

RAËLISM: AN UNCONVENTIONAL RELIGIOUS PATHWAY TO TRANSHUMANISM

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Abstract

Raëlism is a controversial new religious movement that originated in France in the 1970s and has since spread around the world. The movement's core tenets are rooted in science, technology, and freedom and can be summarized as a blend of science and spirituality, millenarianism, revelation, story, pseudoscience, and reinterpretation. Raélians believe in the extraterrestrial origin of humanity and promote the pursuit of higher consciousness, inner peace, individual empowerment, and peace-building. To this end, the movement offers a series of seminars that aim to provide a transformative experience for

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participants and leads various social initiatives and projects at a global level. Although Raëlism has gained popularity among some individuals, it has also been the subject of substantial criticism and controversy, particularly because of its unconventional views on sexuality and its alleged support for human cloning and genetic engineering. Nonetheless, the movement continues to be a subject of interest and scrutiny for scholars, journalists, and the curious. This article provides an overview of the history, ideology, and practices of the Raëlian Movement and its relationship with transhumanism.

Keywords: History of religions, new religious movements, Raëlism, transhumanism, extraterrestrial creation

Introduction

The Raëlian Movement is named after its founder Raël, who was born Claude Maurice Marcel Vorilhon in 1946. He was formerly a French sports car journalist and a test driver (Palmer, 2004) for a car racing magazine, *Autopop*. Having been claiming contact with extraterrestrials (ETs) since 1961, Vorilhon stated that he had received messages about humanity's future during an encounter aboard an extraterrestrial spacecraft (Rael, 2005a). While it is normal that extraordinary details are present in an alien story, Vorilhon's memoir of his initial contact with ETs features very intriguing details. Vorilhon later identified the ETs that visited him as members of the advanced alien species "Elohim", whose name means "those who came from the skies" (Battal, 2023) in Hebrew (Rael, 2005b). Vorilhon contended that the Elohim, who, according to Vorilhon's definition, are responsible for the creation of life on earth (Battal, 2023), gave him straightforward instruction to return at the same time other days, equipped with the Bible and a means to record information or take notes (Rael, 2005b). After a week of intense Bible study, Vorilhon assigned himself a new identity as the messianic prophet "Raël" and a new purpose as the earthly ambassador of the Elohim, claiming to have the same common father with Jesus, the Elohim Yahweh (Bigliardi, 2023; Shamir, 2020). He then announced a new doctrine that would form the intellectual basis of the religious movement that he would establish and lead

(Gallagher, 2010). In 1974, he founded the Raëlian Movement, naming it after himself, as allegedly bestowed by the ETs (Vorilhon, 1974).

The Raëlian Movement's unorthodox religious exegesis manifests in its interpretation of the Bible and the role that the Bible played in the establishment and evolution of the movement (Gallagher, 2010). Raëlist belief is rooted in an extraterrestrial foundation and centers on extraterrestrial creation, sexual identity, and spiritual awareness. The movement asserts that ETs created humanity and will return to guide humans toward transhumanism, surpassing physical limitations. The idea that life on earth was created by ETs hence requires rejection of traditional theistic beliefs. Raëlism also argues that human spirituality was shaped by the Elohim (Palmer - Sentes, 2012; Rael, 2005b; Gregg, 2014). Furthermore, the movement has distinct philosophical and psychological viewpoints that engage with the concept of trauma to further reinforce its religious conviction and control, which is evident in the movement's Happiness Academy initiative (Bauduin, 2015).

Raëlism regards individual and communal sexual identity as the means of spiritual enlightenment and personal fulfillment (Gregg, 2014) and, therefore, assigns particular importance to feminine and sexual issues in its ideology, tenets, social and religious activities, etc. Among new religious movements (NRMs), the Raëlian Movement is notable for its progressive and exploitative behavior, given its prophetic message and interpretive methods, which set it apart from other religious movements (Bigliardi, 2015). Specifically, Raëlism distinguishes itself through its emphasis on sexual identity, its focus on science and technology, its fierce advocacy for cloning, and its challenging stance against the beliefs and practices of the world's established religions.

The particular importance that Raëlism attaches to science and technology lies in its claim that technology is the main means used to create life on Earth by the Elohim and that it will once again be the sole tool that humans use to achieve eternal life (Sinani, 2013; Houtman - Aupers, 2010). This pronounced emphasis on science and technology embodies the movement's main relation to transhumanism and differentiates it from other NRMs, not to mention traditional religions (Bigliardi, 2023).

Transhumanism questions traditional notions of human nature and individuality, promoting the adoption of technology that significantly

enhances human capabilities (Sorgner, 2021; Szabados, 2020). This focus on technical advancement invites contemplation of the shifting essence of human spirituality. This intersection stimulates debates over the essence of spirituality in the context of technological development, as individuals navigate their spiritual identities in light of technological advancements and enhancements. Furthermore, transhumanism embraces and even sparks discussions on the use of advanced technology, such as artificial intelligence, genetic technologies, and nanotechnology, for life extension and other potential human enhancements (Sorgner, 2021). Pursuing technological enhancement to overcome fundamental human limitations and achieve superintelligence, superlongevity, and super well-being (Lima - Belk, 2022; Simon, 2018) and eventually immortality is central in transhumanist thought. Although harshly criticized, transhumanism's vision of transcending human limitations through technological means has significant implications for various fields, sparking debates in education, ethics, medicine, sports (Eriksen, 2021), and, of course, religion.

The relation between transhumanism and religion fundamentally concerns the intersection of scientific progress and spiritual beliefs. Transhumanism is a philosophical and cultural movement that advocates the utilization of science and technology as a tool to enhance the intellectual, physical, and psychological capabilities of humans, but remarkably, it lacks a spiritual basis. Nevertheless, it gradually maintained ties with religious affairs and later led to the emergence of religious movements that are now called religious transhumanism because the established religious teachings are based on the ideas of a creator, God, and the afterlife. As all such transhumanist ideals are considered to defy the central position of God, transhumanism raises ethical and philosophical questions about the implications of human enhancement technologies for making profound modifications in human capacities (Szabados, 2020).

As highlighted above, the Raëlian Movement's integration with transhumanism is notable in that both transhumanism and Raëlism regard technology as a force that can either create life on a dead planet or enable existing life to survive infinitely. Raëlians hold the deep conviction that ETs, i.e., Elohim, will eventually guide humanity toward transhumanism. Aligning with transhumanist ideals, Raëlians

believe that technological advancements, including genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence, can lead to the achievement of transhumanism, which, within the framework of Raëlism, involves genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence to improve human health, intelligence, and lifespan (Vorilhon, 1974).

Raëlism's core tenets are deeply influenced by transhumanist philosophy. It has also inspired and influenced transhumanist thought over time and fostered advances in the field of transhumanist research. While Raëlism has been criticized for its influence on transhumanism, contending that its unconventional beliefs are potentially detrimental and can lead to the development of dangerous and unethical technologies, the Raëlian vision of transhumanism is highly optimistic and utopic in contrast to more cautious and realistic views on the potential dangers of transhumanism (Vorilhon, 1974).

In fact, the Raëlian Movement promotes an unconventional discourse significantly influenced and shaped by transhumanism and human enhancement technologies. Thus, a unique fusion of transhumanism and Raëlism is reflected in the movement's distinctive approach to spiritual and technological advancement, aiming to achieve human transcendence through both technological and spiritual means (Lewis - Tøllefsen, 2016). The pronounced place of Elohim in the Raëlian narrative adds a spiritual dimension to transhumanist discourse, presenting a vision where technological progress and spiritual evolution converge.

As an NRM that questions and challenges conventional religious ideas and practices, the Raëlian Movement has often faced criticism but nonetheless has managed to receive acclaim for its advocacy of peace and harmony. Currently, Raëlism is the world's largest UFO-inspired NRM (Gregg, 2014).

This study aims to address in detail the Raëlian Movement from different aspects and perspectives and with reference to transhumanism.

1. Religious Framework

The very foundation of the Raëlian Movement is intricately tied to the prophetic figure of Raël and to an enigmatic event reminiscent of God's first revelation to the prophets, as relayed in mainstream

religions, such as Islam. However, its religious discourse is distinguished by a series of unique features, such as the claim that the messenger in the encounter, which is the cornerstone of its belief system (Bigliardi, 2015), is defined not as an angel of God but as a member of an advanced alien species, Elohim, who have allegedly created life on earth by technological means.

Philosophical examinations of NRMs have shed light on Raëlism's distinctive philosophical foundations, which advance a unique set of religious beliefs and practices (Sakellariou, 2013). The cosmology of the Raëlian Church, aligned with modern science, further contributes to its departure from traditional religious cosmologies (Chryssides, 2000). The emphasis on the extraterrestrial touch in creation and on science and technology as tools for human advancement and transhumanism make Raëlism stand out as a UFO religion. The movement's optimistic outlook, rejecting traditional concepts of sin and guilt, underscores its unique approach to spirituality, highlighting personal development, scientific progress, and the pursuit of immortality. This rejection of traditional concepts frees Raëlians from feelings of shame and allows them to focus on personal growth and self-improvement. Instead of dwelling on past mistakes, Raëlism encourages its followers to embrace their potential and strive for a fulfilling life. The Elohim are regarded not only as the creators who mark the origins of humans but also as guides who will shape their destiny. The Elohim are also responsible for the transmission of advanced knowledge to humanity. Since the time of the early humans, the Elohim, as benevolent creators and teachers, have been guiding humanity toward its full potential through knowledge transmission (Vorilhon, 1974). Vorilhon asserts that prophets or founders of former religions, such as Buddha, Moses, and Muḥammad, are transhumans who were contacted by the Elohim earlier and who were given the advanced knowledge and holy messages to pass on to humans on Earth. As such, Vorilhon argues that he was the modern-day prophet, last contacted by the Elohim, and that he was taken by them to their planet, where he was given the chance to meet Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad (Rael, 1978).

1. 1. Exotheology

The term "exotheology" was coined in the 1960s or 1970s, contemporaneous with the introduction or announcement of Raëlism,

transhumanism, UFOs, etc., to refer to the study of theological matters in relation to alien intelligence, potential theological ideas that ETs may hold, or how humans' theological beliefs may be affected by proof of and/or engagement with ETs. Exotheology studies the implications of discovering life beyond Earth on religious beliefs and connects with astrobiology (Parkyn, 2023), examining the potential for life in the universe.

For Raëlism, the significance of exotheology is that it addresses existential questions arising from potential contact with extraterrestrial life and encourages interdisciplinary dialog. It also explores theological implications for human spirituality and understanding. In general, exotheology offers a framework to address ethical and existential considerations and to reevaluate traditional theological ideas and hypotheses. Within Raëlism, exotheology manifests as a synthesis of UFOlogy and religion. Specifically, this framework captures the impacts of discovering extraterrestrial life on the movement's beliefs about human origins and the Elohim's role in the alleged scientific creation of life on Earth. It presents a distinctive view of the potential influence of extraterrestrial life on religious narratives and beliefs, which is an important aspect of its uniqueness among NRMs. The movement's practices, such as sensual meditation, and beliefs influence its exotheological perspective (Gregg, 2014).

1. 2. Intelligent Design and ET Creation

The concept of intelligent design, as hypothesized by Raëlism, asserts that the creation of life and humanity was neither an evolutionary process nor a consequence of random coincidences. Instead, it was an outcome of advanced scientific genetic engineering processes that were planned, implemented, and controlled by an advanced extraterrestrial species known as the Elohim.

In this respect, the concept of intelligent design is a fundamental belief that is common in nearly all mainstream religions, which suggests that the complexity of life and the universe is best explained by the existence of an intelligent creator or designer. What distinguishes Raëlism is that this concept is intertwined with the idea that the Elohim possess advanced scientific knowledge and capabilities that enable them to design and create life on Earth (Sentes - Palmer, 2000). This perspective differs from traditional religious creationism in that it attributes the origins of life to an extraterrestrial

intelligence rather than a divine deity and the might needed for creation not to godly powers unique to God but to mere science that can moreover be achieved by anyone through research and experimentation.

The Raëlian concept of intelligent design also involves the belief that humanity was not set loose or left unwatched. The Elohim's creation is an ongoing and interactive process, and they maintain a vested interest in the development and progress of humanity. In this respect, Raëlians believe that the Elohim will eventually return to the Earth (Zeller, 2011) to guide humanity toward transhumanism when humanity has reached a sufficient level of scientific and ethical advancement. This belief indicates that Elohim are motivated by scientific progress, personal development, and the pursuit of a harmonious future for humanity. In Raël's view, harmony refers to being free of money, sickness, and war (Rael, 2005b).

1. 3. Becoming Creator

The founder and alleged prophet of Raëlism asserts that humanity may also have the capacity to create or contribute to the creation of life on other planets with the advancement of human scientific knowledge and technology, similar to the Elohim who possess advanced scientific knowledge and capabilities, which enabled them to design and create life on Earth.

In line with this view, endeavors toward spreading or expanding life beyond Earth are based on factual claims, and humanity is now attempting to terraform Mars or Venus. The latter does not truly entail creating life from scratch but rather trying to transform other planets similar to Earth and to transfer the existing life forms from Earth to these planets. Nonetheless, such projects and related research still reflect humanity's reliance on and conviction in science and technology in becoming a creator or cocreator by achieving such great targets, as espoused by several religious transhumanist movements. In this regard, the Raëlian emphasis on the role of science and rationality in shaping humanity's future and its potential to contribute to the development of life in the cosmos is arguably grounded in the scientific community at the governmental and international levels.

1. 4. The Spiritual Discourse of Transcendence

Raëlism's spiritual discourse is a mosaic composed of complex elements of millenarianism, revelation, story, pseudoscience, and

reinterpretation that sets it apart from other traditional theological frameworks. This unique blend contributes to Raëlism's distinct religious characteristics and differentiates it from other emerging religious movements (Bigliardi, 2015).

The spiritual discourse of Raëlism is based mainly on intertwining elements of science and spirituality and comprises a synthesis of transcendence, divinity, and the pursuit of higher consciousness, which are central themes in its belief system (Lewis - Tøllefsen, 2016). Raëlism's emphasis on humanity's transcendence is manifest in the belief in extraterrestrial contact and humanity's creation by advanced beings known as the Elohim. This narrative highlights the aspiration to overcome traditional human limitations and acknowledges the Elohim as divine entities with advanced capabilities.

The pursuit of higher consciousness is another crucial theme in Raëlism's spiritual discourse. The movement advocates for shedding cultural norms and embarking on a journey toward higher awareness through the body and senses. Rejecting traditional notions of possession and relational belonging, Raëlism encourages followers to pursue higher consciousness by liberating themselves from cultural baggage.

Raëlism's spiritual narrative also involves a reinterpretation of divinity that challenges traditional religious constructs. Raëlism presents the Elohim as advanced beings who have played a pivotal role in the spiritual evolution of humanity. The transmission of advanced knowledge from the Elohim to humanity redefines traditional notions of divinity.

Furthermore, aligning with a quest for scientific and spiritual advancement within a millennial context (Sentes - Palmer, 2000), the movement views technology not only as a material tool but also as an indispensable means for achieving spiritual goals (Grünschloß, 2016). Unlike mainstream religions and traditional religious movements, which may view technology with skepticism, Raëlism recognizes the potential of technology to enhance human consciousness and spiritual growth (Botz-Bornstein, 2017). For instance, the implementation of human enhancement technologies is a shared concern across Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, stemming from ethical, moral, and theological considerations, which revolve around issues of playing God, altering the inherently perfect creation of Allah/God, and the

potential consequences of such interventions for future generations. Raëliism, in contrast, regards these technologies as conduits for transcending human limitations and achieving a higher state of being through the responsible and ethical use of technology (Kiran et al., 2015) to make advancements in genetic engineering, nanotechnology, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies and accelerate human evolution, eventually realizing the transhuman future. In this future, such technological advancements will contribute to enhanced intelligence, extended lifespan, and freedom from disease and death and will create immersive experiences fostering self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and spiritual exploration.

1. 5. Symbolism

The promotion of Patriarch Hassoun as a cardinal was one of the important developments for Eastern Christians. Since Basilios Bessarion.

1. 5. 1. Swastika of Enlightenment

The swastika, which is also known as the armed cross, is an ancient and widespread symbol that can be found in nearly every part of the world, especially in ancient sites (Flaherty, 2021; Chryssides, 2000; Urban, 2015). Although there is no consensus as to what the symbol actually represents, Raëlians argue that the swastika represents all-positive concepts, such as good luck, prosperity, and harmony. Despite being controversial, the choice of a swastika as the movement's symbol is grounded in Raëliism's reinterpretation of ancient symbolism, reclaiming the swastika's original meaning and repurposing the symbol to represent the Raëlian vision of a future where humanity transcends its current limitations and achieves a state of transhumanism. This symbolism is also tied to the cyclic nature of all processes in the universe, where the swastika in the center is claimed to mean that everything is cyclic, with the top becoming the bottom and the bottom, in turn, becoming the top (Rael, 2005b).

Another symbol, as ancient and widespread as the swastika and even controversial to some extent, is the six-pointed star, which is currently mostly associated with Jews and the state of Israel. The Raëlian symbol combines the two symbols, a six-pointed star featuring a stylized swastika in the center (Urban, 2015; Hanson, 2005), and is called the "Swastika of Enlightenment".

The six-pointed star is known as the Star of David (or Shield of David), the Seal of Solomon (Wells, 2006), or simply the hexagram. However, the difference is that the hexagram does not have to be equilateral, and the parallel sides do not have to be horizontal. The seal of Solomon is three-dimensional and interlaced, while the star of David is two-dimensional and overlapped. Therefore, the Raëlian symbol consists of a stylized combination of the seal of Solomon and the swastika.

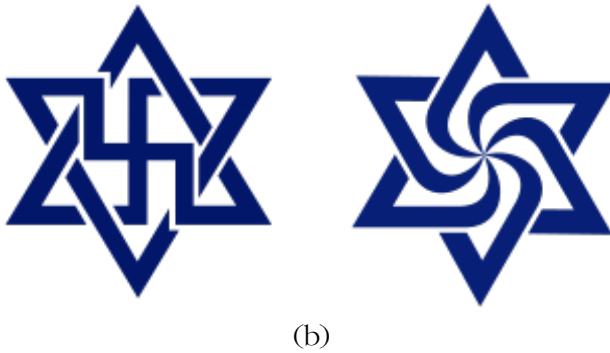


Figure 1. Symbols used by Raëlism: (a) Swastika of Enlightenment, the universal symbol; (b) Raëlian symbol with the swirling shape substituted for the swastika that was used in Europe and America between 1991 and 2007.

The symbol aims to represent the harmonious integration of science, technology, and spirituality and plays a crucial role in conveying the synthesis of Raëlism and transhumanism. The four arms of the swastika, intertwined with the seal of Solomon, symbolize the four pillars of Raëlism: scientific progress, personal development, sensual love, and collective harmony. These pillars signify the interconnected aspects of human existence that must be nurtured in balance to achieve transhuman goals. The spiral form within the swastika further symbolizes the continuous process of evolution and transformation, representing the Raëlian belief in humanity's ongoing advancement toward the transhuman condition with enhanced intelligence, extended lifespan, and the ability to manipulate matter and energy. However, the stylized swastika in the center of the six-pointed star has often been criticized due to its resemblance to the Nazi swastika, and Raëlians have been accused of fascism and racism and

of not respecting victims of the Holocaust. Raël then decided to form an alternative logo to be used in America and Europe, where the swastika was replaced with a swirl (*The Washington Post*, 16.11.2023; Chryssides, 2000). In 2007, the alternative symbol was discarded, and the original swastika symbol was restored. Since then, the original symbol has been the only Raëlian symbol used worldwide (Urban, 2015).

2. Festivals, Rites, and Rituals

2. 1. Festivals

Raëlians adopted their own calendar that began with the bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. This first day of the Raëlian calendar is commemorated as a festival by the Raëlians. The New Year festival also functions to remind members of the destructiveness of humankind and that the Age of Apocalypse is underway (Hippert, 16 Nov 2023).

In addition, Raëlians celebrate three other festivals each year on the anniversaries of Raël's claimed encounters with the Elohim on October 7th (the second encounter in 1974, during which Raël claimed to have met prophets such as Jesus, Muḥammad and the Buddha on board the spacecraft (Hippert, 16 Nov 2023) and December 13th (the first encounter in 1973 in which Raël was anointed as the chosen prophet) and the first Sunday in April, on which day Raëlians believe the Elohim created the first humans, Adam and Eve (Palmer, 2004).

2. 2. Transmission Rite

Like many other religious movements, Raëlism has rites and rituals. The most important and essential rite performed in Raëlism involves the admission and initiation of individuals to become Raëlians. A novice to Raëlism must be baptized in an initial rite called "transmission" or "transmission of the cellular plan" (Bigliardi, 2015). The baptism ritual itself is very similar to Christian baptism in that one guide member sprinkles water onto the forehead of the new member (Hippert, 16 Nov 2023). The initial transmission rite is a significant and sacred ceremony that marks the formal acceptance of an individual into the Raëlian community and represents the beginning of their journey within the movement.

This initiation rite is performed by upper-level members, such as priests or bishop guides. The transmission rites are performed four times a year on the days of Raëlian religious festivals (Hippert, 16 Nov

2023). While the Raëlian calendar begins on August 6th, and the festival commemorating the first creation celebrated on the first Sunday in April is the fourth of the festivals in a Raëlian calendar year, it is regarded as the first performance of the rite, commemorating the first ritual performed by Raël to baptize 40 novices in 1976 (Palmer, 2004).

The rite emphasizes the sacred nature of newcomers' commitment and likely holds deep cultural and spiritual significance within the movement, transmitting the values, beliefs, and cultural and spiritual heritage of Raëlism to new members (Marinescu, 2021; Pérez, 2013). A key ritual involves purported telepathic communication with ETs, during which the guides form a human chain of participants by interlocking their hands with one another to improve connectivity. Raëlians believe that this practice facilitates the transmission of the genetic code of every new member to the Elohim, who meticulously documents their genetic information. This information will help the members be recognized by Elohim on the day of judgment when the Elohim return. The Elohim possess the capability to guarantee the eternity of Raëlian believers by potentially replicating the bodies of each member through cloning. For this purpose, new members are required to sign a contract granting morticians permission to cut out a section of bone from the forehead, also referred to as the "third eye", after their death. This piece of bone, which is the source of the genetic code to be used in cloning the individual, is then carefully packaged in ice and sent to Raël, who will personally deliver it to the Elohim (Hippert, 16 Nov 2023). Nevertheless, there are no records as to whether this procedure has ever been carried out.

The transmission ritual may also involve embodied practices that symbolize the commitment and sacrifice of the individual as they align themselves with the teachings and principles of the movement (Gregg, 2014).

2. 3. Sensual Meditation

One of the central rituals in Raëlism is a guided meditation called "sensual meditation", which is outlined by Raël in his book *La méditation sensuelle* (Palmer - Sentés, 2012; Rael, 2002). This practice focuses on enhancing the five senses, promoting heightened awareness of the physical world and the beauty of the universe as well as transmitting love and telepathic links to the Elohim and achieving harmony with infinity (Palmer, 1995). Raëlians believe that this sensory

awareness is not only essential for spiritual growth but also serves as preparation for the technological advancements that will lead to transhumanism. The ritual creates a connection between immediate sensory experience and the broader goal of evolving toward a transhuman state. All Raëlians are, therefore, encouraged to participate in sensual meditations where they are often guided by streamed instructions, audio, or visualization (Palmer, 2004; Rael, 2002).

2. 4. Collective Meditation

Collective meditation is a significant ritual where Raëlians gather to meditate together, focusing on the Elohim and the principles of Raëlism. This collective meditation is believed to create a powerful energy field that promotes individual transformation and contributes to the collective evolution of humanity toward transhumanism. The ritual emphasizes the communal aspect of the Raëlian experience, reinforcing a shared commitment to spiritual and technological advancement (Rael, 2002).

2. 5. Awakening Seminars

The Raëlian Church arranges summer gatherings that are allegedly intended to serve as educational platforms guiding individuals through transformative self-discovery and personal development. The activities are known as awakening seminars and involve a variety of activity stages, including daily lectures given by Raël, sensual meditation sessions, periods of fasting and feasting, testimonials, and a range of alternative therapies, as well as a controversial cross-dressing activity to explore the fluidity of gender expression and self-observation of one's own genitals and masturbation.

Raëlians use these seminars as platforms to build friendships or engage in sexual affairs or intercourse. Participants wear white togas with name tags, and they employ colored bracelets to indicate their engagement preference in the seminars, i.e., whether they want solitude, social interaction, or companionship.

Stage Name	Activity
Introduction to Raëlian Philosophy	Overview of the movement's core principles, teachings concerning the Elohim, rejection of traditional religious doctrines, and emphasis on individual and communal sexual identity
Self-Exploration and Identity	Activities and discussions related to personal experiences, beliefs, and values, with a focus on individual and communal sexual identity
Mindfulness and Meditation	Incorporation of mindfulness and meditation practices, cultivation of deeper connection with inner selves, engagement in guided sessions aimed at enhancing awareness, relaxation, and inner peace
Consciousness Expansion	Exploration of topics related to consciousness expansion, the nature of the mind, perception, and the interconnectedness of living beings. Introduction of concepts from neuroscience, psychology, and metaphysics to broaden participants' understanding of consciousness
Exploration of Extraterrestrial Connection	Belief in extraterrestrial creators (the Elohim), discussions of humanity's potential connection with extraterrestrial civilizations, the implications for human evolution, and messages conveyed through Raëlian teachings.
Scientific and Spiritual Synthesis	Bridging the gap between science and spirituality, the harmonious coexistence of scientific knowledge and spiritual insights, and the role of scientific understanding in shaping a positive future
Promotion of Peace and Tolerance	Emphasis on a culture of peace and understanding and principles for positive personal change
Community and Networking	Building connections with like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of community and mutual support aligned with Raëlian philosophy and seminar topics

Table 1. Stages of Awakening Seminars

While the specifics of the seminars may vary based on the participants' evolving needs and interests, a typical awakening seminar generally includes the stages listed in Table 1. However, the main goal is to provide a transformative experience in line with Raëlism's principles of individual empowerment, scientific understanding, and the pursuit of peace.

3. Ideology, Social Movements, Activities, and Projects

The Raëlian Movement encompasses a notable ideology and global social movements. The foundation of Raëlism is an ideology rooted in the principles of science, technology, and freedom. Raëlians actively organize and spearhead many social events and projects on a global scale. In line with the fundamental tenets of Raëlism, their social movements, activities, and projects involve the scientific-oriented initiatives of high-tech topics such as human cloning and genetic engineering, global peace, and the protection of human rights, particularly women, sexual identity, and freedom. They organize activities aimed at promoting social change and boosting awareness in many communities and initiatives worldwide.

3. 1. The Happiness Academy

In pursuit of promoting personal growth, well-being, and happiness, a significant initiative named The Happiness Academy was established by the movement to reinforce and promote the rejection of traditional religious constructs and to further highlight personal development, self-fulfillment through self-awareness and emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and the pursuit of a fulfilling and harmonious life. The academy offers a range of workshops, seminars, and educational programs designed to provide participants with tools for enhancing their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being and for empowering them to cultivate happiness, resilience, and a positive outlook on life (Bauduin, 2013; Id., 2015).

The academy itself can be viewed as a manifestation of Raëlism's commitment to fostering a more harmonious and compassionate society and its advocacy for a more empathetic and interconnected world (Bauduin, 2015).

3. 2. Clonaid Organization

The Raëlian Movement views cloning as a natural progression of human technology and a tool for achieving a higher state of being; it,

therefore, advocates for cloning as a means of achieving immortality and transcending human limitations (Machado, 2010). In line with this view, the Clonaid organization was founded in 1997 and is registered in the Bahamas as a nonprofit organization (Clonaid.com, 13 Nov 2023).

The establishment of Clonaid reflects the Raëlian focus on the integration of advanced knowledge and advanced technology in genetic engineering, regenerative medicine, and nanotechnology for achieving biological immortality, cognitive enhancement, and life extension (Vorilhon, 1974). With Clonaid, Raëlians aim to develop cloning technology, which they believe holds the key to immortality (*The Washington Post*, 16 Nov 2023; Sinani, 2013). As such, the contract for the collection and conservation of a frontal bone portion, which was addressed under the Transmission rite in the Rites and Rituals section, is (to be) processed by Clonaid for cloning purposes (Bigliardi, 2015). Nevertheless, the biotechnology company Clonaid is often perceived as a cult (Simon, 2018).

Clonaid was the first company to publicly announce its intention to offer human cloning services. The declared goal was to provide couples with the option of cloning their deceased children (Palmer, 2001), emphasizing that cloning was a form of assisted reproduction rather than human engineering (Alcibar, 2008). The organization's public statements and activities sparked debates about the ethical implications of human cloning, the potential benefits and risks of advanced technologies, and the role of religion in shaping societal attitudes toward technological progress. Despite this controversy, Clonaid continued to assert its commitment to providing human cloning services. The movement garnered notable attention upon the announcement of the successful cloning of a baby girl called Eve (Battal, 2023) by the director, senior Raëlian Brigitte Boisselier (Alcibar, 2008; Machado, 2010), but no definitive evidence of successful human cloning has been produced. The organization's claims were met with skepticism by the scientific community, yet many experts have raised concerns about the ethical implications of human cloning, including the potential for psychological harm to the cloned child and unknown long-term health effects.

The movement's advocacy for cloning technologies and Raël's lobbying efforts before the U.S. Senate to remove restrictions and

prohibitions on cloning reflect Raëlism's contentious stance with regard to human cloning (Heyking, 2005). However, its plans to establish a cloning facility in the United States have met with legal challenges (Szabados, 2020; Clonaid.com, 13 Nov 2023).

In 2002, citing ethical concerns surrounding human cloning, Clonaid announced its intention to focus on animal cloning research and development. Currently, Clonaid remains an active organization, but its human cloning ambitions have largely been abandoned due to scientific and legal challenges. It pursued to continue human cloning activities in other countries where such research is legal (Clonaid.com, 13 Nov 2023). However, the organization continues to promote Raëlism and its beliefs about technology's potential to enhance human well-being and to advocate for cloning as a potential tool for medical advancements and environmental conservation.

Overall, Clonaid's activities have significantly contributed to broader discussions about the responsible development and application of technology, the potential impact on human society, and the role of ethical considerations in shaping the future of transhumanism.

3. 3. Geniocracy

Religions and religious movements often establish their own community and moral norms to regulate and shape societal, legal, and even economic systems. In this respect, the Raëlian Movement has a governance system that prioritizes decision-making based on demonstrated intelligence and competence rather than traditional democratic processes. This system, aligning with the Raëlian emphasis on rationality, science, and knowledge as drivers of societal progress, was termed "geniocracy" by the movement's founder, Claude Vorilhon.

Geniocracy intersects with Raëlian theology and its commitment to individual and communal empowerment through knowledge to challenge established norms in favor of progressive approaches to societal organization, and it highlights the potential for scientific advancements to shape an equitable and harmonious society.

Feature	Justification/Argument
Intellectual Meritocracy	Geniocracy upholds intellectual meritocracy over traditional markers such as hereditary status or popularity and advocates that individuals with outstanding intellectual capabilities should guide and lead society.
Scientific Decision-Making	Raëlian geniocracy envisions decision-making based on scientific knowledge and rational thinking. Leaders should rely on evidence-based reasoning and scientific principles when formulating policies and making critical decisions.
Emphasis on Education	Education should develop and nurture intellectual capabilities. Educational systems should be designed to identify and cultivate potential genius in individuals from a young age.
Technologically Advanced Society	Scientific advancements should be utilized for the betterment of humanity. The application of cutting-edge technologies should be used to address societal challenges and enhance the overall well-being of individuals.
Ethical Considerations	Ethical considerations should be incorporated into decision-making. These principles should be prioritized by governments together with human rights and the well-being of all individuals.
Peaceful and Harmonious Coexistence	The ultimate goal is to create a society characterized by peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and collaboration. Therefore, conflicts should be resolved through reason, understanding, and the application of scientific principles.

Table 2. Key Features of Geniocracy within the Raëlian Movement

As listed in Table 2, key features of the geniocentric system include intellectual meritocracy, advocacy for scientific decision-making, a strong emphasis on education to nurture genius, envisioning a technologically advanced society, incorporating ethical considerations into governance, and aspiring to a peaceful coexistence.

Geniocracy serves as a cornerstone for the Raëlian vision of a utopian society where intellectual excellence and scientific progress

guide governance and societal structures, reflecting the movement's unique theological beliefs and its emphasis on rationality, scientific understanding, and the potential for societal progress through intellectual empowerment.

4. Intersection, Interaction, and Integration with Transhumanism

As an intellectual and cultural movement, transhumanism advocates for the use of science and technology to enhance human capabilities (Campbell et al., 2008), thus challenging traditional notions of human nature and the boundaries of personhood (Foith, 2013). It envisions a future where applied reason, coupled with technology, can eliminate aging and greatly enhance humans' intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities (Urgan, 2019) in the pursuit of morphological freedom and longevity while considering the precautionary principle and personhood (Szabados, 2020).

Transhumanists believe that human enhancement technologies should be widely available, with individuals having discretion over their use. Parents are also seen as having the right to choose enhancements for their children-to-be (Bostrom, 2005). This perspective reflects a commitment to individual autonomy and a positive view of technological progress in shaping the future of humanity.

Raëlism, on the other hand, focuses on the utilization of advanced technology and knowledge by extraterrestrial beings in shaping human existence and spirituality. It advocates for the integration of technology to overcome traditional limitations and transcend human conditions. In this respect, its emphasis on the transcendence of human limitations aligns with transhumanism's core principles, particularly in the pursuit of superintelligence, superlongevity, and super well-being (Lima - Belk, 2022).

The potential intersection between Raëlism and transhumanism lies in their shared emphasis on transcending traditional human limitations through advanced knowledge and technology. Both movements share an interest in advancing human capabilities and redefining traditional notions of divinity and personhood and envision a future where humanity evolves beyond its current state, effectively challenging conventional notions of personhood and human nature. Raëlism's

belief in extraterrestrial contact and the transmission of advanced knowledge resonates with transhumanism's focus on using technology to overcome human limitations. The core principles of transhumanism, including morphological freedom, human enhancement, and longevity, may resonate within Raëlism's philosophy of integrating scientific and spiritual elements for human evolution.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that while there may be conceptual overlaps, the distinct philosophical and spiritual foundations of Raëlism and transhumanism may present challenges to fully integrating their ideologies. Both Raëlism and transhumanism have distinct discourses, belief systems, and cultural contexts that may influence the extent to which they intersect and collaborate in shaping future visions of human potential and evolution.

Raëlism's approach to transhumanism is unconventional, combining religious beliefs with a strong emphasis on scientific progress and technological advancement. While the conceptual intersection with transhumanism is evident, the movement's integration of spirituality and technology is distinct. Namely, Raëlism blends scientific progress with personal transformation and seeks transhumanism not only through technological advancements but also through spiritual enlightenment. Raëlism moreover highlights that the Elohim's return to guide humanity and realize transhumanism will also take place once humanity reaches a certain ethical and moral level and establishes a social climate where peace, tolerance, and understanding are present among diverse cultures and belief systems. Raëlism's fusion of spirituality and technology offers a fresh perspective on the future of humanity, attracting individuals seeking a new paradigm for human evolution and advancement (Lewis - Tøllefsen, 2016).

4. 1. Becoming Divine through Technology

Raëlism blends pseudoscience, revelation, and the reinterpretation of traditional religious concepts (Gregg, 2012) to envision a future where humanity transcends its current limitations through the application of advanced knowledge and technology. The pronounced importance and value of technology as a conduit for spiritual enlightenment and transcendence is central to the movement's belief in extraterrestrial contact and the transmission of advanced knowledge. The movement's vision presents a radical departure from other religious movements by placing the power of transformation

exactly in the hands of humanity. In this respect, the ideas of Raëlism align with those of some religious transhumanist movements, such as Terasem, which asserts that God is technological (Yeşilyurt - Yeşilyurt, 2022).

Likewise, it is exactly technology and advanced knowledge that enabled the Elohim to reach a state of transhumanism characterized by enhanced intelligence, immortality, and mastery of matter and energy (Vorilhon, 1974) and to become the creators of life on Earth. The concept of technological deification is central in Raëlism; it maintains that humanity can achieve a state of divinity through the transmission and integration of advanced technology and spiritual principles under the guidance of the Elohim. In this respect, Raëlism views technology not as a threat to humanity but as an indispensable tool for realizing its full potential, including the attainment of divinity. Therefore, Raëlism and Raélians advocate for the development and application of technologies such as genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence to overcome biological limitations, extend lifespans, and expand human consciousness (Lewis - Tøllefsen, 2016), thus reinforcing and reaffirming their pioneering position in transhumanist thought.

This embrace of transhumanist concepts reflects Raëlism's modern, science-oriented worldview and its belief in the potential of technology to transform humanity positively.

4. 2. Impact on Transhumanist Discourse

Raëlism's impact on the broader context of transhumanism is somewhat difficult to outline. Raëlism introduces a unique perspective that blends spirituality and technological advancement. This impact can be assessed through both the contributions Raëlism has made to transhumanist discourse and the challenges it presents to the broader transhumanist community.

4. 2. 1. Contributions to Transhumanist Discourse

The contribution of Raëlism to transhumanist discourse can be assessed in terms of four main aspects: a spiritual dimension, personal development, and sensual love, a positive outlook on technology, and a sense of community and shared purpose.

Raëlism injects a spiritual dimension into transhumanism by emphasizing self-awareness, consciousness expansion, and ethical considerations as integral components in the pursuit of transhuman

potential. This infusion challenges the prevailing notion of transhumanism as a purely scientific or technological endeavor, broadening its scope to include a more holistic approach to human enhancement. The Raëlian movement expands transhumanist discourse beyond technological advancement to encompass a more comprehensive view of human flourishing by passionately advocating for personal well-being and the appreciation of sensory experiences. This focus highlights the interconnectedness of physical and emotional aspects in the pursuit of transhuman goals.

Raëlism also contributes to a more balanced discourse on the role of technology in human progress through its positive stance toward technology, thereby refuting concerns about its potential negative impacts and encouraging responsible development and application for the benefit of humanity. Moreover, Raëlism fosters a sense of community and shared purpose among individuals who seek to redefine the paradigm of human evolution and encourages collaboration and mutual support in transhumanist pursuits. The cultivation of a shared sense of belonging strengthens the transhumanist movement and facilitates collective action toward common objectives.

4. 2. 2. Challenges to Transhumanist Discourse

Raëlism has undeniably influenced the transhumanist discourse by introducing unique perspectives, broadening the scope of discussion, and challenging traditional notions of human enhancement. However, the movement faces challenges related to the acceptance of its unconventional beliefs, practices, and ethical considerations and the scientific feasibility of the technologies it proposes.

First and foremost, Raëlism's core tenets involving extraterrestrial contact and guidance raise concerns about its credibility within the broader transhumanist community. Even as deemed mirth by some serious scientists and thinkers, the unconventional beliefs advanced by Raëlism make it challenging for some transhumanists to fully embrace its ideas. On the other hand, practices such as sensual meditation and the controversial use of the swastika symbol have drawn criticism and raised concerns about potential exploitation and manipulation. As addressed in a later section, this criticism has led to an update of the movement's symbol.

Another challenge against Raëlism is its passionate advocacy for technologies such as genetic engineering and cloning, which has sparked debates about the ethical implications of human enhancement. Furthermore, the strong emphasis placed on individual freedom by Raëlism raises concerns about the potential misuse of technology, which must indeed follow strict and clear ethical guidelines. Finally, several aspects of Raëlism's vision, such as digital immortality and achieving immortality through cloning (Machado, 2010), are viewed by many scientists as beyond the current scientific reality. The perceived lack of scientific feasibility challenges the movement's credibility and raises questions about its long-term viability.

Conclusion

By merging elements of spirituality and technology, Raëlism has had a substantial impact on the discussion of transhumanism. Its fundamental principles, which include the belief in extraterrestrial guidance and the pursuit of technological deification, distinguish this movement in the transhumanist landscape. The ideology of Raëlism advocates for the adoption of digital immortality and cloning, envisioning a future in which technology surpasses biological constraints. Raëlian rituals, such as sensual and collective meditations, serve as conduits connecting the spiritual and technological domains, equipping followers for progress and innovation.

The distinctive fusion of spirituality and technology in Raëlism has significant ramifications for both religious and technological discussions. It challenges conventional concepts of a deity, suggesting a reevaluation through technological advancement. This view attributes distinctive significance to spirituality in a rapidly progressing modern society. The emphasis on human development in Raëlism implies a possible transition toward religious engagement that is more individualized and based on direct experience. Raëlism's focus on ethical issues in the use of technology is in line with a more responsible attitude toward technology, which could result in the development of ethical rules and safeguards.

The convergence of Raëlism with transhumanism is a remarkable intellectual phenomenon that challenges existing frameworks of

human advancement and reimagines the influence of religion in our swiftly expanding society. The movement's notable capacity to integrate spirituality and technology highlights its pioneering approach to transhumanism, as demonstrated by its focus on individual growth, spiritual advancement, and intimate affection, combined with passionate support for scientific progress and technological development. This comprehensive viewpoint contradicts the common belief that technology is used only to enhance our physical and mental abilities. Instead, it suggests that technology can also support spiritual growth and help us obtain a deep understanding of our place in the cosmos.

Nevertheless, the unorthodox methodology of Raëlism may engender doubts in certain transhumanist circles regarding its trustworthiness, given its assertions of extraterrestrial encounters and direction from the Elohim. Furthermore, the prioritization of individual autonomy and support for advancements such as genetic engineering and cloning require meticulous ethical deliberation to avoid any abuse and promote responsible technological progress.

Ultimately, the convergence of Raëlism and transhumanism offers an intriguing subject for analysis, stimulating reflection on the simultaneous existence of spirituality and technology in relation to human capabilities. Although its unorthodox character has raised concerns, Raëlism presents novel viewpoints on the function of religion in our ever-changing society and the transformational potential of technology. This perspective extends beyond the realms of physical and cognitive abilities, encompassing spirituality and ethical considerations as well. As we explore the frontiers of transhumanism, the impact of Raëlism is expected to persist, shaping discourse and sparking creative opportunities for human evolution toward transhuman and post-human conditions.

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