

ZARATHUSTRA, TRANSHUMANISM AND THE HOMO GUBERNATOR  
By Levi Checketts

Friedrich Nietzsche's "Zarathustra" commands "Become what you are."<sup>1</sup> Like much of what Nietzsche writes, this command is both more profound and more plain than moral demands offered by other philosophies. Not one to favor the "decadence" or "realism" of other moral systems (including Kantian and Christian), Nietzsche opted for the plain and simple but deep; the command is direct, but is nonetheless a true challenge. Nietzsche envisions himself in his writings "philosophizing with a hammer," destroying old idols, making way for the *Übermensch* to arrive—the one who has the genuine will to overcome where others have failed, to face the abyss of truth unflinchingly.

Martin Luther King, Jr. notes that in his studies at Crozer Seminary, he found himself thrown into question and doubt when he read Nietzsche.<sup>2</sup> I have often found myself in a similar position: Nietzsche writes with an honesty, a clarity of vision, and a seeming good faith that makes him hard to ignore. And yet, Nietzsche's vision is biting and uncomfortable for modern ethicists. Is the will to power truly the best option? Can we ignore the will to power? I will not solve this now, but let us leave the Hammer as a hammer and let him provide a contextual check for what follows in my discussion of transhumanism. Nietzsche will be our Virgil, guiding our journey as we descend into transhuman visions of the future and their opponents' responses.

The outline of my paper follows three of Nietzsche's key insights: the falsity of old constructions of the world, the challenge of overcoming ourselves, and the "weak morality" of

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Thomas Common, Amazon Kindle e-book ed. (Houston: Everlasting Flames Publishing, 2010), Chapter LXI. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Thomas Common, Amazon Kindle e-book ed. (Houston: Everlasting Flames Publishing, 2010), 270, 335.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 96.

Christianity. I begin by exploring and exploding some of the current discussions surrounding transhumanism. Following this, I argue that the idea of self-evolution is justified and justifiable, at least from phenomenological and historical standpoints. Finally, I contend that within this vision of self-evolution, we need the principles of Christian “slave morality” to guide us. My vision of this project is what I have termed “*Homo gubernator*,” i.e., humanity as pilot plotting a course into the future.

*The Twilight of the Idols (Ragnarok)*

“‘Why so hard?’ the charcoal once said to the diamond; ‘for are we not close relations?’”<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche demands his reader to maintain rectitude of mind and clarity of vision. One must “be hard” as a hammer is against hollow idols.<sup>4</sup> He therefore rejects old models of philosophy, complaining that “the real world”—or the philosophically constructed world—has replaced the “apparent world” and both have become a lie.<sup>5</sup> Philosophers, in their lust for reason and rationality, have supposed that logical explanations of the world around them are in fact true explanations, though these ignore the apparent or obvious explanations in place. This is, of course, the risk involved in any theological or philosophical project, but it is one we ought to be aware of; carefully constructed world systems may be nothing more than carefully constructed houses of cards.

The debate surrounding transhumanism can be reduced, without caricature, to a debate on worldview. Gregory Stock argues the disagreement between transhumanists and their opponents

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<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Hammer Speaks,” in *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 122.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, “Foreword,” 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, “How the ‘Real World’ at last Became a Myth,” 50-51.

is “about philosophy and religion. It is about what it means to be human, about our vision of the human future.”<sup>6</sup> The primary arguments put forth by transhumanists or their opponents articulate a certain understanding of what the human is, what our place in the world is, and what is morally permissible for us to do or not do. Very rarely is the “you can’t do that” of anti-transhumanists a claim about the infeasibility of technology; more often it is a claim about the incommensurability of human existence and certain technological projects, or transgression of moral boundaries. It is thus important to pay careful attention to the way different agonists in this debate construct their worldview and to inquire whether or not they have built anything other than fetching idols.

Allow me to start with the easy target—the transhumanists (not easy because of the weakness of their position, but because of the sheer number of works written against them). When Don Ihde, Ted Peters and Andrew Pickering, three scholars well-known in their respective fields (i.e. postphenomenology, science and religion, and STS), expressed their own disagreement with transhumanist philosophies, Max More, Russell Blackford and Michael LaTorra (three important transhumanists) replied with what amounts to “that may be true for some, but not all, transhumanists.”<sup>7</sup> Ensuring that one has truly understood *the* transhumanist project is impossible, because, as James Hughes notes, there are at least five central transhumanist visions, ranging from quasi-religious, to social-democratic, to radical libertarian views.<sup>8</sup> In spite of these differences, we can still articulate a set of common beliefs among the transhumanists. According to Max More, transhumanism is a set of philosophies which espouse

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<sup>6</sup> Gregory Stock, “The Battle for the Future,” in *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 303.

<sup>7</sup> See: Gregory R. Hansell and William Grassie, eds., *H±: Transhumanism and Its Critics* (Philadelphia: Metanexus, 2011), 123-210.

<sup>8</sup> James Hughes, “The Politics of Transhumanism and the Techno-Millennial Imagination, 1626-2030,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 47, No. 4 (December 2012), 758.

Enlightenment-era rationality, seek the betterment of humanity (often through science and technology), and promote the self-directed evolution of the species.<sup>9</sup> More's description is not itself overly controversial—indeed, he suggests this is nothing less than Francis Bacon's vision for humanity interpreted through Darwinism. The controversy arises when other writers (or even More himself) express their vision of what the direction of this evolution is and which technologies and sciences will be used to accomplish this aim.

Several transhumanists support “morphological freedom” accomplished through convergent technologies.<sup>10</sup> As the term suggests, morphological freedom means the ability to alter or augment oneself, including body modifications, cybernetic implants, genetic manipulation, or the dramatic prospect of uploading one's consciousness into a computer (sometimes misleadingly referred to as “digital immortality”). This is best accomplished through converging technologies, including nanotechnologies, biotech, robotics, and information and communications technologies (NBRICT).<sup>11</sup> Brought together, NBRICT allows for dramatic augmentation and self-directed change, such as nanobots altering the body on a cellular level, the complete mapping of a brain, or the successful implantation of bionic limbs. In other words, numerous transhumanists believe that humanity is a sandbox which we have now (or soon will have) the ability to manipulate at will. What constructions we make, whether the standard

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<sup>9</sup> Max More, “The Philosophy of Transhumanism,” in *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 3-17.

<sup>10</sup> William Sims Bainbridge, “Converging Technologies,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Technology*, ed. Jan Kyrre Berg Olsen, Stig Andur Pedersen and Vincent F. Hendricks (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 508.

<sup>11</sup> NB: “converging technologies” also take on other initialnoms across the literature including NBIC (Nanotech, Biotech, Information and Communications technology) or GNR (Genetics, Nanotech, Robotics).

“sandcastle” of biological humanity or more creative and inventive sand sculptures are only limited by our imaginations and moral compunctions.<sup>12</sup>

Transhumanists have legion opponents, whose challenges come from numerous philosophical positions. I have written elsewhere about the incommensurability of these positions.<sup>13</sup> I shall not revisit these arguments, rather, I shall lift up the one most fitting perspectives for my position as a Roman Catholic ethicist, namely the neo-Thomist natural law position. Thomas Aquinas, of course, never wrote anything on transhumanism, and not many Thomistic moral theologians have either. Of those who have, a surprising number are willing to allow certain transhumanist goals within a natural law framework.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, it is probably Celia Deane-Drummond’s approach to the question, which acknowledges human biological development but denies the moral appropriateness of “taking leave of the animal” that is perhaps most indicative of Roman Catholic attitudes toward the transhumanist ideas.<sup>15</sup> A central theme in Thomistic moral theory is the principle of morally good natural ends, a theme St. Thomas derives from Aristotle. Aquinas articulates three “orders of precepts of the natural law” which correspond to our natural modes of being. These are the following: first, that we are existent things and thus should seek to continue existing; second, that we are animals and thus should seek species propagation through reproduction; and third, that we are moral beings and thus

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<sup>12</sup> See: Max More, “A Letter to Mother Nature,” in *The Transhumanist Reader*, 449-450.

<sup>13</sup> Levi Checketts, “New Technologies—Old Anthropologies?” *Religions* 8, No. 4 (2017): 52.

<sup>14</sup> See: Brian Green, “Transhumanism and Catholic Natural Law: Changing Human Nature and Changing Moral Norms,” in *Religion and Transhumanism: The Unknown Future of Human Enhancement*, ed. Calvin Mercer and Tracy J. Trothen (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015) 201-216; Patrick D Hopkins, “Is Enhancement Worthy of Being a Right?” in *The Transhumanist Reader*, 345-354; and Gerald McKenny, “Transcendence, Technological Enhancement, and Christian Theology,” in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 184-187.

<sup>15</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond, “Taking Leave of the Animal? The Theological and Ethical Implications of the Transhuman Projects,” in *Transhumanism and Transcendence*, 125.

should seek both rationality including the wisdom of God and human sociality.<sup>16</sup> The Angelic Doctor's assessment in this case is based in Aristotelian biology, but some modern interpreters, such as Deane-Drummond or Jean Porter, have attempted to update this perspective with modern biology.<sup>17</sup> It would seem, as John Paul II noted in *Veritatis Splendor*, that natural science is an important informant for moral theology.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, as the late pontiff goes on to note, moral theology is not finally decided by science, and “moral principles are not dependent upon the historical moment in which they are discovered.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, Thomism has often engaged in making claims about what is morally right based on a certain perspective of human biology, regardless of whether contemporary science supports these claims. Catholic sexual teaching and bioethics are poignant cases of this. The most infamous case is that of *Humane Vitae* (soon celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary), in which Pope Paul VI claims that the natural end of human genitalia is procreation, and thus the non-procreative act of sexual intercourse is intrinsically immoral.<sup>20</sup> A similar case for bioethics is the moral injunction to avoid any forms of euthanasia (including passive), except in cases where care is considered burdensome or useless, in which case withdrawal of life-sustaining technology is accepted (i.e. passive euthanasia is allowed).<sup>21</sup> The “natural functioning” of the entity in question

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Black Friars, Amazon Kindle e-book ed. (Claremont, CA: Coyote Canyon Press, 2010), Prima Pars Secundae Partis Question 94 Article 2.

<sup>17</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond, “God’s Image and Likeness in Humans and Other Animals: Performative Soul-Making and Graced Nature,” *Zygon* 47, No. 4 (December 2012), 934-948; Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 287.

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 111.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>20</sup> Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1968), 11.

<sup>21</sup> US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2009), 30.

(e.g. a sex organ or a human organism) determines the morally right treatment of the entity (e.g. reproductive intercourse or continuation of life). One should notice that in this perspective, the organism *as it is* defines the moral limits of what is appropriate. By this standard, biotechnological projects which tamper with the human organic Gestalt, including human enhancement goals, genetic selection or embryonic stem cell research, are forbidden.<sup>22</sup>

Is transhumanism an idol? Does it withstand the hammer? In an ironic twist of source-material, Don Ihde contends that while transhumanists claim to be Baconian, they yet fall prey to four new “idols” like those Bacon condemned in *Novum Organum*. I shall only highlight his “idol of intelligent design” here. Ihde, as a philosopher trained in the school of phenomenology, notes that the transhumanists’ understanding of human embodiment is based primarily in a calculation-model understanding of how we relate to the world.<sup>23</sup> In this model, human beings operate like the T-800 in James Cameron’s *Terminator* movies: we analyze, process, calculate and translate our perceptions of the natural world, and we move about using precise calculations. Under this model, the adaptation of computer and robotics technologies to our bodies makes sense; we are, after all, nothing other than carbon-based, squishy machines. Indeed, some transhumanists refer to the brain as “wetware,” as opposed to the “hardware” of silicon-based digital computers. However, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s pioneering research on perception, and Hubert Dreyfus’s work on Artificial Intelligence demonstrate, the human way of Being-in-the-world is not reducible to the way our computers operate.<sup>24</sup> The idol of transhumanism, in other

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<sup>22</sup> The International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 86; Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Dignitas Personae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), 37, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Don Ihde, “Of Which Humanity Are We Post?” in *H±*, 128.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. See also: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012); Hubert L. Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can’t Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

words, consists in the fact that humanity has tried to build machines in our own image (as all strong AI research demonstrates), but we “now see in a mirror, darkly” and not yet “face to face”—we do not yet and have not ever had a full understanding of just what it is to be human. The transhumanist vision amounts to another philosophical vision, one that tries to pass off its philosophical anthropology as scientific fact, and one that has failed to take seriously the philosophical insights regarding human embodiment hard won over the past century.

Is Thomism an idol? It seems almost blasphemous to ask this question—after all, the “Dumb Ox” is the patron saint of theologians and philosophers! Jean-Luc Marion suggests an idol is an image which freezes the gaze rather than letting it project ever-outward toward the truth.<sup>25</sup> Within a Darwinian world, it is counter-factual to maintain a static image of human beings. Jean Porter and Celia Deane-Drummond, among others, attempt to bring natural law thinking up to date with modern biology, but they remain aberrations within a field where authors still maintain medieval tripartite understandings of the human soul, that is, the reason, the will and the passions as separate powers. Such views do not accommodate new discoveries of the mind found in contemporary psychology. Most importantly, Thomist perspectives understand humanity as a finished species; we may be *evolved*, but we are not *evolving*. For Thomists, our species-being is perfected (i.e. made complete) and thus our gaze must be frozen on the human *as it is*. As long as our moral perspective on humanity maintains that humans must remain a fixed organism, our perspective remains idolatrous. It is neither God nor nature that demands life remain frozen in place; it is our personal resistance to the realities of living in an expanding universe and an evolving world. Thus, as long as Thomism maintains natural telei based in self-contained organisms, it remains an idol and falls beneath the crushing hammer.

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<sup>25</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Without God: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 24.



Other views in the debate could be examined, and many would share the fate of these idols. The so-called bioconservatives, for example, exemplified by such thinkers as Leon Kass, Michael Sandel and Francis Fukuyama, hold a much more rigid physicalist position on the person than do Thomist natural lawyers. Heideggerians often lift up “being” as a central concept somehow threatened by technology. The list goes on, but in each case, thinkers involved tend to elevate one antiquated vision of the human as definitive, failing to take other knowledge into consideration and letting their gaze be frozen on an image that stands as a self-concept reflecting mirror and does not point beyond.<sup>26</sup> As we move beyond these statues, competing claims of what “is,” let us be careful to allow our vision to meander, to observe all that we can and to let humanity speak for itself.

*Will to Power—Become What You Are*

“Life IS precisely Will to Power,” Nietzsche contested.<sup>27</sup> In nature, survival amounts to struggle, conflict and asserting oneself over any threat that approaches. The Spencerian notion of “survival of the fittest” receives a baptism in Nietzsche’s vision: “the one who overcomes is the one who lives.” Thus, Kelly Clarkson’s Nietzschean anthem: “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.”<sup>28</sup> Humanity, i.e. *Homo sapiens*, dwells in the midst of Tennyson’s “nature, red in tooth and claw.” Life, struggle, overcoming and succumbing are the natural operations around us: this is nature’s truth. What does not adapt to an ever-changing world dies; the being that insists on

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (Stilwell, KS: Digireads.com, 2005), 259.

<sup>28</sup> Kelly Clarkson, “Stronger (What Doesn’t Kill You)” *Stronger*, Sony Legacy B005HQ5S3G CD (2011). Cf: Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Maxims and Arrows,” 33.

stasis elects its own destruction. What are we to make of this? How does it inform current discussions surrounding transhumanist projects?

We must be careful not to too hastily build a new idol to replace the ones we have discarded, but, as Nietzschean scholarship itself testifies, such a task is difficult. We do well to turn to the world around us, both through natural history (what was) and phenomenology (our experience of what is), to move forward. Fossil records tell us that *Homo sapiens* exists alone now where several other human species existed before. How and why the other species went extinct is a matter of debate among paleoanthropologists, but what remains is that our species walks now where other hominins once did and no longer do.

The case of Neanderthals is telling on this front. Neanderthals were either a separate species from or a subspecies of *Homo sapiens* (*Homo neanderthalensis* or *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*) who lived coextensively and contemporarily with *H. sapiens* tribes in Europe 90,000 to 30,000 years ago.<sup>29</sup> This species appears in the fossil record roughly around the time *H. sapiens* does, but died off as our species was beginning to populate the globe (although their genes live on in 2% of people of Eurasian descent). Scientists are not fully in agreement as to what killed Neanderthals off, but it would seem *H. sapiens* possessed some competitive advantage over Neanderthals, possibly in matters of combat or food acquisition.<sup>30</sup> Somehow, our species was better suited for survival than Neanderthal was. The record of the Neanderthals is one we cannot ignore; it is not the case that *H. sapiens*, that biological species which today constitutes the entirety of humanity, appears ontologically superior and biologically completed

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<sup>29</sup> Dan Vergano, "Neanderthals Lived in Small, Isolated Populations, Gene Analysis Shows," *National Geographic* (April 22, 2014) <<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/04/140421-neanderthal-dna-genes-human-ancestry-science/>> [accessed September 7, 2017].

<sup>30</sup> See: Kwang Hyun Ko, "Hominin Interbreeding and the Evolution of Human Variation," *Journal of Biological Research-Thessaloniki* 23, No. 17 (December 2016), 3-4; William E. Banks et al, "Neanderthal Extinction by Competitive Exclusion," *PlosOne* 3, No. 12 (December 2008): e3972.

*ex nihilo* in the biosphere; we were preceded by and lived contemporarily with other human species. We remain the only species of our genus, but this is a relatively recent development. Although the last of other hominins died off ten thousand years or so before the first human city was founded, they are essential links in our natural history. We evolved from them and with them, and it is therefore irresponsible to suggest we have a unique and unchanging nature.

Phenomenologically, we understand as ourselves as product and producer of the world in which we live. One of Nietzsche's most famous interpreters, Martin Heidegger, recognized that the kind of beings which we are "must be seen and understood *a priori* as grounded upon that state of Being which [might be] called 'Being-in-the-world.'"<sup>31</sup> This world we find ourselves in the midst of is one in which other humans, technological artifacts and other things exist in a way we understand.<sup>32</sup> We may think of ourselves as self-subsistent monads who arrive ready-made in a world which we manipulate according to our whim, but the reality is our epistemologies are pre-shaped by our experience of the world as we have it, including the sciences, technologies, philosophies, political structures and social conventions which are part of the "average, everyday" way of our Being-in-the-world.<sup>33</sup> Thus, we should not fault Thomas Aquinas for holding a thirteenth century view of what human nature is, but we may fault contemporary philosophers for holding a view far removed from its context.

We can take this one step further to realize that not only is it the case that new understandings constitute new worldviews, but that these even constitute a new mode of being. Don Ihde, himself an American interpreter of Heidegger (though he departs on key issues

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<sup>31</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Amazon Kindle e-book ed. (Seattle: Amazon Digital Services, 2013), 53. NB: citations of *Being and Time* refer to German pagination.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

regarding technology) notes that human evolution is itself shaped by the technological tools our ancestors used.<sup>34</sup> I would suggest moreover that social development constitutes ontological change in our being; that the twenty-first century CE “netizen” is existentially (if not biologically) distinct from the twenty-first millennium BCE cave painter. As Bruno Latour says of the relation between humans and technologies, “There is no in-formation, only trans-formation.”<sup>35</sup> When we humans examine the way that humanity has changed both genetically and culturally, it is hard to claim that the “nature” of the hunter-gatherer is the same as the nature of the office worker. Put another way: if it is “right” for a spear-throwing nomad to kill predators that pose a threat to him and elevate his stress level, is it likewise right for Bill in engineering to respond in a similar fashion when he feels a similar level of stress in his boss’s presence?

We must therefore acknowledge that humanity is a moving target. “We are a conversation” Heidegger affirms.<sup>36</sup> As a conversation, we are made up of different voices presenting different viewpoints. If the conversation is truly a conversation, all parties are changed and in turn change others. But conversations do not, or should not, remain in the same place; they move on. So we are left with Nietzsche’s injunction at the beginning of this paper: “Become what you are.” In this paper, I have argued that the voice of the transhumanists do not adequately present the state of the conversation we are, and now we must reluctantly admit the same of the Thomists. From this point, however, where are we able to go? What direction does the conversation lead us? What shape is it taking on?

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<sup>34</sup> Ihde, 124.

<sup>35</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 149.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” in *The Heidegger Reader*, ed. Günter Figal, trans. Jerome Veith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 122.

*The Morality of the Weak*

I now feel confident in claiming that the transhumanists can be agreed with only insofar as they note we should think about how to direct our evolution. Human beings *do* evolve, sometimes on a genetic level, most often on a social or cultural level. Sometimes the two are not easily separable. For example, the presence of ADH1B\*2 and ALDH2\*2 alleles is much more prevalent among Asian populations than among European or African populations, lowering alcohol tolerance among Asians.<sup>37</sup> Whether this distribution led to a shift in cultural attitudes toward alcohol or vice versa is hard to say, though there remain popular hypotheses that European preference for brewing beer over Asian preference for brewing tea has something to do with it.<sup>38</sup> Our cultures and undoubtedly our genome will continue to change over generations, and our conscious choices, such as electing to use sunblock and thus prevent premature death due to skin cancer, will contribute to these changes, even if we do not intend to change. The question is therefore not whether humanity will change, but whether we will be prudent in the way we change it. It is my contention, finally, that this is *the* moral question which transhumanist debates expose: to the question of what we are, we face the counter-question of whether we will become what we are.

Nietzsche was once again prescient on this front. His was a philosophy for the future. He awaited the philosopher who was strong enough to do what truth entailed, to firmly grasp for power without letting his conscience hold him back. Nietzsche himself was not strong enough

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<sup>37</sup> Tatiana V. Morozova, Trudy F. C. Mackay and Robert R. H. Anholt, "Genetics and Genomics of Alcohol Sensitivity," *Molecular Genetics and Genomics* 289, No. 3 (January 2014): 253-269.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Bittman, "Why Europeans Drank Beer and Asians Drank Tea," *The New York Times* (July 11, 2008). We may also wonder about European lactose tolerance against the virtual total intolerance of nearly every other ethnic group. These genetic variations, while somewhat flippant, demonstrate however that at the very least human diets have evolutionary components to them. When applied to moral considerations, we might recognize that something like the development of the virtue of temperance will have to include genetic and cultural considerations.

for this—his mental breakdown at the sight of a horse being beaten is the well-known conclusion to his brilliant career as a thinker. What stands in the way of the achievement of the last philosophers? In some texts, Nietzsche rails against the “last men”—people who become satisfied with material subsistence, “and blink.”<sup>39</sup> Life is simple and sufficient—that is enough. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, however, and explicated further in *Genealogy of Morals*, he opposes the “morality of the strong” with the “slave morality” characteristic of Judaism and Christianity. The beatitudes—blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the humble—are the sorts of values only a group thoroughly initiated in the experiences of oppression would uphold.<sup>40</sup>

It is here, though, that I take my leave of Nietzsche for two reasons. First, I trust most readers will concur that while “nobility of spirit” is a wondrous thing to strive for, the notion that the masses exist to serve the “aristocratic” or powerful is untenable morally speaking.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps one has to resort to “weak” religious perspectives to hold this view (if Jacques Maritain is to be believed, it was Catholic natural law that set the basis for universal human rights, after all), but it seems counter-current to the movement of the Hegelian “spirit of history.” The human conscience has, if anything, become more sensitive, not less, since the time Nietzsche wrote. We have grown to recognize the horror presented by genocide and total war; we feel repulsed by racism and sexism; we have advocates and activists championing universal human rights; and we have campaigns worldwide to end human slavery, especially the sexual exploitation of children. If Nietzsche’s personal experience with the Turin horse is any indication, the human conscience

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<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” 5.

<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 195; Friedrich Nietzsche *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. H. B. Samuel, Amazon Kindle e-book ed. (Houston: Everlasting Flames Publishing, 2010), Essay 1, S8, S10. Cf. Nietzsche, “The Anti-Christ,” in *Twilight of the Idols*, 140, 148.

<sup>41</sup> See: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1, S9.

cannot be totally denied without harmful effects, and we do well to pay close attention to the deepening global conscience we have discovered.

The second reason we must take leave of Nietzsche is for the simple reason that political philosophy suggests his plan will not work. Hannah Arendt, a woman who suffered personally because of the Nazi regime and who carried out important research on the rise of totalitarian regimes, noted that “only through this constant mutual release from what they do [i.e. forgiveness] can [humans] remain free agents; only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something anew.”<sup>42</sup> This forgiveness, she notes, is first given its emphasis by Jesus of Nazareth, whom Nietzsche saw as a sort of idiot/genius who worked to destroy society. If Arendt is correct, and the experience of Archbishop Desmond Tutu would seem to concur, then Nietzsche must be wrong. He has served us as a useful guide to this point, but here we must plot a new course.

Where to go? In reflecting on “The Church in the Modern World” (i.e., *Gaudium et Spes*), Johann-Baptist Metz contends that our theology must now be an eschatology. “The Church is the eschatological community and the exodus community,” he writes, and “we are workers building this future, and not just interpreters of this future.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, Christians must shift their gaze from a backward-looking focus on “what is” or “what was” to a hopeful futural effort bringing into being “what will be.” We must begin to take our bearing not from how we have understood humanity to be, or what we believe God has established in us, but rather in who we believe God is calling us to be, and how we can be cooperative builders of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>42</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 240.

<sup>43</sup> Johannes B. Metz, *Theology of the World*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), 94.

In other words, if we are to “become what we are,” as Christians, we must become citizens of the Kingdom of God. Our destiny lies ahead, not behind, and our attention is fixed on the Parousia, not the wisdom of Greek philosophy. The insights of Metz, Moltmann, Rahner, Gutierrez, Rauschenbusch and King in the twentieth century make clear the need for Christians to reorient ourselves toward that Kingdom we profess faith in and pray for the coming of every Sunday.

### *Homo gubernator*

We have now reached a critical point in this discussion. All of the necessary elements are in place for an articulation of what humanity is in relation to new technologies. We see that humanity is an evolved species—we trace our lineage through extinct hominins and we recognize that our species is not yet finished. I have also noted that we have a deep relationship to our technologies—as *Homo faber* (human as builder) we construct the world around us which in turn shapes who we are. It almost goes without saying that we are deeply social—the “conversation” that we are consists of all the voices who have ever spoken; it is a continuing dialogue in which we get caught in the middle, and which our children will pick up. Finally, we must be a teleological species—as the only species that can consciously grasp its own knowledge (Teilhard de Chardin’s “evolution become self-conscious”), we have a special responsibility to ensure that the future we create is one worth having.<sup>44</sup>

These four elements can be smoothly articulated into the metaphor I call *Homo gubernator*, humanity as pilot (or helmsman). I favor this metaphor because unlike other

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<sup>44</sup> See: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, trans. Norman Denny (New York: Double Day, 1964), 271; Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1966), 8. Cf: Shannon Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).



classifications like *Homo oeconomicus* or *Homo faber*, it holds within it a moral imposition. It also helps us to understand humanity in a chronological fashion and not simply attend to whatever is the hegemonic force of the era (e.g. capital or technology). The image of humanity as pilot already suggests our interrelation with technology: the ship is a human artifact created to accomplish certain human ends (e.g. transportation). Moreover, it is a dominant idea within our ethos: Plato uses the metaphor of the pilot for sailing the “ship of state,” Buckminster Fuller emphasizes the need to carefully operate “spaceship earth,” and most authors on technological ethics at some point slip into using the language of navigation, plotting or steering a course for the future. The idea that humanity is “underway” in some existential voyage underlies a surprising amount of discussion in this topic.

The pilot, however, has many important tasks that do not get sufficient attention. The pilot must understand where ship left port, and everywhere it changed direction. With the right instruments, a pilot can measure latitude for a ship, but longitude requires careful measurement of distance traveled and course direction changed. We must pay attention to how historical events, not least of all the Shoah, the creation of the atomic bomb, and the development of the Internet, have affected our voyage. Some will have taken us off course, others will have moved us closer to our goal. The pilot must also be aware of the abilities of the vessel. A sixteenth century caravel operates in ways vastly different from a twentieth century nuclear submarine; a pilot cannot operate both the same way. We must therefore know what possibilities we possess technologically and scientifically. Likewise, we must pay attention to what the state of our “ship” is—what instruments are at our disposal, what tools do we have to operate, how do they affect the overall movement of our ship, and how fit is the vessel? We must therefore have a realistic understanding of the condition of the world. Pilots also must cooperate with the rest of the crew.

Human thriving, or even survival, is a species-wide task. We do not and cannot accomplish it alone. In our context, this means theologians need to be in dialogue with technologists, philosophers, STS scholars, science policy advisors, engineers, philanthropists and public-interest groups if we hope to have any impact. Finally, the pilot must plot a course and make appropriate calculations to reach that goal. Theologians need a clear vision of what our future holds. Transhumanists may be faulted for many things, but lack of vision is not one of them. Theologians, on the other hand, need to have the same passion, the same dream and the same conviction as the Kurzweils, Mores, and Bostroms of the world.

Where does this put us exactly in the discussion with transhumanists? Once again, we recognize that their understanding of what humanity is is itself flawed. As pilots, we may therefore note that their maps are out of date. Phenomenology and the human sciences have improved the “maps” of what humanity is over the past century, and the Enlightenment-era charts are now woefully outdated. We cannot, for that matter, return to Thomism (or Augustinianism or Aristotelianism) because it is also inadequate to our understandings. We may note that the transhumanists have done a fine job of taking stock of their equipment (at least all of the technological advances we are making), and have enlisted many crew members to their service (including DARPA, Google and several companies or think tanks connected to Silicon Valley). However, we would likely disagree once again on the course they have plotted for humanity; it is not in “uploaded minds” or “edited genes” where we will achieve the destiny of humanity, especially if these are reserved only for the richest few. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson rejects transhumanism on the merits of its eschatological millenarianism, and Christian

theologians may do the same.<sup>45</sup> But in this rejection, a new challenge faces Christian thinkers: what would we put in its place? What other course should the human species plot?

*Conclusion—The Last Humans?*

Nietzsche's fear was that the end of history would be marked by human beings of an extraordinarily weak spirit. "The last men" have discovered the secret of leisure; they no longer face hardships or suffering. "'We have discovered happiness,' say the last men, and blink thereby."<sup>46</sup> Certain of the so-called "bioconservatives" take this to be reason to reject transhumanism; they consider the transhumanist goal to be nothing less than the vision of the "last men."<sup>47</sup>

If this is the worry of Christians in broaching the subject, then we suffer from the unfortunate problems of poverty of imagination and weakness of faith. We suffer weakness of faith because we are a pilgrim people, believers who wait in joyful expectation for the return of Christ. We suffer weakness of imagination because our eschatological vision has not lived up to its task of presenting a hopeful future. If we fear a future of eye-blinking lobotomites, we should be active in ensuring a different future comes about. This should be a world of peace and happiness, but it need not look like a universal stupor. It was, after all, St Thomas More who gave us the word "utopia" in his vision of an ideal society. If Christian authors today lack the same imagination, we have only ourselves to blame.

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<sup>45</sup> Hava Tirosh-Samuels, "Utopianism and Eschatology: Judaism Engages Transhumanism," in *Religion and Transhumanism*, 161-180.

<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part, 5.

<sup>47</sup> See: Leon Kass, *Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002), 266-268.

And so I conclude with the re-emphasis of Metz's vision and an invitation to theologians thinking on the challenges of technologies and transhumanism. Christian systematic theology today must be more eschatological than before; Christian ethics must be more consequentialist than its history has allowed. We need positive articulations of what the Christian *will be* in the future, and positive claims about what the Kingdom of God *should look like*. We must be animated by a vision of a future that gives life to us and reminds us of our task as members of the Body of Christ. Most of all, we need more thought dedicated to an articulation of the positive role of technologies in constructing and furthering the Kingdom of God here on earth.

I make no strong claims at this point as to how this vision will appear. It may resemble Teilhard de Chardin's "Omega Point," or perhaps James Hughes's vision of a social-democratic transhuman society. It may look like something else entirely. Nonetheless, the articulation of this vision is crucial for the task of *Homo gubernator*. If we are to progress in the voyage of our species, underway for 200,000 years, we need a point to guide our navigation. Christians must be united on this front, and Christian ethicists and pastors will need to play the important role of pilots, steering Christians away from dangerous paths toward the promised shores of the Kingdom of God.