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Man Reconstructed: Humanity beyond Biology

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A human being is many things, but he is first and foremost a creature; a finite and mortal creature; a creature created by God; a creature bearing God's image and likeness. When Christians assert this creaturely status in the public square, they often encounter responses that range from bewilderment to hostility. There are many reasons why those populating the public square do not warmly receive this reminder, but I want to focus my remarks on technology as reinforcing a Promethean-like desire to overcome the finite and mortal constraints of being human.

It cannot be denied that technology has improved the human condition. People living in developed regions of the world, for instance, enjoy unprecedented comfort, affluence, mobility, and communication. Healthcare in particular has improved dramatically. Pharmaceuticals restore health, prevent disease, and extend longevity. Sophisticated prosthetics restore mobility and dexterity, and even hearing and sight. Quadriplegics can turn lights on and off, change channels and adjust the volume of a television monitor, and operate a computer by merely thinking with the aid of electrodes placed in their brains. The lame walk, the blind see, and the ill are healed because of medicine and not miracle workers.

More expansively, we may ask if these and anticipated technological advances are moving us toward the cusp of fulfilling the late modern project of mastering nature and human nature. Most people spend their time living and working in environments that are constructed or manufactured, accompanied by legions of machines and gadgets. The artificial has become our "natural" habitat; we are more at home plopping a frozen dinner in a microwave oven than hunting game or gathering berries in the forest. Technology is displacing nature as the human mode of being in the world—the way we express and project who we are and hope to become. Or in George Grant's words: "In each lived moment of our waking and sleeping, we are technological civilization."[1]

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[1] George Parkin Grant, *Technology and Justice* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1986), 11.

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Since the mastery of nature is seemingly on the verge of being accomplished, the more ambitious are turning their attention to mastering human nature. Through a combination of biotechnology, bionics, robotics, and artificial intelligence, they envision the transformation of humans into a superior species with enhanced physical and cognitive capabilities, as well as greater longevity. The more bold visionaries are confident that soon—2040 is emerging as the preferred watershed year—the technological capability will be in hand to begin a serious quest for immortality.[2] They look forward to a new humanity, or better, post-humanity; a posthuman world populated by self-created artifacts. The envisioned posthuman is simultaneously a self-made creator and creature.

I. Post-Humanity: Rhetoric or Reality?

It is admittedly tempting to dismiss much of the posthuman rhetoric as little more than the daydreaming of individuals who cannot tell the difference between science and science fiction and subsequently place their faith in unproven technological capabilities. Yet such a curt dismissal would be a mistake for two reasons. First, the idea of becoming posthuman is increasingly attracting public attention. The prospect of genetic enhancement and, more boldly, the possibility of merging with machines to create humans that are better than human have not prompted a response of widespread revulsion. Rather, the cyborg, for instance, has become something of a cultural icon, capturing public curiosity and forming a perception of what constitutes a desirable future.[3] This perception is important, as N. Katherine Hayles has written: "People become posthuman because they think they are posthuman."[4] Attention should be paid to an idea, however bizarre it might be, that is shaping the intellectual, religious, and moral imagination of late moderns.

Second, some provisional assessment should be made if this imagined future is troubling or even perilous, for acting often stems from thinking; ideas have consequences. As humans increasingly regard themselves as artifacts of what they want and will themselves to become, what will be the moral, social, and political consequences? And are they consequences

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[2] See, for example, Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York and London: Penguin Books, 2005), and Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[3] See, for example, Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–181.

[4] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 7.

that should be pursued? In short, envisioning the transformation of humans into so-called "superior" beings is an idea deserving critical scrutiny. Francis Fukuyama may have gone a bit over the top in labeling transhumanism as the world's most dangerous idea, but he is right in insisting that it needs to be challenged in a serious and sustained manner.[5]

Why has the idea or image of the posthuman seized public attention and subsequently formed its religious and moral imagination? How do we assess whether it is a good or bad idea? And if it should prove to be a bad idea, can a better one be offered? In answering these questions, I would like to suggest that we are not so much confronting a new idea, but a very old one in a new guise.

In the first chapter of Genesis it is written that "God created man in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (1:27)." As creatures, humans are in a subordinate relationship with God as indicated in the following verse in which God commands them to exercise a limited dominion over creation. This is not how the story unfolds, however. The following chapters report various misdeeds through which humans utterly fail in fulfilling what they were directed to do, culminating in an attempt to build a tower reaching to heaven. They undertake this project to make a name for themselves, and God worries that if they succeed "then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" (Gen 11:1–9 NIV).

In this biblical account of creatures aspiring to become like their creator, it should be noted that in trying to reach heaven they employed the best technology at their disposal. Such hubris is not confined to the Old Testament. According to Hannah Arendt, the ancient Greeks believed that humans were the only self-aware mortal creatures, bracketed between an immortal nature and the immortal gods. Humans thereby faced the challenge of how, as mortal creatures, they could participate in a world of endless time. One strategy was to invest oneself in activities, such as family or politics, which transcended one's death. A person lived on in an immortal lineage, city, or empire. Variations of this tactic have endured through such modern attempts of creating immortal works of art or literature, or, more broadly and ambitiously, an immortal history.

What these attempts at building a tower, city, or empire hold in common is the recognition that mortality places an absolute barrier against an individual's hopes and aspirations. Time conspires against every endeavor, for it eventually runs out. In death, humans face, in Arendt's

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[5] Francis Fukuyama, "Transhumanism," *Foreign Policy* 144 (2004), 42–43.

words, the "only reliable law of life" that inevitably consigns "everything human to ruin and destruction."[6] Contributing to a future that lives beyond one's lifespan may provide some solace, but it is a cold comfort never truly to enjoy the fruits of one's labor. Such an effort merely serves to reinforce the impermanence of human lives and their activities. Shakespeare, for instance, has never enjoyed his fame over the centuries.

Embodiment, then, is the great enemy of human flourishing.[7] The body imposes severe and intolerable limitations upon what we can do and what we aspire to be. The body, for instance, constrains the will. A person cannot do everything he might want; not just anyone can be a professional athlete or rocket scientist. More troubling, the body is a source of pain and suffering. As embodied beings we are fragile and vulnerable; we can be injured or become ill. More depressingly, even if a person should be fortunate enough to avoid any serious injuries or diseases, one is allotted only a limited number of years. Embodied beings grow old and die. In short, humans must be rescued from the finite and mortal limits of their bodies. The ultimate solution is personal immortality.

II. The Technological Quest for Personal Immortality

The transhumanist response is to wage a technological war against finitude and mortality. In the words of Max Moore, a leading proponent of posthuman transformation: "Aging and death victimizes all humans," thereby placing an unacceptable "imposition on the human race." Consequently, the "technological conquest of aging and death stands out as the most urgent, vital, worthy quest of our time."[8] Aging and death, then, should be regarded as diseases to be treated and eventually cured. Through a combination of anticipated advances in biotechnology, regenerative medicine, genetic manipulation, nanotechnology, bionics, and computer science, aging can presumably be arrested while simultaneously maintaining or enhancing physical and cognitive performance. Individuals will be able to live healthy, happy, productive, and long, perhaps very long lives. While evolution has, through natural selection, bequeathed to *homo sapiens* bodies that serve as poor hosts for the information that

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[6] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 246.

[7] The following critique is adapted from Brent Waters, "Whose Salvation? Which Eschatology? Transhumanism and Christianity as Contending Salvific Religions," in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

[8] Max Moore, "On Becoming Posthuman," http://www.maxmore.com/becoming.htm (accessed July 15, 2011).

constitutes their personalities (what the ancients called "the soul," and moderns "the will"), technological development and ingenuity can be used to negate, or eventually escape, the finite and mortal constraints that nature has imposed.

If humans are to be saved from their bodies, then ultimately death must also be conquered; dying must become a choice rather than a necessity. Through technology, humans can transform themselves into superior, and perhaps immortal, posthuman beings. To reiterate, this undertaking is a unique quest for personal immortality. The transhumanists are not endeavoring to simply live on after they die through something like a lineage, empire, or history, but to avoid death for a greatly extended period of time, if not altogether. In taking on this ambitious enterprise, however, they are seemingly crashing against the insurmountable constraints of human biology. Around 120 years appears to be the maximum amount of time a human being can live. As Leonard Hayflick discovered, cellular division and replication can only occur a limited number of times. With each sequence the telomeres on the DNA of each cell shortens. As the telomeres become shorter, they also become less efficient in replicating themselves. Eventually, they become so short that they can no longer function at all. This imperfect replication process also grows increasingly susceptible to mutations over time, leading to various diseases and degeneration associated with aging. Consequently, the quest for personal immortality appears hopeless, for human genes are apparently programmed to grow old and die.

Biological Immortality

The strategy for correcting this unfortunate coding is to develop technologies that either reprogram or bypass the mortal constraints of human DNA. There are three interrelated approaches to be taken for achieving this goal. The first may be characterized as biological immortality. Some scientists believe that with anticipated developments in genetic and biotechnologies the average lifespan can be increased dramatically, if not indefinitely. The twofold challenge is to prevent the shortening of the telomeres and to ensure that degenerative mutations do not occur in cellar replication and rejuvenation. In addition, the immune system will be genetically enhanced, and deleterious genetic defects removed or corrected to protect individuals from life-threatening and chronic diseases or disabilities. Aubrey de Gray, for instance, contends that living for 150 or 200 years will soon become routine.[9] With further technological innovation,

[9] *Strategies for Engineered Negligible Senescence: Why Genuine Control of Aging May Be Foreseeable*, ed. Aubrey de Grey, vol. 1019 in Annals of the New York Academy of

much more dramatic increases will be forthcoming, and immortality is not out of the question since infinite cellar rejuvenation cannot be ruled out in principle. For de Gray, winning the war against aging, and therefore death, is a matter of efficient engineering. The DNA that natural selection haphazardly concocted simply needs to be redesigned in line with human values and purposes. Moreover, there is a moral imperative driving de Gray's quest for biological immortality, for he insists that mortality is not simply an unfortunate aspect of being human, but is an unmitigated tragedy that can and should be overcome through appropriate research and technological development.

Bionic Immortality

If, however, human biology proves less pliable than hoped—if, for in-stance, the Hayflick limit can only be extended modestly—all is not lost in the war against aging and death. This leads to the second approach of bionic immortality. With anticipated advances in nanotechnology and robotics, various body parts that wear out will be replaced with artificial substitutes. Synthetic blood vessels and skin will replace their less durable natural counterparts, and as muscles deteriorate, arms and legs will be assisted or replaced with sophisticated prosthetics. Nanobots will be in-jected to repair or replace diseased organs, and neuroenhancers will be inserted into the brain to prevent the deterioration of memory and other cognitive functions. Admittedly, these artificial substitutes will also wear out over time, but they will be replaced with new and improved versions. Presumably, such maintenance could be undertaken indefinitely; in prin-ciple a bionic being could live forever, so long as the artificial parts are properly maintained, repaired, and replaced as needed. Additionally, physical and cognitive functions will not only be preserved but also enhanced. Individuals will enjoy the benefits of improved cardio-vascular systems, greater strength and agility, and enhanced intelligence and memory.

Virtual Immortality

There are, unfortunately, some liabilities accompanying this approach. The various electronic and mechanical systems can malfunction, and a hybrid host is still vulnerable to accidents or malicious acts resulting in death. Although a predominantly artificial body is an improvement, it is still not an ideal solution in overcoming finite and mortal limits. This leads to the third, and most speculative, approach: *virtual immortality*. Following

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Science (June 2004), and de Grey, "The War on Aging," in *The Scientific Conquest of Death: Essays on Infinite Lifespans* (Buenos Aires: Libros en Red, 2004), 29–45.

such visionary leaders in the fields of artificial intelligence and robotics as Ray Kurzweil[10] and Hans Moravec,[11] proponents suggest that the information contained in the brain that constitutes a person's memories, experience, and personality can be digitized. In the near future, highly sophisticated imaging devices will scan the brain to collect this information and, in turn, upload it into a computer. Once this information has been organized and stored it can then be downloaded into a robotic or virtual reality host. With frequently updated and multiple backups, the uploading and downloading process can be repeated indefinitely. Consequently, one's virtual self is virtually immortal.

It may be objected that a person cannot be reduced to a series of zeros and ones that can be shuffled about between robotic bodies and virtual reality programs. But Kurzweil and Moravec are quick to reply that since the mind is not a material object, but ultimately what a person is, then it cannot be anything other than information. A personality is comprised of a pattern of organized data that is created and stored over time. A biological body is merely a natural prosthetic hosting this pattern. Unfortunately, nature has not produced a very reliable or enduring prosthetic, so technology must be used to produce a better model. In liberating the mind from the biological body, nothing essential is lost, for if the information pattern of a person's identity is preserved, then, in Moravec's words, "I am preserved. The rest is mere jelly."[12] In short, technology can and should be developed to save individuals from the poor jelly-like conditions of being human.

III. Critical Reflections on Posthumanism from a Christian

Since, to paraphrase the prophet, I am neither an engineer nor the son of an engineer, I am not in a position to prognosticate whether or not these approaches toward achieving immortality are technologically feasible. In many respects, the feasibility is not the most troubling issue at stake, but, the posthuman story that is being told regarding what constitutes a good and desirable life. To a large extent it is a religious story. Not religious in a formal sense, but in the way Martin Luther speaks in the Large Catechism of having a God: wherever one places one's confidence is necessarily one's

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[10] See Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), and *The Singularity Is Near*.

[11] See Hans Moravec, *Mind Children*, and *Robot: Mere Machines to Transcendent Mind* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[12] Moravec, *Mind Children*, 117.

god, or more broadly one's object of faith.[13] Posthumanism is a faith in the power of technology to shape and control human destiny by saving humans from their mortal bodies. It is a story about a new being that is simultaneously a better creator and better creature.

It appears that posthumanism and Christianity share a number of similarities, particularly in regard to soteriology and eschatology. They agree, for instance, that the finite and mortal state of the human condition is not ideal. For posthumanists, humans have failed to achieve their true potential, while Christians believe that humans are fallen creatures. In response, both agree that we require release or salvation from our current condition. For posthumanists, this is accomplished through technological transformation, while Christians are transformed by their life in Christ. Both agree that death is the final enemy; one conquerors this foe by achieving the immortality of endless time, while the other is resurrected into eternal fellowship with the triune God.

These similarities, however, are more apparent than real, for the core beliefs undergirding posthumanism are drawn, often unwittingly, from what Christians regard as heretical sources. This is not a pejorative obser-vation, for identifying these sources does not automatically disclose that the subsequent analysis and proposed solution for relieving the human condition is wrong. Rather, it serves to demonstrate why Christians should greet posthumanism with, at best, a deep skepticism, and, at worse, grave caution. I now hope to demonstrate why such caution is warranted, by summarizing and contrasting some principal soteriological and escha-tological tenets of posthumanism and Christianity respectively, and then argue why those of the former are both false and dangerous.

The urgency of the posthuman religious story is seen in Max More's article, "Technological Self-Transformation."[14] According to More: "Life is fundamentally a ceaseless process, whose quintessence is a self-over-coming, a progression, a self-transformation and self-augmentation." More expansively, the chief characteristic of human life is a "perpetual drive toward its own increase and excellence." It is not coincidental that this drive is accompanied by an innate "desire for extreme longevity and the quest for physical immortality," since they constitute the prerequisites for maximum self-fulfillment. Although technology provides the practical

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[13] See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 119–122.

[14] Max More, "Technological Self-Transformation," http://www.maxmore.com/selftrns.htm (accessed July 18, 2011). Subsequent quotations are from this article unless indicated otherwise.

means for achieving extreme longevity and immortality, more importantly it enhances human autonomy by eliminating the constraints of DNA, religion, political ideologies, and outdated values. Consequently, we are urged to "ignore the biological fundamentalists who will invoke 'God's plan' or 'the natural order of things,' in an effort to imprison us at the human level." We should instead accept the challenge of recreating ourselves in our own image.

What exactly is this image? According to More, there is no single answer. Different individuals have differing goals, so that "self-transformation is best implemented by creating for ourselves a paradigm, and idealized model of the person we want to become." What More calls the "ideal self" or "Optimal Persona" is subject to periodic review, assessment and readjustment in order that the "higher being existing within us" is realized.

More's goal of the optimal person is problematic. He contends that human evolution is driven by a desire for self enhancement. To a limited extent this is true. In the past, however, this augmentation was intergenerational, achieved incrementally through the less invasive means of natural selection in tandem with socialization. Biological and cultural change has been driven by the quality of the species rather than its individual members. What More is proposing is a radical and rapid transformation of individuals rather than the gradual improvement of the species. Furthermore, he assumes that such technological self-transformation can be pursued without any corresponding loss of subjectivity. This assumption, however, ignores the fact that the mind develops in conjunction with the brain, and more broadly the body. There is, at best, scant evidence indicating what kind of subjectivity would result should this linkage between mind and body be reconfigured.

Moreover, even if the kind of self-transformation More proposes proves feasible, what exactly is this ideal self or Optimal Persona? More believes that individuals can refashion themselves into the kind of beings they want to become, but his proposed project of so-called "rational" self-creation fails him because of the radical libertarian rhetoric in which his argument is embedded. His ideal self exemplifies the autonomous individual, which means that he is appealing to a historically conditioned tradition rather than any so-called "pure" rationality. The eventual posthuman is little more than a hyper-libertarian.

More tries to solve this problem by asserting that the "Optimal Persona is Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, the higher being existing within us as potential waiting to be actualized." What would be some of the chief

characteristics of this technologically constructed *Übermensch*? Despite More's insistence that this latent potential can be actualized, he offers few suggestions regarding what a world populated by optimal persons might be like. We may turn to Hans Moravec, however, for a glimpse of the envisioned posthuman future. Moravec describes developments in computer science, artificial intelligence, and robotics over the latter half of the twentieth century, and draws upon anticipated advances in the next few decades. Machines that are both intelligent and conscious will emerge by the middle of the twenty-first century. Once this threshold is crossed, artificial life will evolve exponentially.[15] In order for humans to take full advantage of this technological breakthrough, they will need to merge with their "mind children." Eventually, artificial life will evolve into pure thought, transforming the universe into an expanding cyberspace of pure mind.[16] Once this "Omega Point" has been reached,[17] the resulting post-humans will be far superior to their human ancestors.

This posthuman eschatology, however, does not solve the problem of the *Übermensch*, but only makes it worse. According to Nietzsche, nihilists pave the way for the *Übermensch*. Nihilists come to love rather than despise their mortal fate, enabling them to renounce any right to vengeance or dominating others. For Nietzsche, the only hope is that the nobility of the *Übermensch* will overcome the destructive *ressentiment* of the last men. But what the posthumanists fail to acknowledge is that the inspiration for a noble love of fate comes from the classic Greek philosophical embrace of suffering and tragedy. The *Übermensch* will presumably come to love the tragic fate of his or her mortality and the suffering this love requires. Yet it is precisely this fate that posthumanists are trying to avoid. Consequently, technology is not used to coax out the latent *Übermensch*, but to create an entirely new being. But this begs the question: is posthumanism simply a nihilistic expression of a technophilia (love of technology) devoid of any genuine love of fate? If the nobility of mortality and suffering cannot be embraced, is there anything noble left to will? Rather, are they not attempting to abolish this fate by effectively willing the death of humankind? The only plausible salvific answer that can be offered is that humans must be saved from their mortal bodies in order to perfect the latent qualities of the mind, and this strategy is in turn driven by an eschatological imperative to achieve this perfection through the creation of a superior posthuman creature that provides a more enduring host for the information constituting an optimal person. In short, posthumanists wish

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[15] See Moravec, *Robot: Mere Machines*, 15–126.

[16] Moravec, *Robot: Mere Machines*, 163–189.

[17] Moravec, *Robot: Mere Machines*, 201–202.

to replace mortality with endless time as the definitive feature of the (post)human condition. But is this a religious story that should be warmly embraced?

It is admittedly an appealing story. Who would not want to live forever? Contrary to some critics of posthumanism that complain that immortality would prove boring after a while, I think I could find plenty of ways to amuse myself. An appealing story, however, is not necessarily a true and good story, and that is what must be assessed.

Christians cannot embrace posthuman religion, particularly its salvific strategy and eschatological horizon, for reasons that are similar to its earlier rejection of the Manichean and Pelagian heresies. In brief, Manicheans were dualists who believed that the material world was evil while the spiritual world was good. A person's good soul was trapped in an evil body. Pelagians believed that humans could achieve perfection, however it might be defined, through the strength of their own will power. People can will themselves to be perfect. These are old heresies they keep reappearing from time to time, for they are stubborn and seductive ideas that will not go away, as is apparent in the posthuman story. Post-humanism echoes a Manichean disdain of a corrupt, if not evil, material body from which a person (or more accurately the non-material information constituting a person) must be rescued. Yet, unlike their predecessors the solution is not found in the release of death, but in denying death by overcoming the mortal limits of the body. There is also the Pelagian reiteration of the ability of humans to will themselves to perfection. The posthuman personifies the desire of the will to become the perfect being that it wills itself to be: the optimal person.

What is worrying for Christianity is not that these old heresies have found a new voice in posthumanism, but the disquieting moral beliefs accompanying them. The Manichean cannot resist hating the body, for it is a prison incarcerating the optimal person. The resulting aggravation, however, is not limited to self-loathing, but is extended to a latent contempt of embodiment in general. If the body is merely a prison or poor prosthesis of the will, then it is easier to justify physical neglect and abuse. The Pelagian quest for perfection ultimately cannot tolerate the imperfect. Regardless how perfection might be defined—a perfect body, mind, or will, for example—that which remains imperfect or lacks the capability of being perfected should be eliminated or prevented. Alarmingly, Pelagians of every age often appeal to medical rhetoric to achieve the perfection they

envision.[18] Is it not for the sake of public hygiene that eugenic programs seek to sanitize the race and prevent the birth of those who would infect it? If the posthuman exemplifies the triumph of the will, then there is an accompanying and inescapable logic of the necessity of eliminating or preventing that which is judged to stand in the way of its final and perfect culmination.

These criticisms do not suggest that posthumanists endorse cruelty and intolerance. Rather, old heresies in new garb serve as reminders that good intentions alone cannot prevent unintended consequences that are, nevertheless, evil. The problem with heresy is not that it deliberately advocates what is wrong, but that it elevates half-truths into the whole truth, thereby distorting the good it is purportedly seeking to achieve. Following Arendt, it is, more often than not, thoughtlessness instead of malice that results in evil acts.[19] In rebutting these heresies, Christian theology has appealed to the goodness of the body, and more particularly to the good of embodiment. The particular challenge in response to posthumanism, therefore, is not to remain human, but to remain creaturely, which by definition is to be finite and mortal, and therefore inescapably embodied. It is in and through our bodies that we give and receive life, and in and through our bodies that we are in fellowship with one another and with our Creator.

This affirmation of embodiment is derived from the doctrine of the Incarnation. Through the incarnation, God vindicates and redeems creation from its futility, thereby conquering death as witnessed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the empty tomb that most starkly differentiates Christian eschatology from its posthuman counterpart. The soul is not rescued from the body, but rather it is as an embodied creature that one is redeemed by God. The doctrine of Christ's bodily resurrection, therefore, should not be casually discarded as a relic of a credulous age, for it serves as a powerful reminder that the body is God's good gift and not something to be despised. Christians affirm the *credo* that the resurrection of the body is part of their destiny of eternal fellowship with the triune God. For Christians, death is a real fate, but it is neither to be feared nor loved, for in Christ death has already been overcome and redeemed within eternity. Consequently, what separates Christian from posthuman eschatology is that the latter seeks immortality while the former awaits eternity. Transformation does not consist of greatly extended longevity culminating

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[18] See John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

[19] See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

in virtual immortality, but a temporal finitude and mortality that has already been transcended by eternity. It is the finitude and mortality of being human that is affirmed by the incarnation; it is not a condition from which creatures need rescuing but the condition in which finite and mortal creatures are saved. To denigrate the body is thoughtlessly to deny the very grace that sustains, vindicates, and redeems the human condition. It is the Word made flesh, and not flesh reduced to data, that is ultimately salvific.

Ironically, in their quest for extreme longevity and immortality, posthumanists become fixated upon mortality, and it is a perilous, if not deadly, fixation. Borrowing from Arendt, birth and death are the two definitive conditions demarcating the human condition.[20] It is pursuing life rather than avoiding death, however, that should provide the principal metaphor for ordering human life and lives. What Arndt calls "natality" ensures a generational continuity over time, while also encapsulating the possibility for change and improvement. Each new birth embodies simultaneously a continuous line of memory and anticipation, a self-giving which creates a recipient who is both like and yet unlike the giver. The gift of every parent is also the unique possibility of each child. Although death is not something to be embraced lovingly, mortality is not humankind's great curse. When death is perceived as nothing more than a cruel fate, natality is robbed of its power to renew and regenerate. To be fixated on mortality is to promote a social and political order that attempts to cheat that fate for as long as possible. Survival becomes *the* consuming desire that in turn corrupts all other values and considerations. The birth of a child holds no hope or promise, but serves only as a reminder of a mortal fate to be despised and despaired. Consequently, replication—as opposed to procreation—becomes the tyrannous rationale of personal survival pervading all resulting relationships and associations.

It is telling that posthumanists have little to say substantively about natality and mortality. At best, mortality becomes an *is* from which the *ought* of its negation is derived. Yet the ensuing imperative can only be achieved by relentlessly seeking the destruction of the finite and mortal qualities that makes its formulation possible. Is the surgical removal of humankind's creaturely status really the only advice posthumanists have to offer in the face of death? If so, then the underlying survivalist ethic becomes more explicable, helping to account for an equally vacuous understanding of natality. More often than not, posthumanists simply

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[20] See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7–11.

ignore any intergenerational questions in order to concentrate on the more pressing question of extending personal longevity.

This lack of serious engagement with the religious, moral, and political significance of natality amplifies a morbid fascination with mortality. If the only meaningful way to contend against the old enemy of death is to survive for as long as possible, then it is absurd to contemplate any normative tasks of social and political ordering. There are simply no institutions or structures requiring continuity and renewal, for the future is merely a self-absorbing extension of the present. Yet to ignore or denigrate the significance of natality is to reject the underlying unity and equality that both binds and liberates generations over time. To displace this with survivalist engineering is to succumb to the tyranny of the present over the future; of the creator over the artifact, for the latter can never be genuinely free from the originating intentions of the former; the *made* cannot share fully the equal fellowship of the *begotten*.[21] Ironically, in attempting to transform oneself into a superior being, the resulting posthuman becomes enslaved to itself as a self-constructed artifact, a semblance of a semblance.

IV. Conclusion

Posthumanism is an idolatrous religion proffering a counterfeit salvation. It is counterfeit because of the inability to see finitude and mortality as nothing more than unfortunate constraints upon the will to be conquered and discarded. But the cost this victory would require is the elimination of the very creatures that need to be saved. One has to destroy humankind in order to save human beings. Despite all the survival and immortality rhetoric, at its core posthumanism is a religion predicated upon a death wish. And even if none of the envisioned technological developments come true, it remains a dangerous idea, for it exemplifies and amplifies the nihilistic ontology of late modernity in which creation and its creatures are subjected to an endless and violent process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. Posthumanism is a dangerous idea not because of its futuristic orientation, but because its rhetoric is hyperbolic commentary on our present circumstances. What happens to the moral and religious imagination when posthumans view embodiment as an enemy to be despised and warred against rather than a definitive feature of a creature bearing the image and likeness of God?

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[21] This distinction between making and begetting and the resulting inequality between the maker and the made as opposed to the underlying equality of the begetter and the begotten is derived from Oliver O'Donovan's moral and theological analysis of reproductive technology. See *Begotten or Made?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

I fear that something akin to posthuman rhetoric is coming to dominate the discourse of the public square. This is seen, for instance, in the ease with which the human body, and particularly prenatal life, is coming to be regarded as biological commodities to be used and exploited at will. In opposition, Christians must assert the good of embodiment and defend the status of humans as creatures created in the image and likeness of their Creator. This will not be an easy sell, but then again, when has truth ever been something easy to proclaim or easily embraced?