

6 Technology, Transhumanism, AI, & the End of Humanity

I-Thou vs. I-It relationships.

Discuss:

Come up with five effects that technology has had on your life for good or for bad.

What are some questions we should always ask when facing new technology?

Bioethical Issues

Dealing with Beginnings

Designer Babies?

- Through a new technology, gene editing is now being carried out. The process is called Crispr-Cas9 which enables scientists to snip out defective genes and replace them with corrected ones.
- Surrogacy
- Advances in fertility industry
- IVF - In-vitro fertilization
- No longer reproduction, but now reconstruction.
- Organ snatching

Cloning

- Ever since Dolly the sheep was successfully cloned back in the 1990s, the limits and ethics of cloning have been in the news. With the ability to harvest stem cells from human embryos, the subject of cloning has been on the radar. Same with what is called *therapeutic cloning* which was coined to describe the creation of one's identical twin *for the purpose of organ harvesting*.
- Or there is the idea of *pro-creative cloning* which is a procedure in which an identical twin is produced in the lab and implanted in a surrogate's womb with the intention of creating someone's identical twin.

Dealing with Endings

- MAiD - Questions of our autonomy and the right to die in Canada

Ethical questions

- When is it treatment? When is it enhancement?

- Make artificial limbs that are better than the original (360 degree hands)
- Many medical technologies and biotechnologies have dual uses - they can treat disease and clear medical and psychiatric conditions and they can enhance normal traits. What is treatment and what is enhancement? Where can lines be drawn?
- Artificial Intelligence

What are some of the ideas behind these ways of thinking?

Medicine & Bioethics¹

Discuss: What are the particular ways that you approach medicine and health-care that are specifically shaped by your faith? Think about an atheist and her approach to medicine and healthcare. In practical ways, how do you differ from her in your approach to medicine?

If ethics gets separated from the gospel, it will become legalism. We need to look at ethics in light of the Gospel.

Questions we need to ask:

- What do you gain and what do you lose?
- What are the limits and purposes of these new technologies we are experiencing in the world today?
- What does it mean to be human?
- What does it mean to be protected? Who are the “vulnerable”?
- How shall technology be used when it is applied to human life?
- And how do we respond to new technologies? What kind of posture we can take. Huddle? Apathy? Protest? Participate?
- What is the relationship between Christianity and medicine?
- What is the purpose of medicine?

Dealing with Beginnings

Bioethics is where theology should be having a lot to say about life, its beginnings and ends. It is about the manipulation of life. Buying, selling, borrowing, testing and changing human life.

It is not whether or not you are using technology, but whether or not you allow technology to shape who you are or your offspring.

Dealing with Endings

technological imperative

- Why don't we talk about our age?

¹ Drawn from lecture by Dr. Jennie McLaurin entitled *Meaning and Medicine - Critical Issues in the area of Bioethics* (Vancouver: Regent Audio, 2010).

- What about Cosmetic surgery? Bioethical issue. What does it mean to age? What does it mean to accept limits? Costs?
- When is death?
- When does death actually occur?
- When do we lose the image of God?
- When are we no longer human?
- Euthanasia - "good death"? And yet, we know that death doesn't have dignity, people do.
- On what basis do we ascribe value to life?

It is incredible how medicine does not see mortality as an intrinsic part to what it means to be human.

As Christians, how do you see death? Do we see death as part of our earthly design or something that really shouldn't happen.

Medicine as a Secular Power

Where do we find a place for religion?

- In its "utility" - how useful is it?
- Comforting one in bereavement
- Prayer as a tool to be used to achieve an end.
- Intrinsic meaning of what it means to be human, what it means to be sick, what it means to die have been lost.

To summarize: Medicine today is secular, is a commodity, very centred on the autonomous self, technology driven, private, choice is exalted, and telos is happiness, immediacy

Science, Technology, and the way we speak

1. The way we speak - words

2. The way we relate -sex

- *Discuss: How does e-harmony or "Plenty of Fish" reflect the influence of technology on society?*

"It is this break of the covenant between word and world which constitutes one of the very few genuine revolutions of spirit in Western history and which defines modernity itself."

George Steiner

Biological Determinism and Reductionism

What does it mean to be “me”?

- To explore who am I in the light of scientific discovery about the brain
- To explore the importance of rejecting reductionism. We are not simply a product of our genes and cannot be reduced to a collection of neurones
- To explore the limits of our ability to make moral choices
- To explore the need to think carefully about new technologies

Transhumanism - a means of escape?

Growing focus on slowing down the aging process. Why? Death is increasingly seen as a fatal disease that needs to be eradicated. The ideal, for many who call themselves “transhumanists” is to slow the aging process to the point where there no longer is a stopping point in a “life.” Is it a quest for eternal life? Is it a desire for endless youth?

The goal for many transhumanists is to escape the limitations of the human body. A desire to be located nowhere and everywhere - to be immaterial. If who “I” am is the behaviour of nerve cells and brain activity, then we can transfer this into a computer program and your “self” would be captured in this.



The Dangers of “Nothing-buttery”

Reductionism tells us that the mind, free will and consciousness do not really exist. We are determined by our body and brains alone. Some people even claim that neuroscience has shown that:

- What we do and who we are is determined entirely by our biological makeup
- Even my religious experience is shaped by my normal workings of the brain. Spiritual experience has no reality outside our brains. God didn't make us, but our brains made God.

Discuss:

If spiritual experiences are accompanied by activity in certain parts of the brain, does that mean that spiritual experience is meaningless, and God is not involved?

We need to ask whether we should be surprised to learn that something happens in our brain when we worship? Spiritual experience is REAL and so there should be something going on in my brain. But the problem comes when we confront scientific reductionism which argues that ALL that is going on during a so-called religious experience is only in my brain. Remember to be wary of any argument that uses the words "nothing but."

Does our biology determine our behaviour?

Think of the example of a camera. What is a camera? For one, it is a bunch of metal and electronics - sure, but is that all it is? There is so much more than the metal that goes into it. To say it is JUST metal or NOTHING BUT such and such is really an impoverished statement. What about purpose and design? How important are the purpose, design, the way it functions in determining just what exactly is a camera.

Who is the YOU? Is it your brain?

What about the efforts we make to change our brain like education?

Things we do shape our brains.

So, it isn't JUST our brain that makes me me.

There is a link between the brain and the mind.

The idea of MIND gives us much of our sense of purpose. But what if there is no MIND? And if there is a MIND, how does it fit.

EMERGENCE: The MIND emerges from the complexity of the human brain. Self-consciousness

What about Cloning?

Genetic technology and enhancing or reproducing ourselves. We become the creator. We shape life in the image of ourselves.

But is this really us?

Discuss: Why do you think someone might want to artificially "clone" a person? Can you anticipate some of the consequences of cloning this child? How might it affect the resulting clone, their family, and the rest of society?

A clone would differ from the original because we are not just our DNA. How would you view a clone? A soulless robot? If they were born, would they be a human being?

We are more than computers made of meat. John Polkinghorne.

What about AI?

What do we mean by “artificial intelligence”?

The Rise of Generative AI and LLMs (Large Language Models)

"the development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race."

Stephen Hawking

What are the implications of AI for Christians?

- 1. We need to care about trust and integrity deeply**
- 2. Know what we gain and what we lose with technology**
- 3. We need to understand biblical morality clearly**
- 4. Understand that the pursuit of AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) is actually us playing God**
- 5. We need to understand the Christian vision of human flourishing**
- 6. We need to cherish human, embodied relationships**
- 7. We Do Not Need to Be Afraid**

A Christian Response:

We need to rediscover the Doctrine of the Trinity

We need to recover the doctrine of the Incarnation

We need to speak in dialogue rather than using our words as a tool.

Be located in the Biblical Story (dislocation)

Accept our Givenness (invention)

Jesus' "I AM" is the basis for knowing who "I am." (fluidity)

Recovering the Public Square (Constraint)

We need to have our imagination recaptured

We need to recover the Givenness and the Revelation of the world

We need to re-affirm the goodness and the meaning of marriage

We need to re-affirm and engage in Christian friendship [more than a slap on the back and accountability questions]

- mentoring

Discuss:

- *What are some ways that technology be harnessed to glorify God?*
- *How does technology help or hinder prayer?*
- *What are some practical things you can change in your life to live more fully?*

Next Week: MAiD in Canada with Dr. Kevin Sclater