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Methods and Means to Overcome Agents of Atheistic Anthropocentrism and *Laudato Si'*

Metode i načini za suzbijanje agenata ateističkoga antropocentrizma i *Laudato Si'*

Summary: The article is a continuation of the previous two studies conducted by the authors. The first was a conceptual analysis of the four agents of atheistic anthropocentrism: relativism, hedonism, consumerism, and materialism. The goal of the first paper was to investigate the precise meanings of the agents of atheistic anthropocentrism. The second research paper studied the impact and influence of four agents of atheistic anthropocentrism on society and the environment. Negative impacts were observed, not only on the environment and society but also on the individual. This third research paper explores means, solutions, methods, and remedies to overcome the agents of atheistic anthropocentrism. After understanding the terms and researching the devastating influence of atheistic anthropocentrism, it is crucial to seek ways and actions to face and overcome these social deviations. The paper complements those methods or remedies with the recommendations from the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. These actions to overcome atheistic anthropocentrism are important since *Laudato Si'* is based on a Christian proactive stand towards the world, not just the role of mere observers or analysts. The encyclical *Laudato Si'* clearly shows the negative influence of the agents of atheistic anthropocentrism and provides solutions against them, so it is important to analyze the recommendations of Pope Francis. A strategy summarizing methods and means against the agents of atheistic anthropocentrism is called A.A.A.A.A. - Actions Against Agents of Atheistic Anthropocentrism.

Keywords: atheistic anthropocentrism; *Laudato Si'*; hedonism; materialism; relativism; consumerism; solutions; actions; means; methods.

Sažetak: Članak je nastavak na prethodna dva istraživanja autorā. Prva je bila pojmovna analiza četiriju agenata ateističkoga antropocentrizma: relativizma, hedonizma, konzumerizma i materijalizma. Cilj je prvoga rada bio istražiti koja su točna značenja agenata ateističkoga antropocentrizma. Drugi istraživački rad proučavao je utjecaj četiriju agenata ateističkoga antropocentrizma na društvo i okoliš. Jasno su se uočili negativni utjecaji, ne samo na okoliš i društvo nego i na pojedinca. Ovaj, treći, istraživački rad bavi se sredstvima, rješenjima, metodama i lijekovima za

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prevladavanje agenata ateističkoga antropocentrizma. Nakon razumijevanja pojmova i istraživanja razornoga utjecaja ateističkoga antropocentrizma važno je tražiti načine i postupke kako se suočiti i prevladati te društvene devijacije. Rad nadopunjava te metode ili lijekove preporukama iz enciklike *Laudato Si'*. Te akcije za prevladavanje ateističkoga antropocentrizma važne su jer se *Laudato Si'* temelji na kršćanskom proaktivnom stavu prema svijetu, a ne samo na ulozi pukih promatrača ili analitičara. Enciklika *Laudato Si'* jasno pokazuje negativan utjecaj agenata ateističkoga antropocentrizma, ali isto tako daje i rješenja protiv istih, stoga je važno analizirati i preporuke pape Franje. Predstavljena strategija metoda i sredstava protiv agenata ateističkoga antropocentrizma naziva se APAAA – akcije protiv agenata ateističkoga antropocentrizma.

Ključne riječi: ateistički antropocentrizam; *Laudato Si'*; hedonizam; materijalizam; relativizam; konzumerizam; rješenja; akcije; sredstva; metode.

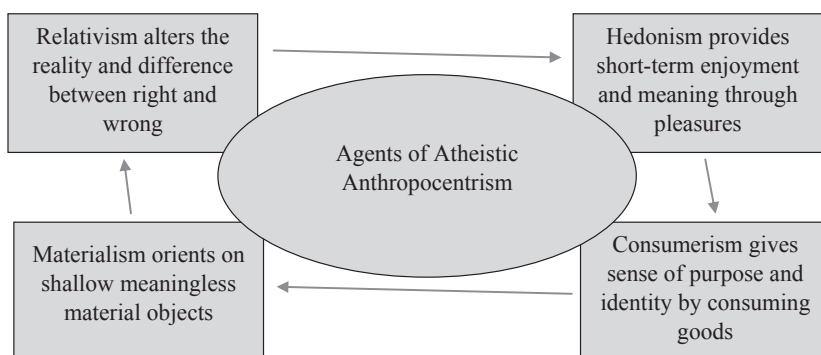
Introduction

The paper continues the research on atheistic anthropocentrism and its agents, including relativism, hedonism, consumerism, and materialism. After a conceptual analysis of the four riders of atheistic anthropocentrism and research on the impact and influence of these riders, the logical next step is to determine what means could overcome these agents. After analyzing atheistic anthropocentrism and its agents, the authors recognized the need for proactive measures to counteract this form of anthropocentrism. The main research questions in this article are: How can deviations from atheistic anthropocentrism be overcome? What tactics and methods can be implemented as remedies, and which are mentioned in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*?

The research paper is divided into five main parts. The first part brings a summary of knowledge about the four riders of atheistic anthropocentrism. Then, the research analyzes methods to overcome each rider of atheistic anthropocentrism in four separate sections. The methodology of this scientific work is a linear qualitative analysis, based on establishing research questions and consulting relevant literature, books, academic articles, and other available sources of information and data in Croatian, Russian, and English languages (Burnham 39) (Franco et al. 112) (Suter 343-356). Similar to the first two articles, the research paper employs a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on multiple scientific branches to broaden the scope of the research problem. Some of these scientific components include theology, psychology, political science, sociology, and others. In the Croatian academic community, research on this topic is based on the description of different views, characteristics, elements, and, to some extent, influences of several riders of atheistic anthropocentrism. However, those articles research one of the four riders of atheistic anthropocentrism. Thus, this research encompasses all the methods to stand against and overcome the agents of atheistic anthropocentrism: relativism, hedonism, consumerism, and materialism.

1. Repetitio est mater studiorum

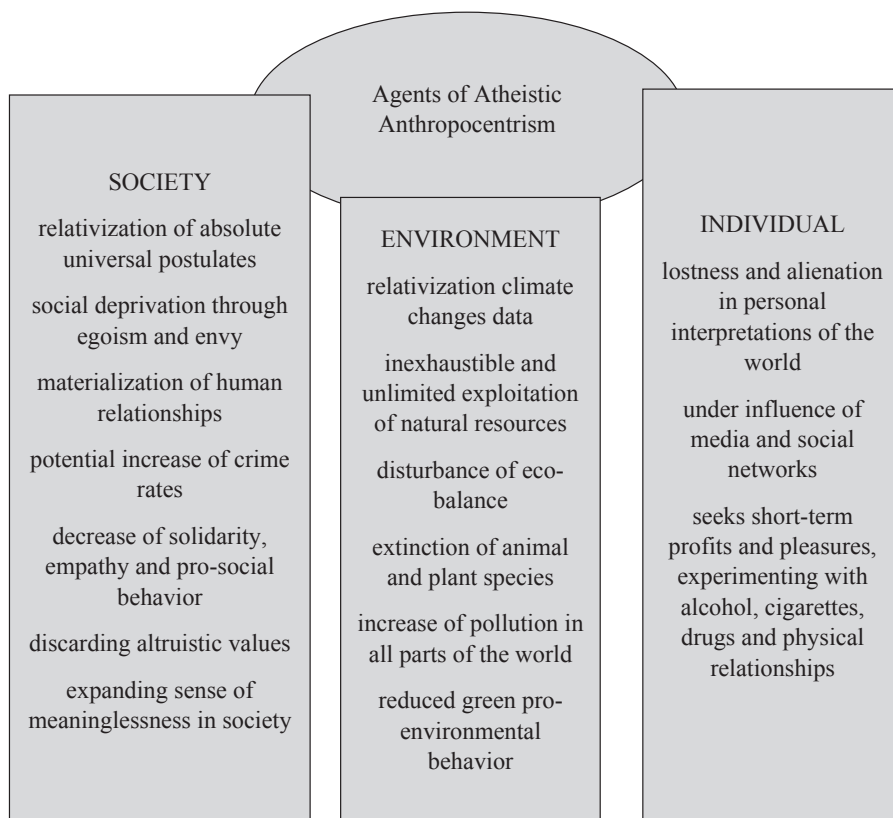
In previous scientific articles, authors have researched the conceptual analysis of agents of atheistic anthropocentrism and their impact on society and the environment. What were the conclusions of those two articles? Anthropocentrism can be seen as an unclear and ambiguous term with multiple meanings, depending on the interpretation. Two main types of anthropocentrism can be distinguished: biblical-theological anthropocentrism and atheistic anthropocentrism (Pavlić and Rukavina, »Conceptual Analysis« 74). Biblical anthropocentrism is rooted in the concept of mankind being created in the image of God, as presented in the Bible, and has its foundations in the evolution of Christian anthropology throughout the ages, as reflected in the thoughts of thinkers, philosophers, and Popes. On the other hand, the danger of atheistic anthropocentrism lies in its obstructive influence on relationships between people and God, people and nature, and among people themselves (Pavlić and Rukavina, »Conceptual Analysis« 75). There are four riders (or agents) of atheistic anthropocentrism: relativism, hedonism, consumerism, and materialism, which dismantle and disrupt the human relationship with God, nature, and other people. What is the *modus operandi* of those agents? Relativism is transforming reality by giving people the power to question everything, even absolute truths. Without moral and ethical truths, people are left without a sense of meaning and their own identity. Then they try to fulfill that emptiness with pleasures, which opens the door to hedonism. Consumerism complements hedonism by offering people a new sense of identity through the constant consumption of material goods. Materialism, the close sibling of consumerism, deepens people's focus on a materialistic life, leaving them as empty body shells and distancing them even further from the true meaning of life with God (Pavlić and Rukavina, »Conceptual Analysis« 82).



Scheme 1 – Modus operandi of four riders of atheistic anthropocentrism after conceptual analysis (authors created illustration)

Four agents of atheistic anthropocentrism have an impact on societies, nature, and individuals. When faced with relativism, society falls into numerous unsavory processes, including the materialization of human relationships, a potential increase in

crime rates, a decline in empathy and pro-social behavior, an increase in egoism and envy, a decrease in solidarity, the discreditation of altruistic values, and the spread of a sense of meaninglessness in society. Agents of atheistic anthropocentrism impact nature or the environment by disrupting the ecological balance, the inexhaustible and unlimited exploitation of natural resources, the relativization of data on climate change, the extinction of animal and plant species, the increase in pollution in all parts of the world, and the reduction of green, pro-environmental behavior. The individual is also influenced by agents of atheistic anthropocentrism, which was not hypothesized at the beginning of the last research. Analysis has shown that the individual is experiencing alienation and isolation in their interpretations of the relativized world and sense of loss. Furthermore, individuals are influenced by media and social networks that promote some of the agents of atheistic anthropocentrism. In such a context, the individual is left alone with his pleasures embodied in experimenting with alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, and short-term physical-intimate relationships. This process leaves individuals without meaning, health, and psychological strength in the long run (Pavlić and Rukavina, »The Impact and Influence« 123-126).



Scheme 2 – Impact and influence of agents of atheistic anthropocentrism on society and the environment (authors created illustration)

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* warns everyone about atheistic anthropocentrism and its four agents. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis uses several terms for this type of anthropocentrism, such as wrong, misleading, inadequate, immoderate, excessive, modern, distorted, and tyrannical anthropocentrism (Pavlić and Rukavina, »Conceptual Analysis« 76). »Misguided anthropocentrism leads to a misguided lifestyle« (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* 122). The global threat and danger of agents of atheistic anthropocentrism are clearly stated and articulated by Pope Francis. It can be said that a three-step process is needed to overcome the negative influence and impact of those agents successfully: 1) Understanding their meaning, influence, impact, and challenges, 2) Communicating and emphasizing them through the encyclical and scientific articles, 3) Taking action to confront and overcome current impacts and influences of the four agents or riders of atheistic anthropocentrism (Pavlić and Rukavina, »The Impact and Influence« 126). The last step is crucial, and it is the primary goal of this paper.

Society, the environment, and individuals are still not lost causes due to the influence and impact of four agents of atheistic anthropocentrism. There are solutions and ways to overcome modern challenges successfully. Previous research has completed the first two steps of the solution, which involve realizing concepts and understanding the influence of the problems. How was it done? By systems thinking, which »leads us away from trying to come up with a quick fix to a problem, which we too often do, in favor of considering the long-term consequences our actions may cause. It supports a deeper level of understanding than we typically take the time to seek« (Schuster 11). The next step is to analyze potential methods and solutions for overcoming four riders of atheistic anthropocentrism. Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato Si'* how »political and institutional frameworks do not exist simply to avoid bad practice, but also to promote best practice, to stimulate creativity in seeking new solutions and to encourage individual or group initiatives« (LS 178). This is particularly important for those who are not ready to face their problems, as they are likely to face even greater consequences. Only by facing problems and taking action to solve them can an individual make changes in their life. What actions can be implemented to diminish the influence and the impact of the four agents of atheistic anthropocentrism?

2. Relativism

Countering relativism is challenging in the modern Western world, which is characterized by individualism and self-centeredness. However, several remedies can be implemented to reduce the impact and influence of relativism. From a Christian perspective, »the human being/person possesses holiness/dignity, and growth in humanity requires the presence of others in our lives. We depend on each other, and that is why we need solidarity as an integral part of our existence and interpersonal relations, as well as relations between communities« (Čadek and Antunović 486).

Solidarity can serve as a remedy against relativism because it focuses on understanding others and taking action against conflicts and clashes of individual relativistic worldviews. As a Latin quote says: *Homo homini sacer* - Man is sacred to man (Pilar 304). It is oriented towards building community with others, unlike relativism that sows doubt in communion. Pope Francis emphasized this in *Laudato Si'*: »These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story which can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us« (LS 232). This remedy can be defined as »anthropological or factual solidarity in which the well-being of individuals is based on the development and well-being of the whole community, where there is an internal communication and experience of mutual needs« (Čadek and Antunović 489). Through solidarity, people communicate, respect, appreciate, and understand others' needs and interests, thereby breaking the alienation and self-centeredness inherent in relativism.

Contextual or cultural relativism can be criticized from a legal perspective. Relativism can be countered by a correct anthropological view of objective human nature, which is inherently stable and enduring. It is not possible to base the generality of human rights outside the eternal and unchangeable natural law, which is valid for all times and all people (Perić 178). A principle of countering cultural relativism can be summed up through the idea of »treating others in the way you want to be treated yourself, since moral relativism denies that any view of this sort can account for all morality« (Harman 6-7).

Furthermore, a high level of confidence and objectivity is proven to be the remedy for relativism. People who believe in their set of values and the truth have a higher level of confidence and are less likely to be relativists. Several studies have shown that relativists (non-objectivists) »found moral transgressions less serious (but equally non-permissible) compared to objectivists, suggesting again a negative relationship between relativism and confidence. Being motivated to act in accordance with moral principles is another major aspect of moral confidence,« ... or in other words, »moral confidence decreases relativism as well as the other way around« (Quintelier and Fessler 12-13). In addition, moral objectivity can serve as another remedy for relativism. »Moral objectivity is a doctrine that presumes the existence of moral truths independent of our own values« (Copeland). With moral objectivity, problems of relativism are overcome by the ability to genuinely and justly criticize social circumstances (Copeland). Relativism successfully creates difficulties and challenges by influencing individuals when they do not trust based moral judgments in situations of moral uncertainty (Абдигалиева 4-5). Getting over relativism means overcoming a person's distorted worldview of reality and the truth. »Very relativistic individuals refuse universal moral principles, but non-relativistic persons adopt universal principles in making ethical decisions« (Vveinhardt).

Each person needs to continue self-education throughout their life. The core of self-education is self-awareness and objectivity. It is a tool of self-affirmation, both for yourselves and for the larger community. Self-education is more important than formal schooling, as it can compensate for official education, whereas schools cannot compensate for self-education. This is a means of self-arrangement to realize relativistic states, which are non-objective and ontologically antifundamental (Pilar 117-120). Pope Francis emphasized »how change is impossible without motivation and a process of education« (LS 15). To overcome relativism, people must develop their strengths through moral norms of absolute nature and ethics, which are founded on veracity and sincerity (Pilar 288-289). Moral norms determine and permit rational arguments in their full acceptability (Barnes 37). A person's authenticity is founded on objective, permanent, and eternal values, which give rise to inner constancy and mental stability. To challenge relativistic fictions full of falsehoods, self-deception, lies, fictitiousness, and misstatements, the principal value must be inner objective truthfulness. It represents a heroic stand and noble overcoming of relativism. »Inner truthfulness respects the majesty of facts, is the conviction of every morality, every greatness, every significance, every progress in the world« (Pilar 376). To sum up, the primary methods and means to overcome relativism are solidarity, natural law, moral objectivity, inner objective truthfulness, a high level of confidence, the pursuit of permanent and eternal values, and self-education.

3. Hedonism

Overcoming hedonism can be confused with the idea of wanting pain instead of happiness. This misconception is caused by a bipolar simplification of humans as products of either pain or happiness. Finding happiness does not mean an eternal accumulation of pleasures without responsibility for such a lifestyle. Nevertheless, in some cases, like in severe depression, small pleasures can help get better. But on the other hand, overpleasuring oneself can lead to depression since pleasure for the sake of pleasure does not have the outcome of well-being. Psychological research has shown that a life of well-being is not solely about enjoying the present moment. »There are many other important factors: for example, a sense of purpose and meaning, positive relationships, regular periods of flow (absorption or engagement in activities), a positive thinking style, and a sense of accomplishment and achievement. Having regular contact with nature, practicing acts of altruism, and a sense of self-development are also important sources of well-being« (Taylor). People cannot find true pleasure in non-altruistic interests, as they have no such interests in consuming hedonistically, whether it be food or any other activity in their leisure time (Dietz 391). It is essential that individuals control their needs, rather than letting their needs control them. Furthermore, there is interesting research on the *hedonic treadmill*, also known as *hedonic adaptation*, which suggests that regardless of wealth, good experiences or bad ones, in the long run, human happiness does not

increase (Brickman and Campbell 295-303). Essentially, regardless of how much people try to find pleasure, their level of happiness does not change in the long run, and the effects of multiple short-term pleasures can have long-lasting, dangerous consequences.

To overcome a focus on short-term pleasures, people should cultivate gratitude and thankfulness for what they have. Focusing on the present and what they already have will bring people happiness, a sense of achievement, and gratitude. This is why present (contemporaneity) is a present (gift). Furthermore, being conscientious has the impact of leading a happier life. »Conscientiousness is a spectrum of constructs that describe individual differences in the propensity to be self-controlled, responsible to others, hardworking, orderly, and rule-abiding« (Roberts et al. 377). Individuals with a high level of »conscientiousness would not only be more able to identify and regulate their and others' emotions more effectively, but also work harder to accomplish their life goals, which in turn would lead to higher achievement levels« (Chamorro-Premuzic et al. 1637) and to higher levels of joy. Conscientiousness and openness to others and the community were associated with a higher level of happiness. This can be connected to altruism, as they are effectively overcoming and transcending the hedonic treadmill (Scott). One understanding of altruism is that it involves a selfless, sacrificial attitude towards a friend, based on an objective moral line of behavior (Прокофьев 692-694).

Hedonism can be overcome by self-control, discipline, and restraint. This is how one can regain control of one's life. It can be achieved through stoicism, a philosophical worldview that emphasizes indifference and detachment from pleasure or pain (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Stoicism was based on the thought of how to survive and stay calm and steady in times of suffering. At its core lies moral excellence as a guiding principle and *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing, as the ultimate goal (Garret). *Eudaimonia* can be seen as a perfectionist ideal of happiness, »a new ideal that will not consist in enjoyment, but in seeking personal perfection, the highest possible value of one's self« (Pilar 310-311). It means that people will stop seeking pleasure in eating, drinking, and sexuality, and start doing all this only if it is necessary for the affirmation and improvement of life (Pilar 310-311). Another form of self-control is asceticism, defined as »the practice of the denial of physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual ideal or goal« (Encyclopedia Britannica). While Stoic *eudaimonia* or Pilar's new ideal of happiness represents a particular kind of balance or equilibrium between pain and pleasure (Pilar 311), asceticism is purely anti-hedonistic and the most effective method for countering hedonism. Ivan Merz, founder of the Croatian League of Eagles, an organization of Croatian Catholic youth, said that there can be no Catholic apostolate without asceticism. For him, every member or every *eagle* should be an ascetic, i.e., a man who strives for Christian perfection (Merz 284). In modern society, Pope Francis realizes how people »have certain superficial mechanisms, but we cannot claim to have a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint« (LS 105).

Another way to get over hedonism is through both spiritual and physical training. As the popular saying goes, »A healthy spirit in a healthy body.« Nowadays, the emphasis is on the body, but it is important not to forget that »our human spirit also needs its food, hygiene, care, and the possibility of expression. According to ancient philosophers, the vitality of the spirit is the one that should be given priority, because a healthy, vital spirit harmonizes all aspects of the human being, just as a musician does with his musical instrument, and that's why: A healthy spirit in a healthy body« (Jončić). This is from the old Latin wisdom: *Orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano*, or we must pray that in a healthy body there is a healthy spirit. This is a warning that a healthy body is not a sign of a healthy spirit, but the opposite. Furthermore, there is a big difference between spiritual and physical effort and endeavor. The body weakens over time through physical effort, while the spirit, on the path of virtue and through spiritual effort, grows stronger over time. That is why the Latin quote says: *Arcum frangum intensio, animum remissio* – the tension breaks the bow, relaxation the soul. There needs to be a balance, coordination, and apportionment between the spirit and the body (Pilar 239). Furthermore, the spirit and the body are interconnected with the mind. Each person should become familiar with, maintain, and comprehend all three (body, spirit, and mind). *Laudato Si'* mentions this dimension because »learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different« (LS 155). Pope Francis also warns that »Christians have not always appropriated and developed the spiritual treasures bestowed by God upon the Church, where the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us« (LS 216). Bible speaks of individual self-affirmation by the words of Jesus Christ: »Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect« (Matthew 5:48). Similarly to this method of overcoming atheistic anthropocentrism specific Russian research are emphasizing the so-called *system hedonism* whose primary goal is to increase productivity of life through the systematization of pleasure (Соколовская and Волочков 91-93). This is a version of the new *ethos* that strives for conscious consumption, fundamentally limited by ethical frameworks and the teachings of consistent progressive development, productivity, and self-improvement of the modern individual (Василенко, 28-30) (Пеньков and Волочков, 110-113).

The crucial method is to face suffering and pain, within which people grow and empower themselves as individuals. As Lance Armstrong said: »Pain is temporary. It may last for a minute or an hour or a day or even a year. But eventually it will subside and something else will take its place. If I quit, however, it will last forever« (Specter), or in this case, pleasures will have consequences that last forever. If there is temporary pain, time will heal it. Interestingly, from the past, people tend to feel pain more vividly, while beautiful moments of pleasure and happiness are primarily experienced in the

present (Pilar 306). Suffering gives value. The purpose of life is not to escape into endless pleasures from difficult and challenging moments that will inevitably come someday. »It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied« (Mill 14). In such periods, a person needs to take responsibility, carry the Cross, and fight everyday challenges, because through challenging experiences, humans become stronger. Friedrich Nietzsche was right in his statement: »What doesn't kill me makes me stronger« (Nietzsche 6). Scientists at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management have proven that this is a valid argument and that there is value in failure by proving how decline or setback in early-career usually led to future career impact (Wang et al. 1). History teaches how the lives of the saints and many people famous for their goodness or intelligence had numerous temptations, challenges and even failures. As it was portrayed in a well-known movie *Batman Begins*, directed by Christopher Nolan, the main character, Bruce Wayne was asked by his father, Thomas Wayne: »Why do we fall, Bruce? So, we can learn to pick ourselves up« (Nolan 10:42). People fail so that they can become better versions of themselves. Flowers cannot blossom without rain. Failure strengthens our inner vigor, extracts the purest components of our spiritual being, and thus makes us come out enthusiastic and upright. Defeat through hardships and life's shipwrecks has a transformational power that can be harnessed for the greater good and success. Here lies the importance of embracing the pain to fuel life. As the old Latin proverb goes: *Felix dolor! Felix culpa!* (Blissful pain! Fortunate fall!). »The most satisfying lives are those which involve challenge, fear, and struggle« (Bloom). They give life a meaningful pursuit because »struggle and difficulty can, in the right contexts, lead to the joys of mastery and flow« (Bloom).

One of the keys to finding a joyful life is to live it through simplicity. Pope Francis emphasizes this in *Laudato Si'* since with simplicity, people »are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many possibilities which life can offer« (LS 223). Pleasure cannot stand alone as a separate goal. Viktor Frankl explains this in his book, »Man's Search for Meaning.« When a man tries to demonstrate his sexual potency or when a woman wants to achieve orgasm, they are less likely to succeed. Pleasure should remain a side effect of intimacy, not a goal in itself (Frankl 125). Ironically, the more people give in to these desires, the less they fulfill them. Temptations create a false image of fulfillment if people indulge in pleasure and thus bury themselves deeper into hedonistic slavery and further away from freedom. That is why it is increasingly difficult for people to overcome addiction, or as the Bible says: »I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate« (Rom. 7:15). This is because in each human there is a thirst which nothing earthly can quench, or how Jesus said: »Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again« (John 4:13).

To conclude with a great image from Douglas Murray about contemporary *Zeitgeist* in western civilization: »A society that sells itself solely on its pleasures is one that can swiftly lose its attractions...« and »a society that says we are defined exclusively by the bar and the nightclub, by self-indulgence and our sense of entitlement, cannot be said to have deep roots or much likelihood of survival. But a society which holds that our culture consists of the cathedral, the playhouse and the playing field, the shopping mall and Shakespeare, has a chance« (Murray 316-317). In conclusion, key remedies against hedonism are long-term goals and achievements, focus on the present, discipline and restraint, understanding and training our body, spirit, and mind, altruism and thankfulness, high level of conscientiousness, stoicism and asceticism, simplicity, embracing and empowering pain and transformational life falls, *eudaimonia* or new perfectionist ideal of happiness.

4. Consumerism

When it comes to consumerism, similar to materialism, people should first look to their needs. What do they really need and why? After defining this and recognizing the function of purchasing goods, it is essential to stop identifying oneself with objects and copying others in the sense of possession. Each person can have a different material lifestyle, just like we have different interests. A person cannot find happiness by buying everything in order to be accepted. Giving away or donating goods and things can raise greater awareness of how those things are unnecessary and that life is possible without them. Such a position is similar to a minimalist one, where buying things is based on their usefulness rather than their status. A person should purchase items to meet their needs and not to impress their neighbors (Becker). Consumerism can be seen as a consumption ideology which makes consumers (leading ideologues) developing their identity, knowingly or unknowingly, primarily through constant consumption (Schmitt et al. 75). Thus, another way to overcome consumerism is to become aware of ideas and values which are imposed and, in a sort of way, indoctrinated upon people. This is why critical thinking is critical. »Criticism comes from the Greek word *krino*, which means to discern, to choose, to judge. Criticism is the analysis, judgment, and evaluation of a subject, proceedings, deeds« (Buchberger 11), or in this case, ideas of consumption. Interestingly, Pope Francis is also calling for critical thinking and a review of crucial contemporary questions in *Laudato Si'*: »Following a period of irrational confidence in progress and human abilities, some sectors of society are now adopting a more critical approach. We see increasing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature, along with a growing concern, both genuine and distressing, for what is happening to our planet. Let us review, however cursorily, those questions which are troubling us today and which we can no longer sweep under the carpet« (LS 19).

Furthermore, on a national level, interesting actions could include policies aimed at reducing consumerism and consumption. A great example of such action is

from the Sweden Ministry of Finance and Strategy for sustainable consumption, in which the Government of Sweden had focused on several main areas in confronting consumption: 1) Encouraging sustainable ways of consuming with eco-smart behavior patterns, more effective ecolabelling and positive developments in the sharing economy; 2) Streamlining resource use by goods that last longer, circular economy and sustainable waste management; 3) Focusing on sustainable food, transport and housing (Ministry of Finance). Furthermore, Pope Francis emphasized how »political activity on the local level could also be directed to modifying consumption, developing an economy of waste disposal and recycling, protecting certain species and planning a diversified agriculture and the rotation of crops« (LS 180).

In industrial production, several challenges arise in the attempt to transition towards sustainable entrepreneurship. Companies must develop sustainable solutions in production with new inputs (materials), while simultaneously modifying existing production operating models and processes. Furthermore, consumers are eager to support such companies while they are unwilling to compromise on taste, convenience, and quality (Davis-Peccoud and Deryckere). It is essential to raise awareness about the environmental dangers of consumption and the need for collaborative cooperation at various levels of society (Ministry of Finance). Research experts in other states propose similar policies of environmental education against consumerism as a possible way of researching and explaining the relationship between overconsumption and environmental challenges (Veinović 74). Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* is also emphasizing this kind of transformation through education, since »change is impossible without motivation and a process of education« (LS 15). »Environmental education should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent, which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility, and compassionate care« (LS 210). These trainings would teach both young and old to: »1) Use less paper and plastic products - e.g., use a reusable water bottle 2) Reduce water consumption - e.g., take a short shower, manually wash dishes, etc. 3) Don't cook more than we consume 4) Compost food waste (instead of disposing) 5) Recycle 6) Reuse instead of dispose 7) Use public transport, ride a car together, walk or ride a bike 8) Saving electricity - for example, by turning off the lights and buy energy-efficient devices 9) Planting trees« (LS 211).

In addition to education, researchers propose green consumerism as a lifestyle to mitigate the adverse effects of consumerism on the environment. It can be explained as the lifestyle of an individual consumer's concern about environmental issues (Haanpää 479). Green consumerism comes in two basic types: »1. *shallow* green consumerism: consumers seek to purchase *ecofriendly* alternatives, but do not necessarily change their overall level of consumption 2. *deep* green consumerism: consumers seek to purchase ecofriendly alternatives, but also, more importantly, seek to reduce their overall level of consumption« (Roach et al. 26). Some actions of green consumerism are boycotting, fair trade initiatives, social movements and government legislation

(Crane 379), through which green consumers build a collective identity and green behavior. It can be looked upon as a type of (green) ethical consumption or (green) moral consumerism (Coffin and Egan-Wyer 115-117).

An interesting idea is one of economic morality and greater discussion about the role of the economy in everyday Christian life. Traditionally, Christianity has been reserved towards economy and economic wealth of an individual, perhaps even due to quotes from the Bible like: »If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven« (Matthew 19:21) or »It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God« (Mark 10:25). Perhaps it is important to emphasize how this mostly means that money alone (or consuming material goods) cannot bring true happiness, meaning, or path to heaven. In this manner, frugality is an excellent method against consumerism, as it aligns with morality, unlike profligacy, and the primary condition for acquiring economic power (Pilar 340). People must be careful not to become avaricious (need for immoral, greedy wealth). *Laudato Si'* has a clear statement of economic morality, by which »work should be the setting for this rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God« (LS 127), not for the endless consumption of the meaningless expendable objects. Therefore, there is nothing inherently wrong with being wealthy and having money; however, how one perceives and utilizes it is the difference between economic morality and economic wickedness, usury and financial speculation.

Laudato Si' emphasizes how »an awareness of the gravity of today's cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits. Many people know that our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them. In those countries which should be making the greatest changes in consumer habits, young people have a new ecological sensitivity and a generous spirit, and some of them are making admirable efforts to protect the environment« (LS 209). Pope Francis was clear and direct when he addressed the issue of the environment and politics: »Many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms, simply making efforts to reduce some negative impacts of climate change. However, many of these symptoms indicate that such effects will continue to worsen if we continue with current models of production and consumption« (LS 26). The Pope also expressed means to overcome this challenge by the development of »policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy« (LS 26). This should be followed by investments in »means of production and transportation which consume less energy and require fewer raw materials, as well as in methods of construction and renovating buildings which improve their energy efficiency. But these good

practices are still far from widespread» (LS 26). Therefore, there is a need to promote further development and continue to improve clean industry and machinery that can safely utilize renewable energy resources. However, they must be available, affordable, and accessible to a large number of populations.

Furthermore, small gestures or small acts of love can change the world. Start with what you can do to help yourself, society, or the environment. Stephen Covey highlights the distinction between proactive individuals, whose focus is on what they can do and influence, and reactive individuals who focus their energy on things beyond their control (Covey 45-50). He has developed a model consisting of two circles: the Circle of Concerns and the Circle of Influence. The first one encompasses things that most people cannot influence significantly, such as the COVID-19 crisis, global warming, societal attitudes, global conflicts, and security threats. Those are part of the Circle of Concerns, since people are concerned about them, but cannot impact those problems alone, at once, and in the short term. However, the Circle of Influence encompasses actions that people can take immediately to effect change. Over time, the Circle of Influence expands, while the Circle of Concerns contracts (Covey 45-50). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says about the good servants: »You have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master« (Matthew 25:23). *Laudato Si'* also emphasizes this principle since »Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made of simple daily gestures that break with the logic of violence, exploitation, and selfishness. In the end, a world of exacerbated consumption is at the same time a world which mistreats life in all its forms« (LS 230). In short, the primary means to overcome consumerism are sustainable production, unique and creative material lifestyle, environmental education and critical thinking, reassessing generally accepted ideas, giving away, sharing or donating consumed objects, promotion of sustainable consumption towards green or ethical consumerism, economic morality and frugality, and small acts of love.

5. Materialism

Strong materialistic values, maintained within the consumer neoliberal capitalist system, have a negative influence on individual well-being and environmental sustainability (Isham et al. 16). Successfully resisting consumerism requires opposing widespread materialism in the present *Weltanschauung*. To overcome materialism, people should not forsake all their material possessions, as some are necessary for living. It would mean shifting the focus from those possessions to other aspects of life. Nonmaterialistic people are neutral and indifferent towards possessions, because they possess things but do not perceive them as having value. Initially, it is essential to cultivate an awareness of how possessions today possess people. Iden-

tity is not ownership, and if it were, then such a person would be owned. A basic identity founded on intrinsic values, such as honesty, integrity, self-control, and helpfulness, can help extrude materialistic and extrinsic values. People should write down their core values and match them with their behaviors to create an identity and image of themselves as they are and as they would like to be. Development of a personal moral character is the basis of being authentically human (LS 5). Dematerialization of people requires a disintegrating lifestyle, so that the needs can overcome objects and possessions.

One way to achieve this is through financial planning, which involves determining the amount of money needed to achieve financial fulfillment. By tracking the flow of their finances, a person can realize what is essential. Social equality is interesting since people are constantly comparing themselves to others. To live life without envy or jealousy, people should stop comparing themselves to others. When people compare themselves to each other, they can be either better (superior) or worse (inferior). If they are better, they can become arrogant; if they are worse, they feel worthless or envious. This leads to arrogance or enviousness (and resentment). Therefore, it is essential not to compare with others. A different way to address envy is to strive for low levels of inequality. The Gini index is a tool used to measure the level of inequality (Farris 851), and inequality levels are increasing in some societies. One of the dominant factors is the jealousy effect, as individuals have illusions about their materialistic prospects and opportunities for upward social mobility, thus becoming jealous of more successful peers (Zonghou and Wang). Pope Francis has warned about this problem: »But we should be particularly indignant at the enormous inequalities in our midst, whereby we continue to tolerate some considering themselves more worthy than others. We fail to see that some are mired in desperate and degrading poverty, with no way out« (LS 66).

Gratitude is another remedy for curing materialism, as it is interconnected with valuing individual positive outcomes as a consequence of other people's intentional, benevolent, costly, and praiseworthy behavior. Such individuals perceive their own lives as more worthy, meaningful, secure, and fulfilling (Polak and McCullough 356). Secondly, what people should do is to pursue sufficiency, »as an economic strategy that focuses on decreased consumption of resources through a reduction in demand for goods« (Isham et al. 3). This means that individuals favor more sustainable ways of life through simplicity and modesty implementing them through actions like sharing items, reducing consumption of resource intensive goods and using public transport (Isham et al. 3).

Openness and focus on community help one create solidarity and value experience over objects. »Some studies have also found that allocating disposable money to experiential consumption (tourism, watching performances) will be more enjoyable, [and give more] satisfaction and happiness than investing in material wealth (clothing, jewelry). ... [Experience buyers] will have better experience memories, more resist-

ance to unfavorable comparisons, and tend to be more closely related to self, and more likely to meet social and emotional needs» (Shuxiang and Yaozhong 363-364). Several authors discuss a similar method, known as *flow experiences*. This occurs when an individual focuses all their attention on a specific activity. Such individuals stop perceiving themselves as separate from the actions they are performing and often lose self-consciousness and track of time (Isham et al. 4). This can lead to greater life satisfaction and higher self-esteem because people are enjoying experiences within particular activity like exercise, craft, schoolwork or socializing, unlike in some passive, entertainment and leisure activities like social networks or watching television (Isham et al. 4). Life is like a game of chess. After the game, the king and the pawn go into the same box. No one can take their possessions into the afterlife, but experiences and good deeds last forever. The Bible talks about this: »For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it« (1 Tim. 6:7-8). »What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?« (Mark 8:36). It is also important to emphasize that relationships should not be viewed as possessions, because nobody can possess someone. Relationships should also be considered as an experience and intrinsic values that enrich people. Relationships are not about possessing or having, but about doing and sharing life activities with others.

Practicing humility, charity, and diffidence can be a valuable exercise in combating materialism, as people simplify their material possessions and avoid the game of status in which they compare and compete with others in acquiring (Young) (Stillman) (Pilar 290-300). Saint Cyprian says: *Humilitas est sanctitatis fundamentum* - Humility is the foundation of holiness, which is the basis of humanity. Humility is the key to all spiritual growth and true sacramental life, as well as a milestone in our interpersonal relationships, where people are not judges and rulers over others, but servants of one another. Deep humility is always more powerful and safer than any airy loftiness (Bašić). »For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted« (Luke 18:14). An individual cannot take a single step on the spiritual path if there is a lack of humility (Bašić). True humility means becoming, deep down, a person who sees the real truth and God's hand at work. Therefore, humility makes people more spiritual, and by cultivating humility, people »will take root below and bear fruit above« (Isa. 37:31) in their lives. Furthermore, there can be no affirmation or success without humility, since »humility comes before honor« (Prov. 18:12). Pope Francis also emphasizes the importance of humility, since »once we lose our humility, and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment. It is not easy to promote this kind of healthy humility or happy sobriety when we consider ourselves autonomous, when we exclude God from our lives or replace him with our own ego, and think that our subjective feelings can define what is right and what is wrong« (LS 224).

Furthermore, it is essential to raise children with reduced exposure to societal and media influences, which in some states may promote materialism and the pur-

suit of possessions. The education of both parents and the school system plays a vital role in shaping children's values; therefore, special care is needed in their education and upbringing. Several studies have demonstrated that parents play a significant role in instilling materialistic values in children. There is no influence of materialism on children when parents criticize commercial advertising or include children in the discussion about household consumption (Shuxiang and Yaozhong 363-364). When it comes to the environment, individuals with higher intrinsic values and motivations tend to have greater concerns for the natural world. Intrinsic people are »more likely to do recycling and to reduce water consumption, to pay 20% higher prices, higher taxes, and to be willing to give part of their income to protect the environment« (Pugno and Sarracino 18). Furthermore, flow experiences also have a positive influence on the environment. Those people are experiencing activities which are less environmentally costly while supporting the idea of achieving a higher well-being with lower environmental impact (Isham, et al. 4). Pope Francis states in *Laudato Si'*: »The intrinsic dignity of the world is compromised ... when human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves« (LS 115). By adopting altruistic and intrinsic behaviors, along with solidarity, the negative influence of materialism on individuals, society, and the environment can be mitigated and neutralized. To sum up, the methods of overcoming materialism as an agent of atheistic anthropocentrism include intrinsic and altruistic values, financial planning and reducing inequality, gratitude and sufficiency, avoiding comparisons with others, non-identification with material objects, openness to community and flow experiences, practicing humility, charity, and diffidence.

Conclusion

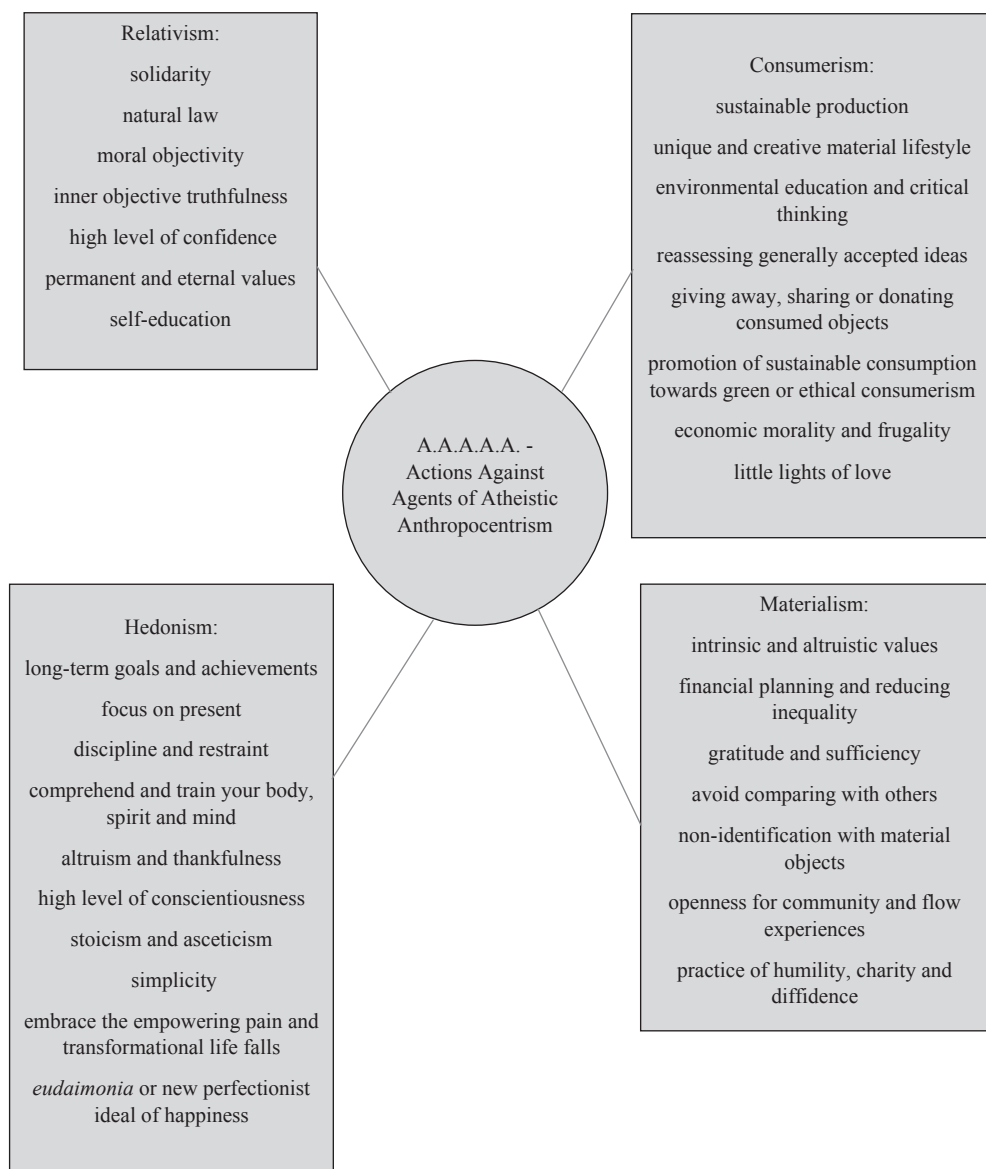
After the first two scientific articles, through which the authors established the conceptual meaning of agents of atheistic anthropocentrism as concepts (Pavlić Rukavina, »The Impact and Influence« 70-86) and their influence and impact on individuals, society, and the environment (Pavlić and Rukavina, »The Impact and Influence« 115-127), the third research paper has analyzed means and solutions to overcome agents of atheistic anthropocentrism. The main research questions in the article were: How can deviations from atheistic anthropocentrism be overcome? What tactics and methods can be implemented as remedies, and which are mentioned in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*?

For each agent of atheistic anthropocentrism, several means to overcome it have been identified, which are listed in Scheme 3. Some methods and means correlate and overlap, or they complement each other, as the influence of agents also correlates. All the means and methods can represent a strategy for empowering Christian or biblical anthropocentrism. This strategy can be named by the acronym A.A.A.A.A.

– Actions Against Agents of Atheistic Anthropocentrism. It is essential to have a proactive stance as a Christian. Atheistic anthropocentrism causes severe damage to the world and humanity, which demands »the active participation of all members of the community« and »active involvement of local people from within their proper culture« (LS 144). This reveals three more interesting methods which are not mentioned but might have a greater impact against atheistic anthropocentrism: 1) be active and present; 2) find your essence and purpose; 3) be aware of your surroundings and neighbors, since everything influences you. These could be further analyzed with other topics that emerged during the research:

- 1) The influence of relativism and other agents of atheistic anthropocentrism in various cultures and civilizations.
- 2) Promotion of Actions Against Agents of Atheistic Anthropocentrism (A.A.A.A.) in education, the school system, and parenting.
- 3) Means and methods to overcome atheistic anthropocentrism in popular culture (movies, media, TV series, etc.).
- 4) Role of popular culture and social media in the promotion of atheistic anthropocentrism and their role in the transformation of societies and individual values. How can communication about the importance of Christian values contribute to countering atheistic anthropocentrism?
- 5) How do political ideologies influence the four agents of atheistic anthropocentrism?

Laudato Si' presents several remedies for deviations of atheistic anthropocentrism. These are the promotion of intrinsic values, solidarity, support at different levels of government and local policies that will improve the quality of life and not just increase production and consumption. In addition, it is essential to emphasize the need for international, interdisciplinary cooperation that encompasses various fields, including religion, the scientific and academic community, politics, non-governmental organizations, the economy, and entrepreneurship. At its core, *Laudato Si'* is a comprehensive, inclusive, universal, and multidisciplinary document that advocates broad social action to change the negative habits of humanity and, as such, can be used as a program of socio-economic renewal of humanity from the social deviations of atheistic anthropocentrism. *Laudato Si'* is a call for »international cooperation based on holism, encompassing every realm, from religion, science, politics, economy, and business« (Pavlić and Rukavina, »Socioeconomic Relevance« 202), against agents of atheistic anthropocentrism and all other deviations of the modern world. If we want to see the world change, we need to change how we see the world under the influence of atheistic anthropocentrism and start to change ourselves proactively.



Scheme 3 - Methods and means to overcome agents of atheistic anthropocentrism or A.A.A.A.A. (authors created illustration)

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