

Transhumanism and the *imago Dei*

Narratives of apprehension and hope

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Abstract

The development of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality generate narratives of apprehension within contemporary Western technoculture. Transhumanist narratives declare that humanity is now upon the brink of seizing technological control of its own evolution, and creating a brighter and better posthuman future. For many, this leads to human technological capability being seen with both a sense of wonder at its potential, and a sense of dread of that same potential. Theologically, this raises two key questions: Firstly, why are human beings technological? Secondly, how should human technological agency be pursued?

In this thesis, the motif of the *imago Dei*, the theological assertion that human beings are somehow made in the image and likeness of God, is employed to explore technological narratives of apprehension, and to answer these key questions. It is argued that the *imago Dei*, interpreted through the metaphor of the created co-creator, provides significant insight into the question of human technological inclination.

The created co-creator, as a metaphor of hybridity, also intersects with similar transhumanist visions of the hybrid or cyborg, where the boundary between human persons and technology is ambiguous. Such visions of the hybrid prove disconcerting, for they blur traditional categories used to organise the world. Moreover, such visions also comprise elements of technological eschatology that provide meaning and hope, and stand in possible conflict with theological equivalents.

The thesis concludes by considering how the metaphor of the created co-creator can draw upon the richness of the Christian traditions of social concern and hybridity to engender narratives of hope. These new narratives enlarge upon the theological understanding of human technological creativity and purpose to supplement the narratives of apprehension. In doing so, they provide impetus for wholesome and hopeful technological agency.

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Abbreviations

AAAS	American Association for the Advancement of Science
ACM	Association for Computing Machinery
AI	Artificial intelligence
AiG	Answers in Genesis
ANE	Ancient Near Eastern
AR	Augmented reality
BMI	Brain-machine interface
CAVE	Cave Automatic Virtual Environment
CBC	Center for Bioethics and Culture Network
CTNS	Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
GE	Genetic engineering / genetically engineered
GM	Genetically modified
GMO	Genetically modified organism
GNR	Genetic, nanotechnological and robotic
GRIN	Genetic, robotic, information and nano- technologies
H+	Transhuman
IEEE	Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
Leg. All.	Legum Allegoriae
MOSH	Mostly original substrate human
NBC	Nuclear, biological and chemical
NBIC	Nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science
NOMA	Non-overlapping magesteria
NSF	National Science Foundation
VE	Virtual environment
VR	Virtual reality
VRML	Virtual reality modelling language
WWW	World wide web

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