4. Upgrade: A Better Way of Being Human?

Introduction

- We are fallen creatures: dependent, weak, vulnerable, corrupt Weakness is fundamental to human experience.

1. The Technological Society[1]

a. The promise of technology:

b. The problem of a technological society

> 'It is the standard temptation of a technological culture…to conceive even the natural as a special case of artifice, to argue for letting nature take its course simply as the best of all instrumental means towards some humanly chosen end.'[2]

2. Transhumanism

a. What is Transhumanism?

- 'Human upgrade'

- Biological engineering

- Cyborg Engineering

- Non-organic beings

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[1] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1964).
[2] Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* (Clarendon Press, 1984), 19.

b. What Drives Transhumanism?

- Refusal of God-given limits

- Deep roots in origins of modern world/modern science

> 'For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is technique; and both, in the practice of this technique, are ready to do things hitherto regarded as disgusting and impious.'[3]

> Modern science and modern culture…don't think of death as a metaphysical mystery, and they certainly don't view death as the source of life's meaning. **Rather, for modern people death is a technical problem that we can and should solve**…

> [H]umans don't die because a figure in a black cloak taps them on the shoulder, or because God decreed it, or because mortality is an essential part of some great cosmic plan. **Humans always die due to some technical glitch.** The heart stops pumping blood. The main artery is clogged by fatty deposits. [etc] And what is responsible for such technical problems? Other technical problems…

> **And every technical problem has a technical solution.** We don't need to wait for the Second Coming in order to overcome death. A couple of geeks in a lab can do it…True, at present we don't have solutions to all technical problems. But this is precisely why we invest so much time and money in researching cancer, germs, genetics and nanotechnology.'[4]

- Death

    o Not a moral matter

    o Not connected to the meaning of life

    o Not connected to sin and its consequences

    o A purely technical problem

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[3] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (Macmillan, 1947), 48.

[4] Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (Harper, 2017), 22-23; my emphasis.

c. Analysing the Transhumanist Dream

- Assumption: not dying is good. Why?

- NB. False dichotomy of causation—*not* God, *but* a technical problem

- Less: what a human life is for. More: how do human machines work?

3. Beginning a Christian Response

- What is a human life for?

- What is *good* for us?

- The technological society: Human goals take precedence over God-given ends

  o 'You will not surely die…You will be like God, knowing good and evil.' (Gen 3:4-5)

- Created reality: God made us for himself

  What is the chief and highest end of man?
  The chief and highest end of man is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever.

  —*Westminster Larger Catechism, Q.1*

  o Rom 11:36; 1 Corinthians 10:31

  o Psalm 73:24-28; 16:11

- What is the problem that we face?

  o Technical glitches?

  o Sin, wrath, death, hell (Rom 1:18-3:20; Matt 15:18-20; 25:41-46; Rev 20:1-15)

- The promise of a better mediator

> Christ showed himself to mortals in the very mortality that **malign and deceitful mediators** proudly exulted that they did not have; and, speaking as immortals to mortals, those **deceitful mediators** promised their deceptive help to wretched human beings. **But the Good and True Mediator** showed that it is sin that is evil, not **the substance or nature of the flesh**, which, along with the human soul, could be assumed and maintained without sin, and **could be laid aside at death and changed into something better by resurrection**…
>
> **…**He also showed that death itself—although it is the penalty of sin, a penalty that he himself paid for us without sin—is not something to be avoided by committing sin but rather something to be endured, if the occasion arises, for righteousness's sake…We were men, but we were not righteous; in his incarnation, however, there was human nature, but it was righteous, not sinful. **This is the mediation by which a helping hand is stretched out to those who lie fallen and prostrate.**[5]

Further Reading

Harari, Yuval Noah. *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. New York: Harper, 2017.

Lennox, John C. *2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.

Mason, Matthew. 'Podbabies and the Fruit of the Womb'. https://www.londonseminary.org/podbabies-and-the-fruit-of-the-womb/.

O'Donovan, Oliver. *Begotten or Made?* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

Turner, Hadden. 'The Road to the Machine-Man: Part One'. *Over the Field* (blog), 25 August 2022. https://overthefield.substack.com/p/the-road-to-the-machine-man-part.

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[5] Augustine, *City of God*, X.24.