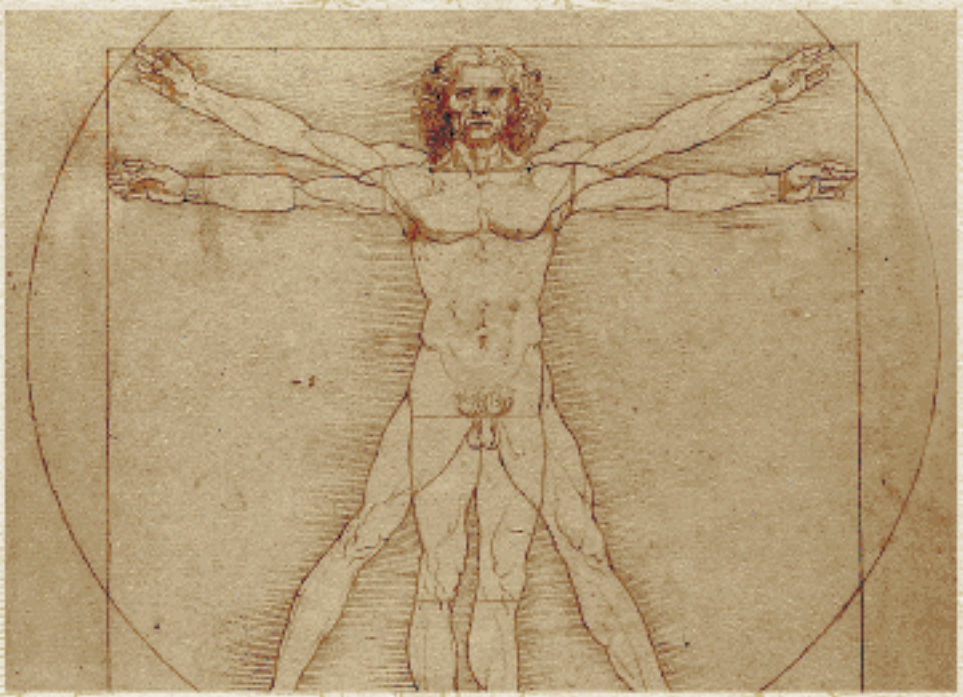
CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL ETHICS
7

Being Human in a Technological Age: Rethinking Theological Anthropology

EDITED BY
Steven C. van den Heuvel



PEETERS

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Building a Posthuman Artificial Paradise: Christian Theology in Interaction with Futuristic Expectations of Technology

RAYMOND R. HAUSOUL

Abstract

Unprecedented developments in artificial intelligence (AI) characterize our time. This chapter aims to bring the futuristic expectations of the post- and transhuman world into dialogue with Christian eschatology and anthropology. The choice of a positive-critical interaction between Christian theology and the techno-futurism of Moravec and Kurzweil is obvious, given the fact that AI already has various fields of development. After a brief presentation of both authors, we will examine to what extent their expectations concerning AI and post- and transhumanism are interpreted and guided by philosophical-theological aspects. Consideration will also be given to what degree Christian theology can be enriched and challenged by their technological visions. Doing so, this chapter will focus on the themes of (1) imperishability, inertia, and death, (2) on fragmentation and the dualism of the material and immaterial, and (3) on the transformation of human life.

Introduction: Infotech, Biotech, AI-Tech

Today we are witnessing growing progress in information and biotechnology. The variety of applications of artificial intelligence (AI) is astonishing.[1] During the twentieth century, when research on AI originated, the emphasis was on programming computers intelligently enabling them to transcend human intelligence in a self-learning way.[2] This would

1. It is important to identify the diversity in AI. Pedro Domingos identifies five forms of current "AI-tribes": symbolists, connectionists, evolutionaries, Bayesians and analogizers. Pedro Domingos, *The Master Algorithm: How the Quest for the Ultimate Learning Machine Will Remake Our World* (New York: Basic Books, 2018). See for an overview of project developments Seth Baum, "A Survey of Artificial General Intelligence Projects for Ethics, Risk, and Policy," *Global Catastrophic Risk Institute Working Paper 17-1* (2017).

2. Daniel Crevier, *AI: The Tumultuous History of the Search for Artificial Intelligence* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

usher in a new era of greater freedom and bring about an interaction between humans and machines.

It is well-known today what the first results of AI developments were. In 1997 the chess computer *Deep Blue* won against the chess champion Garri Kasparov. Others followed.[3] In 2017, *AlphaZero* defeated the open-source chess program *Stockfish 8*. In contrast to *Stockfish 8,* which had gathered ten years of chess experience, the brand new *AlphaZero* did not have any chess strategy. The developed AI algorithm gathered information on how to play chess in four hours. Based on this, *AlphaZero* defeated *Stockfish 8*. For people unfamiliar with the source-code of *AlphaZero* these results were unprecedented and ingenious.

Another result of AI can be found in the development of cars. Where drivers are distracted by smartphones, traffic violations, fatigue or drugs, self-propelled cars are not affected by any of this. Because they are connected to one algorithm, it is possible to drive protected from the human carelessness just mentioned. This innovation also delivers multiple benefits in terms of fuel consumption, avoiding traffic jams and other traffic inconveniences.[4]

Besides these examples, there are also popular AI applications, such as *Netflix*, *Spotify*, *Amazon,* and *Facebook*, that are useful to find the films, music, books, or other things that we are looking for. These developments show that AI is an integral part of our future.

Aim of this Contribution

Both Christian theology and technology aim to have a positive impact on our daily life. This offers the opportunity to interact with the eschatological perspectives of both in a critical manner. In this chapter, this will be done in the light of the futuristic perspectives presented by Moravec and Kurzweil. We will examine to what extent their technological expectations concerning AI can be interpreted and guided by philosophical-theological aspects. Also, the question is asked to what extent Christian theology can be enriched and challenged by their technological visions. We will specifically focus on the theme of human limitations, mortality, and transformation.

3. Monty Newborn, *Beyond Deep Blue* (London: Springer, 2014).

4. Lawrence D. Burns and Christopher Shulgan, *Autonomy: The Quest to Build the Driverless Car—and How It Will Reshape Our World* (New York: Ecco, 2018).