How

can I set or bring philosophy into motion, into movement, and how can dance open up new spaces and new ways of seeing the world and become a certain way of being in the world? How can dance create new spaces for communication and enable, facilitate, and delimit the constraints of seeing the world? I try to find how dance and movement can create new dynamic models of social space—spaces of new possibilities for non-discursive action of the subject. How can dance reverse sets of relationships and constellations of power for those who are left on the edges of society and those who are marginalized? (Rupčić Kelam, 2023).

Thus, in my consideration and also in my practice, I try to bring philosophy into movement and to “dance” the static nature of philosophy. A reference point in my considerations was Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, in the sense that dance is a model and method of constructing alternative realities, opening new spaces, and becoming a means for mobilization (Foucault, 1967.; Foucault, 2008., pp. 13-29).

In that sense, dance can become a counter-space that undermines power relations and imposed, hegemonic discourses of traumatic experience. Through my personal life, I have experienced traumatic events that changed the course of my life and left scars on my mind, but not only on my mind—on my body also. I have experienced that trauma isn’t just something that happens in our mind, but it also affects the body; trauma is a reaction and comes as a reaction to events, not just the event itself.

I was a dancer for my whole life, but at some point, I couldn't dance anymore for a while because my body was not mine at that time. I was disconnected from my body. In time, I started to realize that I needed to do something to reconnect with my body again. I started to dance again and tried to find my own voice and my own story through my body. I started to dance my story, only to discover that through dance I found my voice again and met my wholeness again.

This kind of experience I wanted to convey to everyone who is struggling with this kind of experience and to my students of philosophy, because I started to notice that they are deeply disconnected from their bodies. I wanted to dance philosophy and to set philosophy into movement. There, I found the connection between the philosophy of dance, the body, and the "different voice." (Gilligan, 1982).

I also noticed that we are all affected by some kind of traumatic experience, and we all carry in our bodies personal stories and narratives. A traumatic event changes the course of life and can break the narrative. Our bodies possess the wisdom of untold stories; the body becomes the hub, the archive of memories and stories, and also the place of restoration of meanings after the breaking of stories and the fracturing of the self. In that sense, the body becomes the place of reconnection with the self and the other (Rupčić Kelam, 2023).

In that sense, stories and memories of trauma form hegemonic discourses and systems of power over the individual or society. Dance

resists power, bridging the gap between personal and collective conscious and unconscious. Dance communicates meaning, resists the hegemonic discourses of shame and guilt that often accompany trauma, restores personal narrative, and reconnects meaning. Dance becomes the "other space" or a space of otherness—a space of resistance and rest, a space of refuge, play, imagination, transformation, and a safe place; a space of peace, comfort, and protection (Christofidou, Milioni, 2022).

Dance movement therapy, as a form of psychotherapy, relies on the body as the main medium for expressing and transforming the emotional, mental, and spiritual state of the individual. This form of therapy does not use words as its primary tool, but rather movement, rhythm, and body awareness. On the other hand, philosophy—especially the philosophy of the body, existentialism, and phenomenology—offers a deeper and more profound understanding of human existence, consciousness, and one's relationship to one's own body. In this respect, dance movement therapy and philosophy complement each other, creating a rich space and platform for considering the human being in their wholeness. I wanted to incorporate the therapeutic and creative potential of dance and movement as a means to gain completeness and integrity, to open new spaces of freedom and play, to create the possibilities of new stories, and to develop an Ethics of Encounter (Hamera, 2011).

Philosophy provides us with the context and language for understanding the deeper dimensions of human experience, while dance therapy allows that experience to be embodied and transformed. Combined, they offer a

## Philosophy in Movement, in Motion

The body in motion is not just a biological phenomenon. It is an expression of consciousness, feelings, thoughts, and identity. When we talk about philosophy in motion, in movement, we are talking about the encounter between bodily expression and mental reflection. Movement becomes a way of thinking, and the body a philosophical text that can be read, interpreted, and experienced. Philosophy in motion seeks truth not through words, but through movement, presence, and experience. In Western philosophy, the body has often been suppressed in favor of the mind—from Plato, who saw the body as a prison for the soul, to Descartes, who separated it from the mind through the familiar division into *res cogitans* (the thinking thing) and *res extensa* (the extended thing). However, contemporary philosophy, especially phenomenology and existentialism, is taking a radical turn.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that we do not think only with our heads, but also with our bodies. The body is our first and fundamental presence in the world, through which we experience space, time, other people, and ourselves. Movement is, in this sense, the primary language of the philosophy of being. When we

holistic approach to the human being. Philosophy asks questions about meaning, identity, and consciousness, while dance and movement offer the answer in the very act of being, expressing, and experiencing with the body.

walk, dance, or breathe, we not only function but also express. Every movement carries a meaning, an emotion, and even a philosophical message. Movement can be resistance, liberation, a question, or contemplation. In dance, the body becomes a thought in space. Philosophy in movement is also an act of awareness—being in the present moment. This is what Zen Buddhism calls *zanshin*: complete awareness in action (an enactive approach). In this state, thoughts do not take place only in the head, but through muscles, breathing, and balance. Body, mind, and spirit are no longer separate. They are in dialogue. This dialogue is not abstract; it is concrete, alive, and present. Through somatic practices, philosophy becomes alive. Philosophy lives, dances, moves, and feels. Philosophy tells us that it is not enough just to understand the world, but to feel the world through our own steps, breaths, and movements.

In a time when modern man is often separated from his own body, philosophy in motion calls for a return to oneself—to harmonize thought and movement; to search for the truth that resides not only in words, but in the way we move and act through life.

## Philosophy in Motion: Silence, Listening, and the Body That Thinks

Philosophy in movement, in motion, is not just a concept. It is the experience of being in a body that listens, thinks, and expresses. In a world dominated by the noise of words, speed, and virtual content, the body becomes a space of silence. In motion, philosophy ceases to be an exclusively verbal, rational, and cognitive discipline; it is transformed into movement, breathing, and presence. The foundation of this movement is not only gestures but also silence and deep listening. In the silence of movement, a space is born to feel one's own being—to hear what cannot be expressed in words.

Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the body is not just a machine for action, but a “lived body”—a subject that experiences, communicates, and thinks the world through movement (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). When we move, we actually have a conversation with the world, not with words, but with sensations, muscle tension, contact with the ground, and the rhythm of breathing.

In this dialogue, silence is not a void. It is a condition for listening. Just as in a philosophical conversation true understanding does not come only through speech but through attentive listening, so in movement, the most profound thing happens when we stop “performing” and start listening to the body. Silence allows for presence. In this presence, the body reveals its own wisdom. In such an approach, philosophy is not an abstract thought, but an

embodied consciousness. We become able to listen not only to our body but also to space, other people, and the energy of relationships. Listening in the philosophy of movement is not only a sensory act, but an ethical act. It is a willingness not to impose ourselves, but to be with what is. Listening means admitting that we do not know everything—that the body knows what the mind sometimes does not understand. In the movement that comes from listening, there is room for fragility, intuition, and openness. This movement is philosophical because it asks questions: Who am I when I stop talking? What does the body tell me when I really listen to it?

Philosophy in motion, when combined with silence and listening, becomes a practice of inner ethics. It is a practice of presence, patience, and tenderness toward oneself and the world. In the silence of movement, one does not lose oneself; one finds oneself. Not through a grand thought, but through a small shift, a focused breath, and an awareness of one's feet on the ground.

Ultimately, philosophy in motion invites us to stop thinking of the body as something we “have” and to start experiencing it as what we “are.” Through silence, listening, and authentic movement, we return to our being, not as an idea, but as a living experience which thinks through the body and which is thought in the body (embodied thought).

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# (MY) LIFE IN THE GARDEN

**Veronika Kuti**

*Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Reformed Theology and Music,  
Ecumene Doctoral School,*

## ■ ABSTRACT

Our project explores the transformation of a former monoculture field into a biodiverse habitat. Rooted in the spirit of *Laudato si'*, it integrates theological, scientific, practical, and spiritual approaches to sustainable living in our common home. To do this, we must learn to contemplate God in creation, who is the real gardener.

**Keywords:** common home, *Laudato si'*, garden, ecosystem, ecotheology

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It started with a forester husband, who wanted to live on a farm. But not an ordinary agro-industrial farm to produce crops or food, but a natural habitat to create a living space where not only humans have a home, but all members of the ecosystem. Perhaps it was a nostalgia for his childhood in a village that seemed to him like Eden. It only touched me during the summers spent at my grandfather's, but I also felt in this vision something of the medieval monasteries, of the Benedictine spirituality: physical work, herb gardens, prayers, studies and spiritual guidance. The peaceful habitation of the human being in God's creation, where he is given everything he needs without taking too much.

We spent years searching for the Garden, looking for the place where it was prepared for us. In 2015, we found our treasure hidden in the field. We have lived here for 7 years, but progress is slow for three reasons: like the Gospel parable, we spent everything we had to buy it. Secondly, to get our systems good we need accurate planning and a lot of observation, and nature's systems are slow to build, but we are not in a hurry, it's a life task, a never-ending project. Thirdly, we need a lot of learning from philosophical-theological foundations to scientific and technological knowledge to practical, craft skills. And apart from some hobby gardening, I knew nothing about living with other creatures or a complex bio-system. So I started learning and researching in my own way to understand what is good, what is the value that we want

to put into practice. These are the sketchy approaches I will now briefly share, illustrated by my experience about transforming a barren agricultural field into a biodiverse habitat. Do we have time for slow execution? The lesson of the Limits to Growth is that our basic systems should have been changed a long time ago (Meadows 1972). On the 50th anniversary, Dennis Meadows said that the question today is no longer whether we will get on the roller coaster, but what do we do as we ride down the wave (Heinberg 2022). The panic and rush seem rightful at first sight, but beyond the human dimension we can see the role of Christianity in this global game: on the one hand, to proclaim the message that without Good Friday (whose pain we ourselves cause) there is no resurrection. On the other hand, to carry the hope of resurrection, to believe that we have a role to play where God has placed us (Pope Francis 2024).

I can accept the responsibility of my ancestors, but there is no reason to stop at blaming. The problem, and when I recognised it, is a fact for me. My task is to recognise my scope and what I can do with my acts and words for the rest of my decades, and then how I can pass the baton. My personal curiosity thus led me to the topic of my research, which requires the participation of the scientific community to solve at a society level. Even if this is not a complex problem that can be solved once and for all, it is rather a journey that affects our personal and professional responses, sometimes giving better or worse answers.

Today, there are too many promises in the field of environmental protection and a huge lack of action: we still believe that we can solve the ecological crisis without changing our behaviour. In order to do what needs to be done, we need to act together, regardless of the fact that we start from different foundations and work with different methods. We need the cooperation of disciplines such as secular environmental philosophy, ecotechnology, natural sciences and agroforestry. We need to „enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (LS 3).

As private persons, we need to learn from a wide range of knowledge to find solutions that fit our own ways of life, and as scholars, we need a common language for this dialogue, „that the world cannot be analyzed by isolating only one of its aspects, since the book of nature is one and indivisible” (LS 6). The home is common, and we can't be satisfied with partial answers to a complex and interconnected problem.

I present shortly two topics that we are currently working on in the GodGarden. Biodiversity loss (LS 32-42) is clearly happening today at such a rapid rate because of human activity, and recovery is much slower than destruction. In our case, we are directly experiencing „lands converted into cultivated land lose the enormous biodiversity which they formerly hosted” (LS 39). Most of our land (about 2 hectares out of 2.5) was crop field, from which we would like to create a mixed orchard and wooded pasture, because

the long-term goal is to ensure the family's self-sufficiency in meat. We also have some orchards, but due to previous chemical spraying and weed control, the original ground covering grass is poor, and the fruit trees are over-selected varieties that can only survive with intensive care. So, our current activity is the phased replacement of existing trees and planting of wild rootstocks, which can later be grafted with resistant fruit types. Also, the conversion of the field into a species-rich meadow pasture, but here we mostly just let natural succession take its best. Our activities mainly include selective mowing of invasive monoculture species (e.g. Sudan grass, Sorghum Sudanese) before flowering. Sometimes sowing of pollinator-friendly seed mixtures on empty patches. And lots of walking on the sand and praying for rain.

The other issue is the problem of water (LS 27-31), which, unlike in other parts of the world, is not yet a problem of lack of safe drinking water. The weather in Hungary has changed in recent years, so that even if annual rain falls, it is not distributed regularly, but alternates between periods of droughts and intense rains. Water storage has become a key issue at both national and local level, and long-term solutions require a good level of planning. The first of our three current responses is closely linked to biodiversity, as the best storage site for rainwater is the soil itself. So higher humus content, more coverplants and their roots weaving through the soil means more water it can store. Plant life and rich soil life

is represented here too. (Manuring pasture animals on site would also contribute, but in our case, this will be a later step in the lack of funds for fencing.) As there is no sewage system in our area, we installed a biological purifier a few years ago, which converts the wastewater from our house into humus and irrigation water<sup>1</sup> using bacteria. The aim is still to reduce the use of running water, but water which is used once is recycled locally. The pipeline system to pump the water to the end of the orchard behind the house has been completed, and now the distribution trenches are being constructed in the area, where the gentle slope will allow gravity to bring the water to as many trees and bushes as possible. The rainwater that falls on the roof surface is already collected in a smaller container, but much more could be collected, so we have started to build an underground rainwater cistern of 40 cubic metres. This will be used to irrigate the kitchen garden during the dry periods, and above it will be a planter house, whose thermal balance will be controlled by the water mass below.

Beyond the practical and scientific curiosity and enthusiasm, I am also driven by a desire for real wisdom, to find an answer to the question: how should I live in this problem of the times. This is not a purely intellectual or moral question, but literally existential. It is a question of our existence. „Being a philosopher means solving some of life’s problems, not just in theory, but in practice” (Thoreau 2015). This will lead us to the pursuit of a sim-

pler life, where we can learn to distinguish needs from demands. To use creatively what we already have, and to develop a lifestyle that doesn’t require going on holiday from our life to rest.

Then we can welcome less, discovering the joy of simplicity rather than rigorous sacrifice, when we do not become the property of the things we own or the slaves of a seemingly higher status of living.

Kneeling theology also means contemplating and getting to know God in creation. “If you are a theologian, you pray truly; and if you pray truly, you are a theologian” (Evagrius Pontikos 1860). Creation protection or ecotheology is not only the active response of the Christian to God’s call (moral theology), but also a specific realisation of the Church’s mission (applied theology). That’s why it is closely related to applied domains such as social theology, pastoral theology and spiritual theology. Moreover, it is especially suited to the theological practice of ecumenism, since it does not affect classical differences and can be a sign of unity. The time perspective of our task is quite wide. Not only because of the mentioned ecological slowness and life-long challenge. In human dimensions, we are working for the future: for our children, grandchildren, or our descendants in any sense. The full scope of this is the salvation history, and a story that has been spoiled: „so that God may be all in all.” (1Corinthians 15,28) But to arrive there, we must find our place in the redeemed creation, because „creation itself eagerly awaits

the revelation of the children of God. [And] the entire creation has been groaning in labor pains until now” (Romans 8:19,22), so we are not alone in this, we just need to learn to cooperate with the other beings of creation. And with the Creator. Mary Magdalene did not immediately recognize Jesus on the mor-

ning of the resurrection, and thought she was talking to the gardener (John 20:15). But she was not far wrong. The story from creation to redemption goes from garden to garden (and from tree to tree). To find our own place and life in the garden of creation, we have one thing to do: become disciples of the Real Gardener.

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<sup>[1]</sup> This water is suitable for watering trees and indirectly food-producing plants such as berry bushes. It should not be used for watering root vegetables or for watering the soil surface where it could splash on the leaves or crops to be eaten.

## DIETETICS AS THERAPY SKETCH FOR A HOLISTIC IDEA

Adam Tamas Tuboly

*Department of Behavioural Sciences, Medical School, University of Pécs, Pécs*

### ■ ABSTRACT

This short essay is an attempt to establish the connection between Steven Shapin's grandiose historical reconstruction of the science of dietetics and the problems of chronic diseases and psychosomatic illnesses.

**Keywords:** dietetics, psychosomatic illness, Steven Shapin, chronic disease

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The American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines “chronic diseases” as “conditions that last one year or more and require ongoing medical attention or limit activities of daily living or both”. Their typical examples include such diverse issues as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Among a host of potential causes or contributing factors we find smoking, poor nutrition and physical inactivity, excessive alcohol use, and a host of further nonmedical, “social determinants”, like age, environment, occupation, mental health.

Notably, the typical examples of chronic disease do not include psychosomatic illnesses, which cover such physical pains that “arise in the mind” (Shorter 1992, 2) instead of having an actual and localized organic origin. Some ill-defined back and stomach pains, special forms of sudden paralysis and fatigue, all could be psychosomatic issues that come with a physiologically normal and healthy back, stomach, and basically undisturbed nervous system (as Shorter has shown, the “symptom pool” could vary with cultural and temporal contexts). Because patients report defined physical symptomatology (mainly various forms of pains with different intensity), such psychosomatic illnesses may often limit one’s daily activities, disturb their emotional life and thus affect one’s routines, and could last for years. As in such conditions there is a certain level of psychological contribution, their treatments are usually

beyond the limits of the usual pharmaceutical interventions and require not just good mental hygiene, but occasionally an even broader, holistic approach.

As an example, after several years of various abdominal pains (without finding the actual specific pathology that could cause the pain), I was visiting a physician recently with a right-sided pain. His diagnosis was that due to my lifestyle (sitting, reading, writing), I have a mild form of concave chest, thus my ribs do not provide sufficient space for my internal organs and that is manifesting in my regular and chronic pain, often accompanied by disturbing indigestion (causing further eating and mood problems, causing yet again further psychological discomfort during everyday routines).

After telling this story, some friends were laughing, others gave the typical “there is something in it” nodding, and even though the diagnosis was refuted by a physiotherapist, it led me to the history of dietetics. Recently the American historian and sociologist of science, Steven Shapin has published his latest magnum opus, *Eating and Being: A History of Ideas about Our Food and Ourselves* (Shapin 2024). The book is a major historical narrative about the scientific and cultural development of dietetics, the leading medical science of food and nutrition from the antiquity till the early 19th century. In the book, Shapin has recalled the following diagnosis and narrative from the 17<sup>th</sup> century:

*Students and scholars, as it was persistently said, had weak stomachs. They digested their food poorly, and indigestion in turn produced the dark and cloudy vapors that made for scholarly melancholy. [...]*

*One major cause of scholarly disease was fundamental to the sedentary life: scholars and other students just spent too much time sitting. This prolonged posture mechanically compressed the stomach, interfering with proper concoction and initiating the causal chain that proceeded from 'crudities' to 'vapors' to constipation and on to the protean marks of melancholy. (Shapin 2024, 164, original emphasis).*

Dealing with “occupational diseases”, dietetics introduced numerous variables and contextual considerations to explain individual differences and phenomena by connecting digestion, behavior, and mental life.

Dietetics was based on the old humoral theory that ruled everyday medical- and health-life of Western societies almost unchanged for two millennia (dating back to Hippocrates (5th century BC) and further developed and refined by Galen (2nd century AD)). According to the theory, human bodies are made of four distinct elements: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, and all diseases go back to a loss of balance between them (through either excess or deficiency). Thus, imbalance is a sign of an unhealthy body and mind, and different pathologies could be related to different imbalances.

Humoral theory was a holistic theory as it established further relations of the bodily humors to environmental factors (such

as weather, family and work relations), but also to the food ingested by the individual. Dietetics hence was not just about what we eat, but about an ordered, balanced way of life, providing a manner of living to prevent sickness and maintain health, to keep the balance of the humors. It had a relativist or individualist element: what was good for you, could be bad and harmful for someone else. Knowing yourself (which food, in what degree and when agrees with you) was the substance of theory: you were your best doctor, because you “knew yourself better than anyone else possibly could” (Shapin 2024, 171).

Furthermore, dietetics was not just a medical theory, but also a moral science: the idea was that what was medically good for you was also morally good. You had to find the right measure and relation between your everyday practices (like sleeping patterns, ways and modes of eating, drinking, conducting sexual activities, excretion, workload, thinking and mental disturbance, and daily routines) and your humors, and dieticians have told you for centuries that to prevent illness and act right, balance and moderation are the ways. As to act good, you had to act moderately, finding your middle a 'la the Golden Rule, to live healthy, you had to behave moderately, finding your balance with your humors (affected, well, basically by everything).

What is then the current view on the therapy for people suffering for psychosomatic

chronic diseases that puts a heavy burden on them and their environment? The biological processes at work are indeed complex, and in not finding clear cut triggers for them might suggest that there is an even more complex story to be told about your life,

your practices, your environment, and about your self-knowledge. And an invitation for reflection on how to find the balance, your balance, between all these factors. There is a full, rich life beyond calory-counting and ultrasound examinations.

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## EXPLORING ETHICAL DIMENSION IN CINEMATIC NARRATIVES: A CINEPHILE'S JOURNEY

Marek Lis

*Faculty of Theology, Opole University*

### ■ ABSTRACT

Ethical issues emerge not only in philosophical treatises, but also within the realm of popular culture, dominated by audiovisual media. For many people, ethical dilemmas in films become a kind of teacher of ethics: for this reason, film as locus ethicus should be of interest in (bio)ethical reflection.

**Keywords:** Krzysztof Kieślowski, Krzysztof Zanussi, cinema, ethics, theology

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Ethical reflection arises from encounters with reality, from the need to name good and evil, to work out the norms of human conduct. Aristotle stated *Nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu*, but this sentence referred to a communicative situation radically different from ours. In the ancient world, people experienced the world in person, or through a relationship with another person. However, a shift was already occurring at that time: this new world of borrowed experience was first analyzed by Plato in his dialogue *Phaedrus*. Plato, the first critic of the media, observed that letters – written texts, detached from human beings, were beginning to exist independently (Ong 2002). The development of literature made it possible to share experiences in an unprecedented way, to remember them despite the passing of successive generations. Among these texts were also those that inspired ethical reflection.

The emergence of cinema at the end of the 19th century introduced a new medium. Cinema, the first audiovisual medium, gradually became a new space for reflection addressing ethical issues: responsibility for another human being (e.g. Chaplin's films – *The Kid*, 1921) or for social issues (*Intolerance*, dir. David Wark Griffith, 1916). Currently thousands of films explore a broad spectrum of (bio)ethical issues. While few people formally study ethics, billions reflect on ethical questions presented on the screens. I count myself among them—cinema has been one of my ethics teachers!

I propose a preliminary typology of ethical films:

- film as a portrayal of a subject to ethical evaluation,
- film as an ethical treatise,
- film as an ethical problem.

The first group could include films that express disagreement with what is happening in the world: wars, terrorism, the exploitation of weaker, defenceless people or children, AI or transhumanism. The list of ethically relevant phenomena is far more extensive (Dalla Torre 2010).

The second group comprises films whose creators present personal reflections on man and the world of his values. The Polish filmmakers Krzysztof Zanussi and Krzysztof Kieślowski, the American Paul Schrader or the Iranian Asghar Farhadi have explored such themes.

The third category, film as an ethical problem, represents the intersection of ethical and cinematic issues; these include, for example, films that employ transgression: they function as expressions of ethical or unethical behaviour, often provocatively, and consequently become subjects of ethical evaluation (Vogel 1974).

As a theologian with a background in media studies and film studies, I have paid particular attention to films in the first and second categories, resulting in publications where film has become the starting point for an analysis of ethical attitudes. In several publications I explored, for example, bioethical issues in

cinema, such as suicide, violence, and its impact on the viewer (Lis 2013a).

However, I would like to highlight the multidimensionality of film as a mode of narration using the example of two Polish filmmakers whose work is particularly relevant to this discussion. Kieślowski's widely known Decalogue (1988) series was created with the author's implicit ethical intention: the observation of characters losing a sense of life and basic values served the director as a basis for recalling the fundamental ethical foundations found in the biblical Decalogue. The film originated from the director's sense of ethical responsibility (Stok 1993, 143). The issues of marital fidelity, family relations, abortion (the story of the pregnant Dorota unfolds in the 2nd, 5th and 8th films, and is concluded with the statement „the life of the child is the most important thing”), murder or the death penalty, theft and betrayal were presented by Kieślowski from an ethical perspective, yet ethical values were derived from the precepts of the Decalogue and the Gospel (Lis 2013b). The same is true of Krzysztof Zanussi's films: his films explore the ethical dilemmas faced

by their protagonists. Many connoisseurs regard Zanussi as a cinema ethicist who describes the human attitude towards problems and dilemmas, but a careful analysis reveals deeper motives for the behavior of the film protagonists and their ethical choices: a hidden theological background present in films (The Constant Factor, 1980) that are not overtly religious in nature (Lis 2015).

Theologians as early as in the 16th century began to use the concept of *locus theologicus*, which opens the way to a theological analysis not only of the Scriptures and explicitly religious texts, but also, for example, of works of art, fiction and now films. Perhaps an analogous term, *locus ethicus*, could be used to describe films that undertake or inspire ethical reflection? Can film function as a teacher, raising ethical questions for its audience? I argue that it can. Thus cinema could become an educational tool, a source of examples and material to discussion, even when it tries to provoke or deconstruct these values: the Hungarian film *A torinói ló* (2011, dir. Tarr Béla) reverses the biblical narrative of creation of the world and moves towards silence and darkness.

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# ROBOTS AND HUMANS: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NEURO-ETHICS.

**Tibor Szolcsányi**

*University of Pécs, Medical School, Department of Behavioural Sciences*

## ■ ABSTRACT

Advances in artificial intelligence, particularly in deep learning systems, have renewed debates about the possible moral and legal status of intelligent machines. These discussions extend beyond the question of future AI rights and directly engage considerations about the neuroethical foundations of human dignity and human rights. Because contemporary AI architectures are, in certain respects, functionally analogous to aspects of human brain organization, it becomes necessary to clarify which features of neural functioning are ethically relevant for the attribution of moral status.

This essay examines one influential theory used to justify human and animal rights: Tom Regan's account of inherent moral worth. It analyzes Regan's notion of being an experiencing subject of a life and offers a phenomenological interpretation that emphasizes the role of phenomenal consciousness in human motivation and preference formation. The paper argues that, although intelligent machines may exhibit complex goal-directed behavior, there is currently insufficient justification for attributing moral rights to them. At the same time, the analysis demonstrates how debates about AI rights deepen our understanding of the neuroethical foundations of human dignity.

**Keywords:** neuroethics, artificial intelligence, Tom Regan, phenomenal consciousness

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## Introduction

The functioning of the human brain has ethical significance as evidenced by the widespread medical and legal acceptance of the whole-brain death definition of death (Bernat, 2005). This definition implies that biological personhood is determined—either fully or at least in part—by the brain’s capacity to coordinate bodily functions. This raises a fundamental question: is it possible to identify the specific attributes of the human brain that make each person intrinsically worthy? In other words, can it be rational to ground

the concept of human dignity and rights in the functioning of the nervous system?

The complexity of this question necessitates consideration of another related issue, which may offer some preliminary insights. The internal operations of the most advanced AI-based robots exhibit certain similarities to the functioning of natural nervous systems. This raises the critical question: under what conditions should a brain-inspired intelligent machine be considered as an entity deserving rights?

I turn now to this second question.

## Critical Anthropomorphism: a conceptual and methodological tool

The question of whether intelligent machines and robots should be considered as entities with rights is a complex ethical and philosophical issue. As artificial intelligence and robotics evolve, the possibility of granting rights to machines must be examined within a structured theoretical framework. To find an appropriate theoretical framework, it can be useful first to introduce the concept of critical anthropomorphism, which refers to the cautious attribution of human-like traits to robots based on their observed behaviors. Naturally, a certain degree of anthropomorphism is unavoidable when examining the functioning and behavior of AI (for review, see Li & Suh, 2022), as AI is specifically designed

to perform human-like cognitive tasks, such as symbol-processing, memory, perception, among others. Moreover, AI capable of machine learning employs multilevel data-processing mechanisms that, in some relevant respects, resemble natural neural networks. As Arleen Salles (2020) and her colleagues emphasize, neuroscience has clearly inspired AI-research, but the reverse is also true because AI-research has inspired neuroscientists to better understand how the human brain works. It is therefore unsurprising that not only lay persons tend to use to kind of naive AI-anthropomorphism, but AI experts also tend to use anthropocentric language when analyzing the behavior and function-

ing of intelligent machines. (Salles, A., Evers, K., & Farisco, M. (2020)). However, unlike naive anthropomorphism, which assumes that any human-like behavior in machines implies consciousness, critical anthropomorphism serves as a methodological tool for analyzing robotic agency and cognition.

The concept of critical anthropomorphism originates in debates on animal welfare issues. In that context, critical anthropomorphism is the view that the compassionate treatment of animals must be grounded in objective knowledge—utilizing scientific methods—regarding the evolution, behavior and internal processes of the animals and species in question (Donnelley & Nolan, 1990; Morton, Burghardt & Smit, 1990). Naturally, debates exist in the literature concerning the role and significance of critical

anthropomorphism (see e.g., Karlsson, 2012). However, from a philosophical standpoint it is much clearer that critical anthropomorphism is essential for formulating strong arguments against certain versions of panpsychism, such as a view that suggests all physical objects can experience pain.

If a robot merely simulates human emotions and decision-making through advanced programming but lacks any true internal experience, it remains a sophisticated tool rather than a rights-bearing entity. However, if a brain-inspired robot's behavior indicates a deeper cognitive structure—one that allows for learning, adaptation, and self-initiated action—then denying its moral status might be unjustified. Ultimately, the answer depends on the theoretical framework adopted.

## Human rights and the philosophical basis for moral consideration

To determine whether an intelligent machine or a robot should be granted rights, it is useful to draw upon established theories regarding human and animal rights. Tom Regan's concept of inherent moral worth is particularly relevant in this context. (Regan, (2004). Regan argues that an entity deserves rights if it is an experiencing subject-of-a-life—an individual capable of experiencing its environment, recognizing the effects of its own behavior, and pursuing personal interests based on future-orient-

ed desires. In Regan's view, therefore, we do not have sufficient reason to attribute inherent moral value to an entity merely because it is sentient; other attributes play a decisive role in this determination. Consequently, if a robot can demonstrate characteristics suggesting that the robot is an experiencing subject-of-a-life, such as the ability to form goals, avoid harm, or express preferences, then denying its moral status could be inconsistent with Regan's theoretical framework.

The key question, however, is whether a robot's actions are the result of genuine internal preferences or merely predefined responses to stimuli. To examine this question more thoroughly, I will offer an interpreta-

tion of Regan's view on what it means to be an experiencing subject-of-a-life. An analysis of phenomenal consciousness and its role in human experiences and motivations will be central to my interpretation.

## The phenomenal aspect of experiences and human preference-formation

Phenomenal consciousness is commonly defined as the aspect of consciousness associated with the concept of qualia. Undoubtedly, human experiences often possess qualitative features that define how sensations, emotions, and moods feel to an individual—or as Thomas Nagel (1974) phrased it, “what it is like” for a person to have conscious experience. Even within the same sensory modality, experiences can differ significantly in their qualitative character—for example, variations in colors, tastes, odors, or musical sounds.

A defining characteristic of phenomenal consciousness is its subjectivity. Only the individual undergoing a particular experience has privileged, first-person access to its qualitative content. In contrast, external observers can only have indirect, inference-based access to the phenomenal properties of another's experience (Nagel, 1974). This asymmetrical access, and the resulting individual uniqueness of phenomenal states, is perhaps the most important attribute of phenomenal consciousness (Haladjian & Montemayor, 2016)).

David Chalmers (1997) famously introduced the “Hard Problem of Consciousness” to emphasize a fundamental explanatory gap in contemporary neuroscience and philosophy of mind: while science has made substantial progress in mapping the neural correlates of conscious experiences, it remains unclear how and why specific patterns of neural activity give rise to phenomenal states. Nevertheless, human motivations are often directed toward phenomenal states rather than merely toward states of affairs. Consider, for instance, one of the most fundamental human motivations: the desire for safety. While appropriate external conditions are typically necessary for people to experience a sense of safety, these circumstances often serve merely as a means to the subjective experience of what it feels like to be safe—or to ensure the subjective feeling of safety for loved ones. The phenomenal aspect of experiencing safety, therefore, is in many cases an inherent component of the genuine human motivation for safety.

Numerous other examples can illustrate the

relevance of phenomenal states in achieving, maintaining, and ensuring preferred individual experiences. According to my best knowledge, the first author who clearly argued for the functional role of phenomenal consciousness in the human cognitive system was Uriah Kriegel (2004). In a recent article, Cleeremans & Tallon-Baudry, (2022) also emphasized the role of phenomenal states in human decision-making and preference formation. By

contrast, although intelligent machines can exhibit goal-directed behavior, there is a consensus among AI researchers that, at the current stage of AI development, there are no sufficient practical reasons to assume that the behavior of intelligent machines results from subjective experiences or phenomenal consciousness (see, e.g., Haladjian, H. H., & Montemayor, C. (2016); Ng, G. W., & Leung, W. C. (2020); Woodward, P. (2022).

## Concluding remarks

If we accept my phenomenological interpretation of what it means to be an experiencing subject-of-a-life, then there is currently insufficient justification for granting rights to intelligent machines and robots within the framework of Tom Regan's theory. From a neuroethical perspective, it is also crucial to recognize that the neural processes oc-

curing in the human brain can give rise to—and correlate with—subjective experiences and the phenomenal aspects of human consciousness. It may be possible to develop a conception of human dignity that reflects the fact that, under appropriate neural conditions, human beings are experiencing subjects-of-a-life.

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Some parts of this essay—specifically, the final paragraph of Section 1 and all paragraphs in Section 2—were written with the assistance of AI, based on my own PowerPoint slides.

The prompt used was: "Create a coherent academic text based on the uploaded slides." In addition, various parts of the essay were refined with AI support to enhance American English grammar and academic style, in part following AI-assisted editorial feedback.

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# HOW BILL GATES AND I MET THROUGH BIOETHICS AND WHY I THINK PHILANTHROCAPITALISM IS A BIOETHICAL ISSUE

Ivica Kelam

*Faculty of Education/Faculty of Dental Medicine and Health, Josip Juraj  
Strossmayer University of Osijek*

## ■ ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the Gates Foundation's influence on global health and agriculture. While promoting technological solutions, its philanthrocapitalist model raises bioethical concerns regarding power imbalances, lack of democratic accountability, the promotion of GMO-based agricultural reforms, and the privatisation of public health systems. I argue that such practices reshape global health policy and food systems, often marginalising local knowledge and community participation.

**Keywords:** Philanthrocapitalism, global health policy, Bill Gates, bioethics, GMOS, agriculture

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## Introduction

In the 21st century, philanthropy has been replaced by so-called “philanthropic capitalism”, which has significantly changed how global health policies are shaped and international development projects are implemented to improve the health and living conditions of the poorest people on the planet.

This new “philanthropic capitalism” model implies that ultra-wealthy individuals, led by Bill Gates, use their wealth, often acquired through neoliberal, ethically questionable market practices, to operate in humanitarian or scientific-medical fields, while applying market logic and success metrics. The most prominent representative and promoter of “philanthropic capitalism” is Bill Gates, whose

activities through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have become a global actor in shaping global health policies. However, while the Gates Foundation invests billions of dollars in vaccine research, the fight against infectious diseases, and agricultural biotechnology (including GMO crops) in developing countries, there are growing critics (myself included) who question the ethics and long-term consequences of these actions. Although this type of philanthropy appears well-intentioned at first glance, it increasingly resembles neocolonialism disguised as aid when analysed more closely. Below, we will briefly list and explain the main ethical issues associated with the practice of philanthrocapitalism.

## Undemocratic power and lack of accountability

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is the largest private funder of global health policies and the second-largest funder of the World Health Organisation (WHO), with several billion dollars in annual expenditures. The result of this type of financing is a direct influence on the priorities of the World Health Organisation, GAVI, CEPI and similar bodies. However, unlike national governments that must adhere to democratic procedures, the Gates Foundation operates independently of

the political will of citizens; that is, Bill Gates is politically and morally accountable to the public for his actions. Consequently, such an absolute lack of accountability poses a serious bioethical problem because it allows the concentration of power without the possibility of critical scrutiny, audit or sanctions. Citizens of developing countries, scientists, and local health systems often have no meaningful opportunity to influence projects promoted by Gates and his foundation that directly affect their lives.

## Technical solutions and conflicts of interest

Bill Gates often favours technological solutions such as vaccines, genetically modified crops, and the digitalisation of healthcare systems. While these tools have value, this reductionist approach ignores the complexity of social and cultural contexts. Health is not merely a matter of technology but also of economic, social, and political conditions. It is important to note that the Gates Foundation invests in shares of pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies whose prod-

ucts it simultaneously promotes, as was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, with Bill Gates's firm insistence on protecting the patent rights of large pharmaceutical corporations on coronavirus vaccines having a particularly negative public resonance. Such a conflict of interest undermines the ethical credibility of the foundation and raises the question of benefit: for whom are the projects intended – for patients or corporate shareholders?

## Colonial patterns and cultural paternalism.

Programs funded by the Gates Foundation often do not align with local priorities or cultural values. In India, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Pakistan, vaccination programs and food packages were implemented without sufficient participation from local experts and communities. This kind of paternalism

is reminiscent of colonial governance models in which “scientific” progress is imposed on local populations without their consent. In the long term, this can lead to refusal of medical interventions, erosion of trust in institutions, and the creation of additional health inequalities.

## Conclusion

The philanthropy of Bill Gates is as dangerous as it is powerful. While bioethicists such as Peter Singer may regard his work as historically significant, a deeper analysis reveals a functional failure of the “techno-fix” model. As highlighted in my previous research, 18 years of AGRA (Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa)

have not only failed to meet their promises but have coincided with a 30 per cent increase in the level of undernourished people in the target countries (Kelam, 2024). These stark data underscore that Gates's model is not merely ineffective; it is fundamentally anti-democratic. By prioritising the expertise and local seeds

of African farmers over top-down agribusiness, the Gates Foundation effectively undermines local autonomy. As Jan Urhahn poignantly argues, this model has failed to relieve the hunger crisis and instead serves to “undercut Africans’ ability to solve their own problems, free of do-gooder philanthropists” (Urhahn, 2023). This highlights the necessity of bioethics as a science that must problematize the power relationships and non-democratic practices inherent in such global charity. Ultimately, the bioethical concern is the preservation of the status quo. Philanthrocapitalism, by its very nature, avoids addressing the root causes of inequality—namely, the neoliberal capitalist

system—to ensure that the benefactors remain at the peak of the global power pyramid. As Tim Schwab (2023) reminds us, a charitable gift should collapse power asymmetries rather than magnify them. In this light, Gates’s disregard for the dignity and rights of low-income people speaks to a colonial lens. We will conclude with a word from Tim Schwab: humanitarianism, which aims at real human progress, equality, justice, and freedom, requires us to “challenge unaccountable power and illegitimate leaders, not worship them” (Schwab, 2023). In this bioethical framework, Bill Gates is clearly identified as the problem rather than the solution.

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# ADHD AND THE CHANCE TO LIVE LIFE BACKWARDS

Gusztáv Kovács

*University of Pécs, Medical School, Department of Behavioral Sciences  
Episcopal Theological College of Pécs*

## ■ ABSTRACT

The main assumption behind the current article is that academic inquiry is rooted deeply in personal biography. Using the author's own transition from theology to the study of ADHD, the text posits that this condition serves as a powerful metaphor for the Lebenswelt of the 21st century. With reference to the work of Gábor Máté and Byung-Chul Han, it concludes that recovering deep attention is a vital theological and philosophical necessity in an age defined by burnout and an "excess of positivity".

**Keywords:** ADHD, personal biography, Byung-Chul Han, attention, Gábor Máté

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Academic thinking including science are personal. The choice of subject of inquiry itself is telling not just about the preferences of the given society, but also about the person and his interests. What one chooses to put under the microscope magnifies also a part of who he is. This was true at the beginning of academic thought in Greece, when philosophy and science were not differentiated as they are today. The roots of Plato's interest in the ideal can be found in his family origins, just like Aristotle's interest for the functioning of organisms are likely to come from his physicist father. Both contributed strongly not only to philosophy, but also to

what we call law, sociology, biology or medicine today, and the reason behind their choice of subject lies deep in their biography.

How valid these statements are is shown by my own personal history in academic thinking. As a trained theologian, professional philosopher and bioethicist I especially leaned towards topics which were connected in many ways to my path through life. Looking at the topics of my publications, one might easily draw the line of important matters in my own life, but by reading the texts the changes in the social context behind my research are also detectable (Kovács 2009; Kovács 2010; Kovács 2014; Kovács 2021).

## ADHD and 21st century life

The reason for choosing ADHD as a topic of research also lies in a personal experience. Gábor Máté, the Hungarian born physicist from Canada, uses a wonderful simile to describe the experience of a person with ADHD:

“My life, like that of many an adult with ADD, resembled a juggling act from the old Ed Sullivan show: a man spins plates, each balanced on a stick. He keeps adding more and more sticks and plates, running back and forth frantically between them as each stick, increasingly unsteady, threatens to topple over. He could keep this up only for so long before the sticks tottered and the plates began to shatter, or he himself collapsed. Something has to give, but the ADD personality has trouble letting go of anything. Unlike the juggler, he cannot stop

the performance” (Máté 1999, 11-12).

When I read Máté's lines, it reminded me not only how many roles I have to fill in my public, professional and personal life, being a rector, a researcher, a lecturer, a colleague, but also as a husband and a father. It brought the numerous personal and institutional contacts to my mind which I maintain and foster on a regular basis. Moreover, this description also reminded me of the numerous ways I'm connected with the persons and institutions through my phone, where I not only engage in individual conversations, but also initiate conference calls, pay my bills, search for information and find orientation when I'm lost in space or life. I think I'm not alone with this and Máté's simile of the spinning plates

gives an enlightening and plastic description not only of my life, but of most people living across the globe. Thus, in my opinion, ADHD

might not only refer to a set of neurological conditions but might also be used to describe our experience of the world we live in.

## Byung-Chul Han: the philosopher who lives life backwards

This idea of using ADHD as a means to describe our fundamental experience of our everyday life captivated me and I was thrilled when I got Byung-Chul Han's *Müdigkeitsgesellschaft* (The Burnout Society) into my hands. Similarly to Susan Sontag (Sontag 1978), Han uses illness as a metaphor to describe the basic functioning of contemporary society and also our experience of it. As he claims in *The Burnout Society* that "Every age has its signature afflictions" (Han 2015, 1). Han sees the afflictions of the early 21st century as neurological disorders and diseases such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), borderline personality disorder, and burnout. He calls the 20th century is the "bacterial age", which was ended by antibiotics, the diseases of the 21st century are not caused by infections, but by an "excess of positivity" (Han 2015, 1).

Attention and focus, however, are not only a subject of psychology, but also of philosophy and religion. Burnout does not only concern our productivity or mental well-being, but also our sense of meaning – be it philosophical or religious. This is another strong insight of Han, as he writes in his latest book *Sprechen über Gott: Ein Dialog mit Simone Weil* that "Religion presupposes an attention for things that elude availability, consumption, and devouring" (Han 2025, 12). For me, as a theologian, not only ADHD as an allegorical criticism of our lived reality turns out to be highly relevant, but also the focus on the phenomenon of attention in Han's works. The social and the psychological is thus connected to religion and becomes the subject of theology.

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