

# **Sacred Cyborgs**

## **Exploring the Intersection of Artificial Intelligence, Transhumanism and Religion**

*International Conference on Transhumanism and Religions at the University of Innsbruck*

**Date: 7.-9. February 2025**

**Location: Madonnensaal, Faculty of Theology (2nd floor, room 201)**

**Karl-Rahner-Platz 3, 6020 Innsbruck**

### **Abstracts and CVs**

### **Keynote Lecture**

**Prof. Dr. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner** | John Cabot University (Rome), Italy

*Religion, Politics, and Original, Classic, and Euro-Transhumanism*

#### **Abstract:**

In contemporary discourse, the entanglement of religion, politics, and transhumanism has intensified. Individuals like Dugin and the Patriarch of Moscow regard transhumanism as “diabolical,” framing Russia’s confrontation with the West as a clash between Orthodox truth and a decadent techno-future. Steve Bannon, an ex-advisor to Donald Trump, broadens Francis Fukuyama’s critique by emphasizing that practicing transhumanism is far more dangerous than merely theorizing it; his comments carry antisemitic undertones by linking transhumanism to global conspiracies. Classic transhumanism, represented by figures like Elon Musk, has gained political traction but features an atheistic bent often hostile to monotheistic religion—though not shared by “original transhumanists” like Natasha Vita-More and Max More. Building on the “weak thinking” of Gianni Vattimo and integrating it into a variant of Euro-Transhumanism, this talk argues for a more nuanced perspective: there need be no conflict between monotheism and transhumanism if grounded in an appropriate ethical framework. Overcoming binary oppositions can mitigate moral pitfalls and pave the way for a reconcilable future in religion and politics.

#### **Biography:**

Prof. Dr. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner is Professor of Philosophy at John Cabot University in Rome, known for his pioneering work on posthumanism and transhumanism. Often referred to as the “Bad Boy of Philosophy,” Sorgner combines Nietzschean philosophy with transhumanist ethics in his “Euro-Transhumanism.” He serves as Academic Advisor for Humanity+ and is a Fellow at the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies (IEET). Additionally, he is a founding editor of the *Journal of Posthuman Studies* (Penn State University Press). Sorgner’s approaches have garnered acclaim from various intellectuals, including Gianni Vattimo, Eduardo Kac, Julian Savulescu, N. Katherine Hayles, and Stelarc.

## Panel I: Philosophical and Theological Foundations of Transhumanism

Dr. Andrei Nuțaș | Institute of Advanced Environmental Research, West University of Timișoara, Romania

*Transhumanism as Religion: Emerging Faiths and Philosophies*

### Abstract:

This talk critically explores how transhumanism—especially in its classical Silicon Valley formulation—replicates structural features commonly associated with religious movements. Promises of cosmic colonization, digital immortality, and a post-biological future echo longstanding religious themes of salvation, transcendence, and an afterlife. Meanwhile, charismatic “tech gurus” and AI-centric elites often assume roles reminiscent of spiritual leaders, raising concerns about a potential “techno-feudalist” restructuring of social order. By examining these parallels through theological, sociological, and ethical lenses, the presentation delves into how modern technology-based aspirations echo the communal frameworks, shared mythologies, and moral codes typically seen in religious organizations. In doing so, it invites reflection on the broader implications of viewing emerging tech-driven visions as recast forms of spiritual yearning—prompting us to question not only the future of belief but also the evolving structures of power and social organization in an era shaped by digital innovation.

### Biography:

Dr. Andrei Nutas is a research fellow at the Institute of Advanced Environmental Research belonging to the West University of Timisoara. His work engages with ethics, technology and sustainability through an euro-transhumanist lense. Dr. Nutas has recently published his first book "Artificial Morality: An Exploration of Moral Machines". Some other recently published papers of his are "AI solutionism as a barrier to sustainability transformations in research and innovation" with Gaia and "Space Junk Ethics" with the Journal of Posthuman Studies. In addition, Dr. Nutas is the head organizer of the Transhumanist Summer Festival which will take place in August 16-24, 2025 în Timisoara, Romania. The festival will host a transhumanist summer school, a transhumanist summit as well as various expos that aim to structure a vision of how humanity can develop a "sane" transhumanist future.

Prof. Dr. Johannes Hoff |University of Innsbruck, Austria

*Transhumanism as Symptom of an Insane Society: Idolatry and the Future of Religious Formation*

### Abstract:

This lecture interprets transhumanism not as a coherent philosophical system but rather as a symptom of a sociocultural pathology. It highlights the inherent logical self-contradictions and the backward-looking view of science and technology in transhumanist “progress” narratives. In exploring the technogenic root causes of today’s social pathology, the presentation underscores the idolatrous features of transhumanist utopias and addresses the late-modern phenomenon of non-belief (mécréance). These factors point to a wider “orientation crisis” sparked by technological “advances” in the 21st century. In the concluding segment, transhumanist soteriology is portrayed as a corruption of the forgotten root of the concept of salvation in premodern Christian orthodoxy.

### Biography:

Prof. Dr. Johannes Hoff has been Professor of Theological Dogmatics at the University of Innsbruck since 2020 (succeeding Karl Rahner) and a Senior Research Fellow at the Van Hùgel Institute, University of Cambridge. Formerly Professor of Philosophical Theology at Heythrop College (University of London) and at Saint David’s College (University of Wales), his research investigates the pre-modern tradition of philosophical mysticism, digital transformation’s anthropological challenges, and posthumanist “technologies of the self.” Hoff’s ongoing work includes an Austrian Science Fund (FWF) project on “Embodiment in Theological Anthropology.” A related collaboration with the Institute for Information Systems and Society at WU Vienna focuses on the intersection of ethics, technology, and theology. His monograph *Verteidigung des Heiligen. Anthropologie der digitalen Transformation* (Herder, 2021) addresses the anthropology of the digital age.

## Panel II: Transhumanism, Technology, and Islamic Thought

Prof. Dr. Maurizio Balistreri | Tuscia University (Viterbo), Italy

*Space Travel and Religion: Theological Implications of Humanity's Expansion*

### Abstract:

The exploration and colonization of space is increasingly supported by both Catholic and Islamic authorities, who recognize potential benefits in humanity's expansion beyond Earth. However, this talk will argue that such endeavors may conflict with key ethical principles in both traditions, particularly regarding reproduction and interventions in human nature. It will explore the theological implications of space exploration and examine how religious values may shape the future of humanity's presence in space.

### Biography:

Prof. Dr. Maurizio Balistreri is Associate Professor of Moral Philosophy and Bioethics at the Department of Linguistic and Literary, Historical, Philosophical, and Legal Studies (DISTU) at Tuscia University. Formerly Chair of the Turin Bioethics Lab, he is Editor of the "Icaro" book series (Fandango). His main interests include bioethics, applied ethics, robot ethics, and AI ethics. His publications cover a variety of topics—ranging from human reproduction to genetic engineering—and include:

- *Il bambino migliore? Che cosa significa essere genitori responsabili al tempo del genome editing* (Fandango, 2022)
- *Superumani. Etica e potenziamento* (Espress 2011; 2020)
- *Sex Robot. Love in the Age of Machines* (Fandango 2018; Malpasso 2021; Trivent 2022)
- *Il futuro della riproduzione umana* (Fandango 2016)
- *La clonazione umana prima di Dolly* (Mimesis 2015)

He is also co-author of *Biotechnologie e organismi modificati. Scienza, etica e diritto* (Il Mulino 2020).

Dr. Hureyre Kam |University of Innsbruck, Austria

*Islamic Thought in a Transhumanist World: Ethics of Responsibility  
as a Necessary Orientation in Face of the Anthropocene*

### Abstract:

This paper explores the intersection of Islamic ethics, the Anthropocene, and transhumanism, contending that the complexities posed by globalization, environmental crises, and rapid technological innovation necessitate a robust ethics of responsibility. Building on Al-Māturīdī's theological defense of free will—particularly his notion of the "moment of inner resistance"—the study highlights the limits of strictly deontological, intentional, or virtue-based approaches in addressing emerging dilemmas. It proposes a novel framework of responsibility ethics, suitable for Islamic theological discourse, to balance spiritual objectives with scientific realities. The argument concludes that such an integrative approach both honors the autonomy central to Islam and provides a vital normative compass in the face of accelerating advancements in AI and biotech.

### Biography:

Dr. Hureyre Kam studied Philosophy and Islamic Studies at the Technical University and Free University of Berlin, earning his PhD at Goethe University Frankfurt. His dissertation—*Das Böse als Gottesbeweis* (2019)—examined al-Māturīdī's theodicy. After completing his doctorate, he lectured at the Swiss Institute for Islam and Society at the University of Fribourg. He held a visiting professorship at the Academy of World Religions (University of Hamburg, 2018–2021) and received a Feodor Lynen Research Fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation to conduct research at Yale University. Since 2023, he has been investigating epistemological and ethical dimensions of post- and transhumanist ideas through a Kalām (Islamic theology) framework at the University of Innsbruck. In 2024, he was appointed as a guest professor in Islamic Theology and Education at the University of Zurich.

## Panel III: Ethics, Hope, and Faith in Technological Futures

Dr. Asligül Aysel | University of Innsbruck, Austria

*Ethics and Morality in the Age of New Technologies: A Reflection from Islamic and Societal Perspectives*

### Abstract:

The rapid development of new technologies—such as artificial intelligence (AI) and biotechnology—has prompted significant ethical and moral questions regarding their impact on society. This contribution explores the intersection of ethics and morality in the context of technological advancements, drawing on insights from both Islamic and broader societal perspectives. It defines ethics and morality within the technological sphere, discussing key concerns such as data privacy, algorithmic fairness, and human enhancement. Islamic teachings—grounded in principles of justice (*‘adl*), beneficence (*ihsān*), and harm avoidance (*darār*)—provide a framework for evaluating the ethical implications of these technologies. The paper also addresses specific challenges posed by AI, biotechnology, and surveillance, highlighting the relevance of Islamic ethics in ensuring fairness, transparency, and respect for human dignity. Moreover, it examines the societal push for global ethical standards—exemplified by initiatives like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)—and proposes that a synthesis of Islamic and societal perspectives can foster a more holistic approach to technology ethics. The contribution concludes by stressing the importance of dialogue between Islamic and broader societal frameworks to navigate the ethical complexities of technological progress responsibly.

### Biography:

Dr. Asligül Aysel studied History and Oriental Studies/Islamic Studies at Ruhr University Bochum (RUB) and Istanbul University. She completed her dissertation on Turkish ways of life in Duisburg at RUB. From 2014 to 2016, she worked in the museum sector, and from 2016 to 2018, served as a research associate in the project “Acceptance, Formation, and Transformation: The Example of Islamic Religious Education” at the Department of Islamic Theology and Didactics at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen. From 2018 to 2021, she worked on the DFG project “Islamic Theology at German Universities: A Study of Islamic Religious Expertise in Germany” at the University of Münster (WWU) and was a member of the Excellence Cluster “Religion and Politics.” Since October 2021, she has been a Senior Scientist at the University of Innsbruck. Her research focuses on Islamic educational and professionalization processes in Germany and Europe.

Prof. Dr. Michaela Quast-Neulinger | University of Innsbruck, Austria

*Desperate Hope: On Revelation in the Midst of Deep Dehumanization*

### Abstract:

In historical sociology of religion, the “Breakthrough to Transcendence” is considered one of the mile stones of human evolution and a main characteristic of axiality. This shifting in human consciousness has deeply influenced the making of authority and social order. In religious terms, it is revelation, the intimate connection of the human being with the divine, that criticizes mundane realities and demands a permanent transformation of the self towards a higher, ultimate reality. For Karl Jaspers, the breakthrough to transcendence in the first millennium BCE was the founding moment of the human being as we knew it till the 20th century. **Axiality is the moment of humanization.**

In our times, there seems to be a completely different situation. **Trans- and ultimately posthumanism** are nothing but euphemisms for a **deep dehumanization**, embedded in excessive capitalism, meaningless relativism, which is sometimes dressed in truth-theo-fundamentalism, and imperial masculinist power plays. What happens after the mergence of human and technology in the ultimate singularity (cf. Kurzweil)? Is the singularity the ultimate unity of “God” and wo/man most spiritual traditions imagine? Or is it the extinction of what once was a hopeful promise?

The Book of Proverbs (29,18) says: “Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom’s instruction.” Is the religious language of “revelation” still real or replaced by the immanent promises of posthumanism and its power players?

Based on theories of axiality, I will argue that we are in the midst of a new age of deep dehumanization which is in danger of completely breaking with the most precious achievements of axial ages: critical thinking, transformation of the self, plurality and ultimately mankind as such. Where there is no relational God, there is no mankind anymore. **Where there is no revelation, there is no critical instance, no limit, no truth – but pure, naked oppressive power.**

Thus, no surprise, the “God of Tech” is a God of the rich, powerful, merciless. But is it still the God of Abraham/Ibrahim, Isaac, Jacob? Does this God still have a say in the midst of deep dehumanization? Maybe no more than desperate hope.

### Biography:

Prof. Dr. Michaela Quast-Neulinger studied Catholic Theology in Vienna, Salzburg, and Jerusalem (Mag.theol. 2011), as well as Islamic Studies in Birmingham (MA 2012). She earned her doctorate at the University of Innsbruck in 2017. Since 2022, she has held a Tenure-Track Professorship for Fundamental Theology and Religious Studies in Innsbruck. A board member of PLURIEL and the HEST-Cluster “Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” her current research focuses on Axial Age theory, political theology, and the theology of work.

**Dipl.-Phys. Hakan Turan** | Guest lecturer, University of Innsbruck, Austria

*Between Geocentrism and the Evolutionary Multiverse:  
Introduction to Recent Positions in the Islamic Science-and-Religion Discourse*

**Abstract:**

This lecture introduces current positions in the Islamic discourse on science and religion from a theoretical perspective. In addition to approaches focused on Qur'anic exegesis, it presents influential metaphysical models of nature derived from Islamic theology and philosophy. The integration of exegetical and metaphysical positions significantly shapes the understanding of the theoretical foundations and limitations of modern natural science. This encompasses the general concept of natural laws as well as perspectives on complex contemporary fields such as quantum physics and evolutionary biology. The discussion centers on evaluating the extent and implications of integrational perspectives within this discourse.

**Biography:**

Dipl.-Phys. Hakan Turan (born in 1979) is a theoretical physicist and dedicated grammar school teacher specializing in physics, mathematics, philosophy, and Islamic religious education. Beyond his teaching responsibilities, he serves as a teacher educator for trainee teachers (Referendariat) in Islamic religious education in Stuttgart. Hakan also delivers lectures on intercultural communication in schools as part of state training programs and holds a lecturer position at the University of Innsbruck within the master's program 'Islamic Theological Studies,' focusing on the 'Philosophy of Science in Islamic Thought.'

In his doctoral research, Hakan explores the interplay between Islamic philosophy and modern physics, investigating its implications for identity-related educational philosophy. His work aims to bridge traditional Islamic intellectual frameworks with contemporary scientific paradigms, fostering a deeper understanding of how these domains influence each other and contribute to educational practices.

## **Panel IV: Ethical Dimensions of New Technologies Scriptural Reasoning Session**

**Dr. Hadil Lababidi** | University of Zurich, Switzerland

*Islamic Ethical Perspectives on Personality Changes through Deep Brain Stimulation*

**Abstract:**

With the advent of neurotechnology, brain stimulation methods are increasingly recognized for treating neurological diseases such as Parkinson's. However, while deep brain stimulation (DBS) remains confined to medical contexts due to its invasiveness, some emerging brain stimulation technologies are already accessible to consumers without formal medical supervision. Building on new research suggesting future non-therapeutic uses of DBS for cognitive enhancement, this talk examines the ethical and psychosocial ramifications of such interventions, particularly in light of Islamic ethical principles. By engaging concepts like *taklīf* (responsibility before God) and *ḍarūra* (necessity), the presentation illuminates the potential for moral dilemmas and discusses how Islamic bioethics might respond to personality changes induced by DBS.

**Biography:**

Dr. Hadil Lababidi is a lecturer in Islamic biomedical ethics at the University of Zurich. She completed her PhD in Islamic-Religious Studies at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg in February 2023, earning the DAVO Dissertation Prize for her work. She co-edits the *Journal of Medicine, Ethics & Islam / Zeitschrift für Medizinethik und Islam* and focuses her research on dementia in Islam, medical ethics, and gender-specific medicine.

## Panel V: Religion and the Future: Theological and Ethical Perspectives on Space, Technology, and Posthumanism

Fawz Duwhy, M.A. & Taylor Pearson, MSc |University of Leeds & SOAS, UK

*Shahid, AI and Cultural Reprogramming: Exploring Saudi Influence through the Lens of Transhumanist Theory*

### Abstract:

Since the early 21st Century, Türkiye has almost always dominated the TV serial industry in the Middle East, primarily through its successful promotion of Turkish series across the region as part of its soft power. However, more recent developments in Saudi Arabia—particularly with the ascension of Mohammad Bin Salman (MBS) and his Vision 2030 initiative—seek to challenge the dominance of Turkish soft power over the production and popularity of on-demand TV serial platforms in the region. This paper will argue that the struggle for hegemony in the Middle Eastern TV serial market has revealed a transhumanist dimension in how Saudi Arabia deploys AI to advance a form of cultural engineering.

By focusing on Shahid’s use of AI, this paper examines how the deliberate “Saudification” of Turkish-origin TV serials can be interpreted as a transhumanist effort to enhance human capabilities through cultural reprogramming. To be clear, the paper contends that the improvement of human capabilities—per transhumanist theory—is integrally tied to the aims and strategies of “Saudified” TV serials, as well as the broader suite of broadcast technologies used to cultivate Saudi superiority domestically and regionally. The discussion proceeds as follows:

1. Specific examples of “Saudified” serials and their impacts on audiences;
2. Saudi aspirations to assert cultural and religious dominance through TV serials—and how these efforts resonate with transhumanist theory;
3. A focused analysis on how AI technologies used in streaming services illustrate Saudi Arabia’s ambitions to dominate the TV serial market via a transhumanist logic.

### Biographies:

**Fawz Duwhy** is an Iraqi-British researcher specializing in media and cyber law. She holds an LLB and a Master of Arts by Research in Law from the University of Leeds. Her master’s thesis, entitled *A Critique of the Role Model Argument in the Law of Misuse of Private Information*, presents an innovative psychological perspective on privacy law and was supervised by Prof. Paul Wragg. Fawz’s research interests traverse free speech, artificial intelligence, harm theory, and the socio-legal dynamics of the Middle East. She is particularly fascinated by how regulatory frameworks intersect with technological advancements—such as the role of AI in shaping public discourse—and how targeted advertising impacts consumer protection. Alongside her academic work, Fawz investigates the broader social and cultural ramifications of emerging technologies.

She currently serves as the Director of Mooting, Negotiation, and Debating at the School of Law, and teaches seminars in Land Law, Trust Law, Media Law, and Cyber Law.

**Taylor Pearson** is a historian and researcher intensely focused on Middle Eastern politics, particularly within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in History from Royal Holloway, University of London, a PGCE teaching master’s from the University of Manchester, and a Master’s degree in Middle Eastern Politics from SOAS University of London. Prior to his academic career, Taylor spent over three years as a history teacher in the Middle East (UAE, Iraq, and Iraqi Kurdistan), cultivating a deep appreciation for the region’s history and culture—an experience that now underpins his research into its complex political and social dynamics. Taylor remains active in education, taking up roles in both private and state secondary schools in the UK.

Taylor’s academic work focuses on critiquing the colonial legacies that continue to shape the GCC, while exploring the interplay between media and politics in the broader Middle East. His recent investigations examine how emergent technologies and cultural shifts—especially on platforms like Shahid—drive Saudi cultural influence through the convergence of media and AI. Combining firsthand classroom experience with scholarly rigor, Taylor is committed to furthering our understanding of the Middle East by analyzing the historical and political forces that have molded the region. He currently volunteers with a refugee charity in the UK, serving as an academic personal tutor for the University of Leeds.

**Prof. Dr. Sarah Spiekermann Hoff** |Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU), Austria

*Who Believes in Homo Deus? Towards a Posthuman Belief Questionnaire that Explores Public Views on the Future of Humanity*

**Abstract:**

This talk surveys the complex terrain of “posthumanism,” a cluster of philosophical and anthropological perspectives on humanity’s possible futures. Drawing on Tamar Sharon’s taxonomy of posthuman narratives (liberal, dystopic, and radical), it outlines a new survey instrument tested on 300 participants in Germany and Austria. The “Posthuman Identity Survey” systematically captures beliefs about humanity’s future, revealing that posthuman discourse in this sample divides into four main perspectives: critical-conservative, transhuman, techno-liberal, and radical-political. Intriguingly, two-thirds of respondents adopt a “critical-conservative” view, while “Homo Deus” or transhuman positions—often centered on computational anthropology—attract only about 20% of participants, primarily younger males with introverted self-comparison traits.

**Biography:**

Prof. Dr. Sarah Spiekermann Hoff holds the Chair of Information Systems & Society at Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU). A scholar in digital ethics, IT innovation, privacy, and future studies, she has advised international institutions such as the EU Commission and OECD. From 2016 to 2021, she served as vice-chair for the first global standard on ethical IT-system design (ISO/IEEE 24748-7000). She authored *Value-based Engineering (VBE)* (De Gruyter, 2023), *Ethical IT Innovation* (Taylor & Francis, 2016), and the non-fiction work *Digitale Ethik* (Droemer, 2019; forthcoming in English, 2025), alongside over 100 peer-reviewed articles. Named among the top 2% most-cited scholars in her field by a 2024 Stanford University ranking, Spiekermann Hoff also founded the VBE Academy to train cyber-ethics professionals worldwide.

**Prof. Dr. Johannes Grössl** |University of Paderborn, Germany

*Star Trek and Christian Fundamental Theology: A Futuristic Dialogue*

**Abstract:**

Thought experiments are an essential method in analytic theology, aiding in clarifying concepts and developing nuanced theories. Science fiction, through its imaginative portrayals of interactions with non-human intelligent life, offers unique scenarios to refine our notions of human nature. This talk explores how fictional species such as Vulcans, Klingons, and Trill contribute to debates about whether rationality, emotionality, and individuality are fundamental aspects of being human. Extending these explorations to the posthumanist domain, the presentation examines fictional posthuman species like the Organians, Borg, and Q to highlight potential paths for humanity’s spiritual and technological advancement. Ultimately, the lecture posits that analyzing science-fiction narratives can inform crucial theological and ethical discussions about the “essentials” that must be preserved to maintain human identity.

**Biography:**

Prof. Dr. Johannes Grössl studied theology and philosophy at the University of Munich and Harvard University. He received his doctorate in 2014 from the University of Innsbruck and completed his habilitation in 2020 at the University of Würzburg. Appointed Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Paderborn in 2023, he has held research and teaching positions at Rutgers (New Jersey), Siegen, Münster, and Munich. His work focuses on theodicy, free will and divine foreknowledge, science and theology, transhumanism, Christology, and comparative theology.