



AI, TRANSHUMANISM, AND DIGNITY

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WORLDVIEWS:

COMPARING the Faith

BIOETHICS:

APPLYING the Faith

APOLOGETICS:

DEFENDING the Faith

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**PHILOSOPHY
PROGRAM**



OVERVIEW

- 1. Human Dignity
- 2. Artificial Dignity?
- 3. Transhumanism: A Path to Greater Dignity?
- 4. Defending Humanity against That Hideous Strength

1. HUMAN DIGNITY

- The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) speaks of our

“inherent dignity”

and

“the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.”

HUMAN RIGHTS

- **Inherent:**
 - someone has a human right just in virtue of being human
- **Equal:**
 - human rights do not come in degrees
- **Universal:**
 - all humans have them; they are not dependent on social class, mental or physical capacity, usefulness to society, etc
- **Inalienable:**
 - they cannot be suspended by other people or circumstances

A PROBLEM OF JUSTIFICATION

- If all human beings have high and equal dignity and rights, this cannot be based on natural characteristics
- E.g. consciousness, reasoning, moral sensitivity
- They all come in degrees
- Some humans do not have them at all

GOD BESTOWS DIGNITY

- **All** human beings are made in the image of God
- Despite the loss of original righteousness, this is a continuing basis for special worth
 - **After the fall, humans were permitted to kill and eat animals, but not each other! (Genesis 9:6)**
 - **To curse one made in the image of God profoundly disrespects the creator (James 3:9-10)**

JUSTIFYING HUMAN RIGHTS

- Humans are **specialy** made in the image of God
- They are entitled to all those rights necessary to carry out their **vocations as stewards**
- These rights are:
 - **Inherent** God specially **made** us in His image
 - **Equal** They do not depend on our natural capacities
 - **Universal** **All** humans have them
 - **Inalienable** No human can take them away

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT US?

- We are made in God's **triune** image
- Within the Godhead, there are eternal self-giving, loving relations between the three persons of the Trinity
- God made us the kind of being that is capable of **imitating** the divine life, and of **incorporation** with it



I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15: 5)

GOD REAFFIRMS HUMAN DIGNITY

- God became man
- Henceforth, the person of Christ is an eternal union of the divine and human nature
- God did not become any other living creature
- God did not become any human artifact

2. ARTIFICIAL DIGNITY?

- **Materialism:**

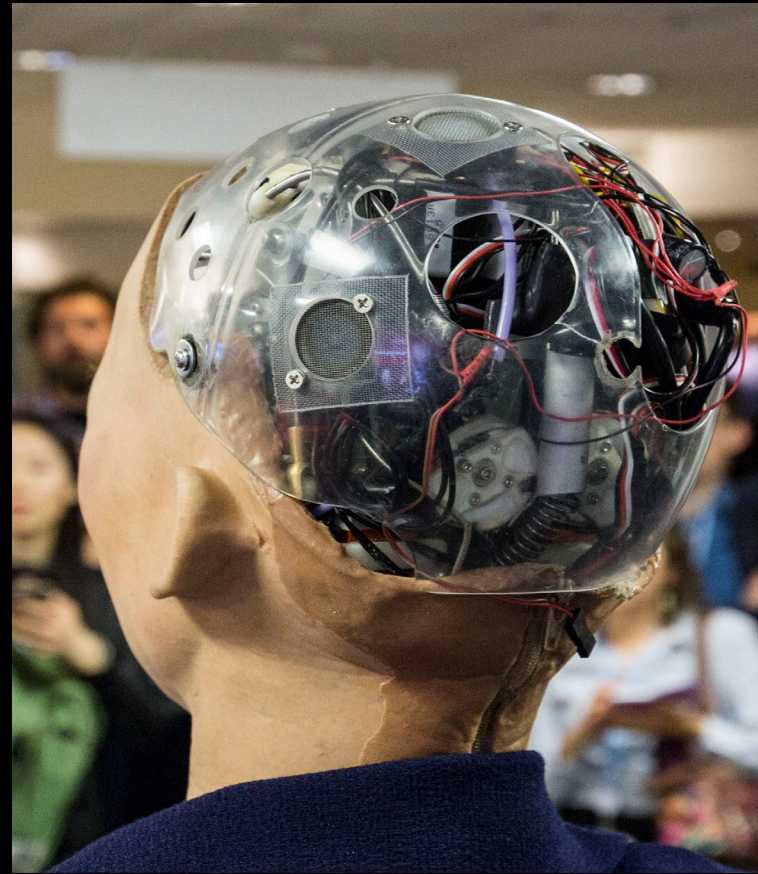
a human being is a collection of “features”

- **Utilitarianism:**

what matters is what something can **do**, not what it **is**

- If artifacts can match (or surpass) human abilities, do they deserve dignity as well?

THE ROBOT SOPHIA



A “SOCIAL ROBOT”

- Sophia was developed by Hanson Robotics (Hong Kong) in 2016
- “She” is a social robot who can mimic human social behavior
 - Has computer vision, face tracking, emotion recognition, and speech synthesis
 - Interviewed frequently
 - Capable of simple conversations, sometimes coherent, sometimes nonsense
- In 2017, Saudi Arabia granted Sophia citizenship
- Sophia is programmed with stock replies to human questions, but also analyzes speech to improve its responses (a “Chatbot with a face”)

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

- If Sophia has “artificial dignity”:
 - Would harming Sophia be a crime against Sophia, not just its designers and owners?
 - Would Sophia have special rights (e.g. right to “life”, right to vote, freedom of speech, freedom of conscience)?
- If a robot could match or exceed human abilities, would its dignity be equal to, or greater than, human dignity?

3. TRANSHUMANISM: A PATH TO GREATER DIGNITY?

- **Transhumanism** “is a movement that advocates for the use of technology to enhance the abilities of the human mind and body. The goal of transhumanists is to transcend our natural bodily limitations, extend our lifespans and ultimately achieve immortality. **Some view transhumanism as the next logical step in evolution, leading to the creation of a posthuman society.**”
- <https://builtin.com/artificial-intelligence/transhumanism>

TECHNOLOGY AND HUMANITY

- For centuries, we have used technology to make life easier and work more efficient
- More recently, we have used it to repair, assist, or replace damaged organs and limbs
 - Artificial hips
 - Synthetic heart valves
 - Pacemakers
 - Prosthetic limbs
 - Cochlear implants
 - In process: implants to restore some form of vision to the blind

ENHANCING BIOLOGY

- Hearing ultrasonic sound
 - Ville Pulkki, Leo McCormack, and Raimundo Gonzalez, "Superhuman spatial hearing technology for ultrasonic frequencies," *Scientific Reports* 11 (2021): 11608.
- Infrared vision (not goggles, neural implants)
 - <https://www.intelligentliving.co/bionic-eyes-thermal-infrared-vision-development/>
- Memory Expansion and Brain Enhancements
 - Elon Musk: direct connection between the brain and the internet?
- Brain-bridging (two heads are better than one?)
 - Shared experiences, amalgamated minds?
 - Christof Koch, *The Feeling of Life Itself* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 108-9.

MAN TRANSCENDING MAN?

“The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity.”

--Sir Julian Huxley, “Transhumanism,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (1968) Volume 8, no. 1, 76.

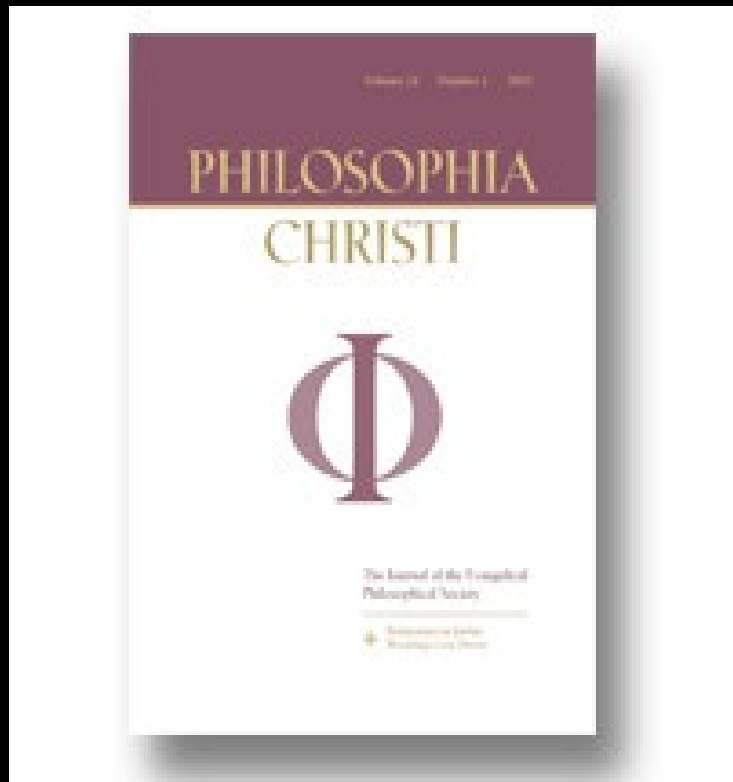
4. DEFENDING HUMANITY AGAINST THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH

- Using technology to restore functionality of senses and limbs is typically a morally permissible form of medical intervention, though implants may pose risks
- Enhancing the senses or powers of human beings may have advantages (e.g. improved safety, communication), but also has dangers (e.g. violation of privacy, espionage)
- But could technology produce “posthuman” beings with greater dignity than unenhanced human beings?

AN ASSUMED PHYSICALISM

- Post-humanists assume physicalism: that every aspect of a human being reduces to, or emerges, from the physical.
- However, physicalism is implausible:
 - The hard problem of consciousness
 - The unity of consciousness
 - Intentionality
 - Personal identity
 - Reasoning

THE ILLUSIONS OF TECHNO-ANTHROPOLOGY



Angus J. L. Menuge, "The Illusions of Techno-Anthropology," *Philosophia Christi* 24, no 1 (2022): 85-100.

POST-HUMANITY: A CONFUSED IDEA

- “Post-humanity” rests on serious philosophical confusions:
 - A. Essence vs. Function
 - B. Organism vs. Technology
 - C. The Myth of Self-Creation

A. ESSENCE VS. FUNCTION

- The identity of a kind of being is grounded in its essence
- An acorn grows into an oak tree
- This is development of the same essence (oak)
- The acorn does not become a different *kind* of being, even though the tree has new functions, like producing leaves, that the acorn does not have

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

- A zygote develops into a fetus, an infant, a child, and an adult
- The adult has functional abilities (reasoning, talking, making moral judgments) that the zygote lacks
- But the adult is the same (human) kind of being

INHERENT WORTH IS BASED ON THE KIND OF BEING

- If human beings have inherent worth, it must be based on the kind of being they are, not on what they can do
- Functional abilities vary and some lack them altogether
- Inherent worth does not come in degrees and cannot be absent

FUNCTIONS ONLY CONFER INSTRUMENTAL VALUE

- If a soldier is given “bionic” vision, he may be more valuable to the military (greater instrumental value)
- But the soldier does not become a different kind of being
- The technology does not change the human essence of the soldier; it merely enhances function
- The soldier’s inherent value does not change

B. ORGANISM VS. TECHNOLOGY

- There is a conflation of organism with technology
- Technology develops through **external** agency e.g. a car or a computer is assembled by others (they do not self-assemble)
- Organisms develop through the unfolding of their **internal** essence
- Organisms are alive
- Technology is not, even if it is integrated into a living organism

C. THE MYTH OF SELF-CREATION

- Post-humanists claim that human beings can create a new, improved post-human kind of being
- But adding functional powers to human beings does not change their essence
- They do not become new kinds of beings

THE GOD DELUSION

- Sinful man has the delusion that he is like God, a being with **primary** creative power
- But man does not bring himself into existence
- To do that, he would have to precede his own existence!
- Nor can he make himself a new kind of being

EX NIHILO NIHIL FIT

- Suppose I have essence E1, but would like a better one, E2
- If E2 has new qualities, lacked by E1, then where do these qualities come from?
- They do not derive from my essence E1, and all I can do is alter the functionality of E1
- We are asking for something from nothing

THE DANGERS OF TRANSHUMANISM

- Human rights are undermined
- Functional abilities come in degrees; not all humans have them
- Enhanced humans will have more rights than the unenhanced

A NEW APARTHEID

- As we view animals as experimental subjects and food, will enhanced human beings view the unenhanced as expendable resources?
- Where does it end? **Humans 2.0, 3.0,.....**
- A new caste system, in which unenhanced humans become the “crushed,” the “sub-human animals”?

A THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF TRANSHUMANISM

- The builders of the Tower of Babel despised the word by which God created and set out to make a “name” for themselves (Gen. 11:4), trusting in their own word
- Transhumanism is a form of **idolatry**: falling in love with the works of our own hands (technology), we think we can use it to make ourselves a new kind of being, as if we were primary creators, not sub-creators
- The creature cannot be his own creator!

THE CHURCH'S ROLE

- Society's conscience
 - “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)
 - “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves” (Proverbs 31:8)
- A place of refuge
 - “But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may exult in you.” (Psalm 5:11)
- A beacon of hope
 - No-one is worthless for whom Christ died!

OUR PRECIOUS CARGO

“There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat...

To please God...to be a real ingredient in the Divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain”

--C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory”