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A Serious Christian Journal of Life and its Significance

Verba Vitae is committed to bringing the classical Christian tradition into conversation with life issues now confronting us. Modeling the reasoned *logos* of the theological tradition, *Verba Vitae* explores the truth-claims made by thinkers and examines the grounds upon which these assertions are made.

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Who Is the One We Are Improving?

Transhumanism, Moral Authority, and the Promise of Life

I

Suppose that a physician can safely prevent a child from developing a serious disease. There is no general obligation to leave nature alone, and it would be difficult to explain why the child's parents should refuse an effective treatment merely because disease is part of our present biological condition. Now suppose that the parents must decide which of several already-existing embryos to transfer. The laboratory supplies comparative genetic scores with one embryo carrying a lower estimated risk of serious disease, another a predicted advantage in height, and a third some purported advantage in cognitive performance. What, precisely, is being improved? It's certainly not the genome of the embryo selected for transfer since selection changes neither its genetic constitution nor that of those passed over. What appeared to be a question about doing good for a particular patient has become a question about allocating an opportunity among several existing organisms. The first question is whether we may improve a life. The second is what authorizes us to rank lives when making decisions about their futures.

These questions introduce the present issue of *Verba Vitae*, which deals with transhumanism and its increasingly practical implications. We must distinguish a medical technique from an ideology that promises the technological transcendence of humanity, just as we must distinguish an improvement in some human capacity from a judgment about the worth of the one possessing it. Our ability to achieve a result does not by itself justify pursuing it but neither does the fact that a change exceeds an inherited human limit establish that it is impermissible. What needs examining is the authority by which interventions are proposed, the good at which they aim, and the human beings upon whom their effects fall. Lioy, the Lutherans For Life statement, and Seel ask about the grounds and limits of human authority;

Hackmann, Brinkert, and Borquist ask about the goods we pursue; Patterson and my own contribution bring us repeatedly before the human being whose life is affected. The contributors do not answer these questions in the same way, nor should their differences be concealed by the editor's desire for a tidy conclusion.

II

Lutherans For Life, our partner in publishing *Verba Vitae*, contributes its position statement on transhumanism to this issue. It opposes the pursuit of humanly manufactured immortality and a vision of technical self-transcendence that would displace God's promises in Christ. However, it also expressly calls technology a divine blessing when used in faith toward God and love toward the neighbor.[1] Those assertions must be read together. The statement also opposes efforts to enhance human nature beyond God-given abilities and functions, and my judgment that crossing an inherited biological limit does not itself constitute wrongdoing is more permissive than the statement itself allows. The statement renders a confessional judgment while the articles test the anthropological, ethical, and eschatological premises on which judgments about particular techniques depend. Better, I think, to acknowledge where these tasks yield different emphases than to pretend all the difficult cases have already been decided.

Daniel Hackmann's "Created, Not Constructed: Transhumanism, the *Imago Dei*, and the Preciousness of Human Life" confronts the anthropology underlying the debate. His engagement with Yuval Noah Harari's *Homo Deus* asks whether the worth of human beings might rise with greater intelligence, autonomy, longevity, or control.[2] If these are desirable capacities, does it follow that the lives possessing more of them are more valuable? The inference is invalid without a further premise connecting ability to dignity, and Hackmann locates the worth of the creature instead in the *imago Dei*, received from the Creator. Human capacities differ enormously, and some can rightly be improved; moral standing does not rise or fall with those differences. Hackmann thus places a demand upon any proposed program of optimization: explain why the unenhanced and the profoundly dependent are not rendered expendable by its own standards of success.

David Patterson approaches the matter through Luther's theology of the cross in "Wounded Glory and Borrowed Light: Transhumanism Read Through the Theology of the Cross." His essay distinguishes assistance that removes barriers for disabled persons, accommodations made for those experiencing gender dysphoria, and proposals for superhuman enhancement. These are not interchangeable moral categories; to join them indiscriminately risks injuring the very neighbor Christian ethics professes to defend. Nor does compassion require declaring every anthro-

pological question settled. Patterson's account also presses beneath the morality of technologies to the question of where God is known. The theologian of glory expects divine favor to appear in ascent and successful mastery whereas Luther's theologian of the cross encounters God's saving work *sub contraria specie*, under the form of its opposite, in the crucified Christ.[3] The disagreement concerns more than whether enhancement works. I would sharpen the distinction in this way: transhumanism at its most ambitious diagnoses humanity's problem as limitation; Luther's cross names the more radical problem of sin for which technological competence supplies no remedy.

Dan Lioy's "Infinite Hope for Finite Flesh" gives this criticism scriptural and eschatological depth. The bestowed glory of humanity in Psalm 8 is interpreted through Hebrews 2:5–9 where Jesus suffers death and is crowned with glory and honor. The humiliation of Christ (Phil. 2:5–11) stands over against fantasies of self-exaltation while Babel's builders seek to make a name for themselves through their own achievements (Gen. 11:1–9). However, the bricks at Babel were not themselves the sin, and neither are the products of a modern laboratory inherently suspect. Medicine may be exercised within the vocation of preserving and serving life, as God's care assumes creaturely instruments. What must be denied is that the indefinite extension of biological existence would amount to reconciliation with God. The resurrection of the flesh is not the same proposition as the extension of biological survival. Lioy's account places technological hope under a promise whose fulfillment technology cannot manufacture.

III

Eric Brinkert's "A Review of Podcasts: Transhumanism" complicates the familiar opposition between therapy and enhancement. Anna Puzio, one of the thinkers whose conversations he reviews, argues that judgments about which bodily conditions are undesirable or deficient are subjective assessments and that standards of normality can encode discrimination against disability, aging, and other forms of human difference. This is a more serious objection than merely observing that medicine involves value judgments. Still, to say that a judgment is value-laden is not to show that it is merely subjective. Grave disease is not a taste. Restoring sight to a blind child could constitute a real benefit to that child, *ceteris paribus*, without implying that blind persons are worth less than sighted persons. Moreover, even if we granted Puzio's objection in full, it would not erase the distinction with which I began: treating an identified neighbor and ranking several existing neighbors are different acts. What has to be justified is not only the standard employed but the authority exercised toward the persons affected.

Brinkert also sets the Christian transhumanist advocate Micah Redding beside the Lutheran theologian John Pless, though the two never address each other. Brinkert notices that each, in his different way, directs attention to relationship and the service of the neighbor. This convergence is significant, provided that relationality does not become another competence test that the vulnerable must pass. We need not be able to return love in order to be its proper recipient. A Christian defense of relationality must begin with the relation that precedes our power to sustain it, rather than with a tally of those able to reciprocate what is offered.

My own essay, "Making Persons? Luther, Transhumanism, and the Limits of Human Specification," distinguishes numerical distinctness, persistence through change, and the moral non-substitutability of a particular human life. The first two are questions about identity in the metaphysician's sense; the third is not. It also requires a correction. In an earlier contribution to these pages, I argued that persons are individuated extrinsically, by God's love.[4] I now think that claim says too much. Divine address does not tell us whether there is one creature here or two; it does not resolve the biological question posed by embryonic twinning. What it grounds, on the theological account I defend, is something else: that this creature cannot be replaced without loss by another with the same desirable characteristics. Counting distinguishes organisms but does not ground their moral non-substitutability. A market understands substitutes very well; love understands why they are not substitutes.

For Luther, the household or *oeconomia* is an order of entrusted care, not a domain in which parental preference establishes the worth of those entrusted to it. That has consequences for embryo selection. Grave medical considerations may justify an order of transfer; no score, medical or otherwise, justifies excluding an embryo from transfer altogether. Here, our co-publisher and I differ: Lutherans For Life opposes in vitro fertilization (IVF) as such, whereas my essay does not establish that general prohibition and allows medically justified transfer order.[5] That is a genuine difference with our co-publisher, and readers should be able to see it rather than infer it from our silences. My claim is narrower than a general defense of IVF but wider than an ethics of rescuing embryos after the fact: once embryonic lives exist, decisions among them require reasons answerable to these particular lives.

IV

Nils Borquist's review of Toby Ord's *The Precipice* widens our concern from particular lives to humanity's possible future.[6] Ord considers catastrophic risks, some natural and others generated by the extraordinary technological powers humanity has acquired. Such dangers warrant serious attention; providence does not excuse neglect of the future neighbor. However, Borquist warns that a consuming preoccupation with species survival can obscure the human goods for which survival matters, and

he offers acceptance of the eventual succession of species as an alternative outlook. The latter suggestion is his, not an account of Christian eschatology that *Verba Vitae* must adopt. Three futures must be distinguished here: the engineered perpetuity imagined in certain technological projects, the natural history in which humanity eventually disappears, and the Christian promise of bodily resurrection. Neither risk calculation nor mere optimism can make these futures equivalent.

M. Anthony Seel's review of Gene Edward Veith Jr. and A. Trevor Sutton's *Authentic Christianity* may initially appear at some distance from biotechnology.[7] The book concerns Lutheran Christianity amid modern and postmodern rival accounts of the self, and Seel attends to its claims about the external Word, justification, and the gifts human beings receive rather than construct. I would draw a connection beyond the argument of the book under review. Modern confidence that reason can remake the world and postmodern confidence that the subject can make its own meaning may combine in a single technological project, an engineerable body joined to a self-authorizing will. However, ability to redesign the body and authority to define the human good are not the same. Lutheran theology's insistence that righteousness is received, not manufactured, puts that distinction back before us.

I have not tried to reconcile the differences over in vitro fertilization, over whether gender transition belongs within the category of transhumanism, and over which future Christians may rightly hope for. They identify arguments that remain to be made. No contribution in this issue is written by a defender of Christian transhumanism, although one such perspective is heard through Brinkert's review. *Verba Vitae* therefore invites a reply for a future issue from a Christian transhumanist, perhaps one persuaded by Redding's relational account, who can show why the promise of enhancement need not become a doctrine of self-salvation.

The name *Verba Vitae* refers to more than words about biological survival. In John 6:68 Peter confesses that Christ has the words of eternal life, words that neither originate in the hearer nor acquire their truth from the hearer's capacities. Life is received, is sustained through the care and skill of others, and its consummation depends upon the promise of God. We are free to make things, and sometimes wonderful things, for the good of the neighbor. We cannot make the Word that makes us God's own. Accordingly, when an engineer, parent, physician, or public official encounters a human life that falls short of some attractive specification, it will not suffice to ask what more our powers can achieve. The prior question concerns what authority we have over this life, and the decisive theological question remains stubbornly particular: what do we owe this one? The answer will tell us a great deal about whether our impressive powers have taught us to love life or merely to rank it.

Dennis Bielfeldt
General Editor, *Verba Vitae*

Notes

1. Lutherans For Life, "Transhumanism," in *Position Statements of Lutherans For Life* (Lutherans For Life, updated July 27, 2026), 43, https://lutheransforlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ Position_Statements_Lutherans_For_Life_9-18-26.pdf. The statement is reproduced in the present issue.
2. Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2017).
3. Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), theses 19–21, WA 1:354; LW 31:40–41.
4. Dennis Bielfeldt, "Personal Identity, Divine Love, and Extrinsic Individuation," *Verba Vitae* 1, nos. 3–4 (Autumn/Winter 2024): 21–44. Compare "Making Persons? Luther, Transhumanism, and the Limits of Human Specification," in the present issue.
5. Lutherans For Life, "In vitro Fertilization," in *Position Statements*, 24–26; see also "Embryo Adoption," 14–15.
6. Toby Ord, *The Precipice: Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).
7. Gene Edward Veith Jr. and A. Trevor Sutton, *Authentic Christianity: How Lutheran Theology Speaks to a Postmodern World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

Infinite Hope for Finite Flesh

A Christian Response to Transhumanist Idolatry

Dan Lioy

1.0 Introduction[1]

Our age proclaims a gospel of deliverance by design: therapies to silence pain, interfaces to extend cognition, and genetic edits to outmaneuver death. Beneath the glitter of this progress lies a recognizable theology of glory (Latin, *theologia gloriae*). It is a secular soteriology where salvation is recast as human achievement and hope is relocated from God's promise to human prowess.[2]

To a Lutheran ear, the spiritual stakes are immediate. The Creator revealed in Scripture does not redeem the lost by lifting them out of their finitude, but by entering it. He is the God of the manger and the Cross, who takes on flesh, suffers with his creatures, and raises a truly human body from the grave. In this light, technology is rightly understood not as a ladder to divinity, but as a "mask of God" (Latin, *larva Dei*). It is an instrument of vocation used to serve the neighbor yet strictly refused as a rival false redeemer.[3]

The drama of Psalm 8, illuminated by Hebrews 2:5–9, anchors this discourse. Human dignity is a divine gift, and dominion is only truly fulfilled in Christ. Placed alongside the self-exalting ascent of the tower of Babel recounted in Genesis 11:1–9 and the self-emptying *kenosis* of Philippians 2:5–11, the contrast sharpens. The Father's grace precedes any human technique, his gift precedes any human grasping, and the Son's resurrection precedes any human enhancement. What follows does not aim to reject human ingenuity, but to distinctively situate it. The Church embraces tools to care for the world yet places its ultimate hope only in the crucified and risen Lord. His redeemed followers live as finite creatures who embrace an infinite hope.

1.1. The Issue: Transhumanism's Soteriological Claims

In recent decades, transhumanism has matured from speculative thought into a wide-ranging cultural project. It not only advances discrete techniques (such as gene editing, brain-computer interfaces, and life-extension therapies), but a comprehensive

narrative about human destiny. According to this vision, suffering and mortality are engineering problems awaiting technical solutions, and finitude represents a design flaw requiring correction. The theological implications are unmistakable. Salvation is reimagined as a human achievement rather than a divine gift. Also, ultimate hope shifts from God's redeeming action to one's own innovation.[4]

A Lutheran assessment welcomes medicine and technology as genuine benefits while resisting their elevation into pseudo-saviors. The concern is not technical competence but spiritual allegiance. When tools designed for healing begin to promise deliverance from the fallen human condition, they function as idols. Lutheran theology teaches that God meets and dignifies humanity within the very conditions of embodied life, limits that Christ embraced. He was made "for a little while" lower than the angels to crown humanity with glory through his suffering and death (Heb 2:5–9).[5] The question is not whether technology serves good purposes; it often does. Instead, the query is whether transhumanism's storyline of ascent accords with the Gospel's narrative of grace descending in the crucified and risen Messiah.[6]

1.2. Thesis Statement

This essay contends that a Christ-centered, canonical reading of Scripture, which is anchored in Psalm 8 as interpreted through Hebrews 2:5–9 and illumined by Genesis 11:1–9 and Philippians 2:5–11, locates human dignity and hope in God's gift of grace rather than human self-enhancement. Technologies focused on the latter are ethically viable when they serve God-given vocation and neighbor-love.[7] However, they become spiritually perilous when they reach for soteriology. Viewed through a Lutheran theology of the Cross (Latin, *theologia crucis*), transhumanist aspirations toward self-deification deny the very arena in which God lovingly encounters and exalts the lost, namely, through the finite and fragile life that the Messiah assumed and redeemed.[8]

1.3. Methodological Approach

This essay reads Scripture canonically by allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, with the Gospel as the canon's interpretive key. Exegesis is governed by Christological fulfillment, which guards against moralism, abstraction, and triumphalist appeals to "human potential." Accordingly, Psalm 8's bestowed dignity and vocation are read through Hebrews 2:5–9, where the "coming world" is not subjected to angels but to humanity fulfilled in Christ. He is the One made "lower than the angels for a little while" and then "crowned with glory and honor, because he suffered death." This frames the essay's central claim that the biblical pattern moves from divine descent to cruciform exaltation, not from human ascent to self-made glory.

The argument attends carefully to key lexical and translational hinges that shape the essay's theological conclusions. In Psalm 8 and its reception in Hebrews 2:5–11, particular attention is given to Hebrew *ʾĕlōhîm* (and its Septuagint rendering

"angels") and *kābôd* ("glory"), as well as Greek terms that carry the interpretive weight in Hebrews 2:5–9 (for example, *brachý ti* as "a little lower/for a little while," *estefanōsas* "crowned," *hypétaxas* as "subjected/put under"). In Philippians 2:5–11, the essay treats *ekenōsen* ("emptied himself") with care, emphasizing how the text itself defines "emptying" by taking the "nature of a servant" rather than surrendering deity. Throughout, linguistic nuance is handled within each passage's literary and canonical context, so that word-study clarifies, rather than replaces, the text's theological thrust.[9]

Ethical judgment is guided by a Lutheran Law/Gospel dialectic. The Law exposes and restrains the heart's impulse to convert creaturely limits into shame and to pursue "salvation by design" (a modernized works-righteousness). In contrast, the Gospel proclaims dignity, identity, and hope as a gift secured in the crucified and risen Messiah. Within this framework, the essay is explicitly shaped by the theology of the Cross. It insists that God reveals his glory "under the opposite" (Latin, *sub contrario*), not in visible invulnerability or technological triumph, but in the manger and especially the Cross. This confessional posture also supplies the essay's constructive boundary. Technology, when used within one's vocation, is a penultimate good through which God's care is manifested in service to others. Nevertheless, it is a serious error to treat technology as an ultimate, eschatological solution, or as a tool for humanity's self-deification.[10]

Methodologically, the essay undertakes the following: (1) establishing Scripture's affirmative witness to human dignity in Psalm 8 as interpreted through Hebrews 2:5–9; (2) using Genesis 11:1–9 as a diagnostic text that exposes how technological ingenuity can be recruited into a "name-making" immortality project; and (3) presenting Philippians 2:5–11 as the Gospel's counter-narrative that redefines glory through Christ's self-emptying and the Cross. The conclusion distinguishes technology's proper role as an instrument of neighbor-serving mercy from the spiritual peril of transhumanist enhancement narratives that function as rival soteriologies.[11]

2.0 Psalm 8 in Light of Hebrews 2:5–9: Dignity as a Divine Gift, Dominion Fulfilled in Christ[12]

Human dignity is not a prize seized by strength but a status bestowed by God's grace.[13] Similarly, human dominion is not achieved through autonomy but fulfilled in the crucified and risen Lord.[14] Psalm 8 announces a grandeur for humanity that defies natural explanation. The Creator of the universe remembers frail creatures and crowns them with glory and honor. Hebrews 2:5–9 receives this ancient promise, places it into the nail-scarred hands of Christ, and reveals that the royal vocation of Psalm 8 is brought to completion only through Jesus' sacrificial death. The movement is one of descent and gift, not ascent and gain.

2.1 Textual and Canonical Observations

Psalm 8 is a creation hymn framed by a doxology ("O Lord, our Lord," vv. 1, 9). Within that frame, verses 4–6 articulate a paradox. The Creator's cosmic majesty is displayed precisely in his attentiveness to frail humanity. The psalm's anthropological terms sharpen the point. "Man" is *ʾĕnôš* ("mortal/fragile human"), and "son of man" is *ben-ʾādām* ("son of Adam / human being"). These terms emphasize creaturely weakness and Adamic solidarity. Against any reading that treats human greatness as self-generated, the psalm's grammar remains consistently donative. God "remembers," "pays attention," "crowns," and sets humanity over the "works" of the Creator's "hands." Dominion, therefore, is derivative, namely, a trust received, not a sovereignty seized.

Psalm 8:5 (Hebrew versification 8:6) serves as a pivotal textual and theological hinge. While the Masoretic Text reads *meʿaṭ meʾĕlōhîm* ("a little lower than God" or "divine beings"), the Septuagint renders this as *brachý ti par' angélous* ("a little [lower] than angels").[15] Since *ʾĕlōhîm* has a semantic range that includes both God and heavenly beings, the Septuagint's selection of "angels" is a specific interpretive choice rather than a value-neutral equivalent.[16] This distinction becomes crucial in Hebrews 2:5–9, which quotes the Septuagint. Consequently, Hebrews reads Psalm 8 not merely as a celebration of inherent human dignity, but as an eschatological promise. The world to come is not subject to angels, but to humanity, a dominion that is ultimately realized and fulfilled in the Messiah.

Hebrews 2:5–9 sets Psalm 8 within an explicit eschatological scope, specifically, the "coming world." This is not "under the control of angels" (Heb 2:5). Two exegetical features drive the argument. First, the elasticity of *brachý ti* ("a little / for a little while") allows Hebrews 2 to connect Psalm 8's "lowering" to Christ's incarnational humiliation. Second, Psalm 8's dominion lexicon becomes the backbone of the reading in Hebrews 2:5–11. "You crowned" is *estefanōsas*, and "You put everything in subjection" is *hypétaxas*. God's intent is comprehensive ("left nothing that is not in subjection to him"), while candidly acknowledging that present visibility is incomplete ("we do not yet see everything in subjection to him"). Canonically, Psalm 8's royal anthropology thus requires an already/not yet reading. The promise is true, but its full manifestation awaits consummation.

The climactic inversion arrives in Hebrews 2:9. Jesus is "crowned with glory and honor" (*dóxē kai timē*) because he "suffered death." In the canonical logic of Hebrews 2, Psalm 8 is neither a triumphalist anthem of autonomous mastery nor a sentimental hymn to human potential. Rather, it is a vocation and destiny that reaches its consummation through the Messiah's cruciform descent and vindication.

2.2 Christological Interpretation of Psalm 8

Within the canon, Psalm 8's anthropology functions typologically. It names what humanity is called to be under God, while anticipating the one in whom that calling is perfectly embodied and restored. The "mortal human" (*'ĕnôš*) and the "son of Adam" (*ben-'ādām*) are genuinely universal categories, yet Hebrews 2:5–9 shows that this universal is fulfilled in a particular person, Jesus of Nazareth. The psalm's horizon is human, but its completion is messianic. Human dominion is concentrated in the representative second Adam acting "for us" (Latin, *pro nobis*).

Hebrews 2:5–9 makes that fulfillment explicit in that it binds Psalm 8 to Christ's saving work. The "lowering" expressed in the phrase "a little [lower] than" is not read as a static claim about rank alone but as the narrative movement of Jesus' incarnation. The Son enters the human condition "for a little while," embracing weakness and mortality. This is precisely where a Lutheran theology of the Cross coheres with the logic of Hebrews.[17] Christ does not redeem by evading creaturely limitation but by assuming it fully. Accordingly, Psalm 8's coronation is not detached from the Cross. As noted above, Jesus is "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb 2:9) because he "suffered death." Glory is thus hidden beneath a contradictory appearance. The royal crown is bestowed through humiliation, not either by technological advancement or heroic ascent.

This Christological reading also governs Psalm 8's dominion claim of subjecting creation to humanity. Hebrews 2:5–9 insists that universal subjection remains God's intent, while simultaneously admitting present incompletion. The resolution is Christological: "But we look to Jesus." Therefore, the Church's perspective is promissory and cruciform. Faith apprehends the true state of reality in Christ even when empirical conditions lag behind the promise.

Finally, Hebrews 2:5–9 soteriologically anchors the anthropology of Psalm 8. Jesus fully experienced "death for everyone" (*geúsētai thanátou…hyper pantos*, Heb 2:9).[18] That clause prevents Psalm 8 from being recruited into narratives of self-deification. Human dignity and destiny are not secured by enhancement but by vicarious atonement and resurrection life in the Messiah. Psalm 8's "crown," read through Hebrews 2:5–9, is therefore Gospel. Humanity's vocation is real, but its fulfillment is received as a gift in the crucified and risen Messiah.

2.3 Anthropological and Eschatological Implications

Hebrews 2:5–9 refuses both triumphalism and despair by naming the Church's present condition with theological honesty. Psalm 8's dominion promise is true, yet its comprehensive visibility remains incomplete. The same passage that insists God "left nothing" outside the scope of "you subjected / put under" also admits that we do not yet experience the created realm as fully ordered under humanity's feet

(Heb 2:8). This truth yields a distinctly biblical anthropology.[19] Humanity's vocation is real, but it is presently fractured and awaiting consummation.

The interpretive key is Hebrews' Christological focusing move. Psalm 8's royal anthropology is gathered into Jesus, who embodies humanity's intended destiny "for us." What is not yet manifest in "us" is already secured in him, because he entered the human condition "for a little while" (Heb 2:7) and was crowned with "glory and honor" through suffering. Accordingly, the "coming world" (*tēn oikouménēn tēn méllousan*; v. 5) becomes the horizon that calls into question claims about human mastery. The Church may affirm human dignity and vocation without collapsing those affirmations into present-day achievement or measurable technological capacity.[20]

This eschatological posture reshapes how finitude is understood. Psalm 8's "mortal/fragile human" and "son of Adam/human being" do not name a defect to be engineered away but the physical creatureliness within which God bestows honor and within which the Messiah fulfills humanity's calling. Hebrews 2:5–9 intensifies the point. The road to dominion runs through representative suffering, because the crown comes through experiencing "death for everyone." As a result, Christian anthropology cannot treat "limitations" as merely technical problems. Creaturely limits are the arena in which God's promised future is received in faith and enacted in patience, rather than seized through impatient overreach.

2.4 Theological Critique of Transhumanism

Read through Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2:5–9, transhumanism's most serious problem is not that it employs advanced tools, but that it subtly reassigns eschatological weight to them. When technological enhancement is framed as the path to secure what Scripture places in the "coming world," it becomes an attempted shortcut around the canonical logic of promise, suffering, and gift. The biblical arc does not move from finitude to glory by self-upgrade. Instead, it does so by Christ's descent "for a little while" and his crowning with "glory and honor" because of his atoning sacrifice at Calvary.

Psalm 8 prevents a performance-based account of dignity. The hymn locates honor in God's bestowal ("you crown"), not in humanity's capacity to overcome weakness. Hebrews 2:5–9 heightens that critique by locating the decisive human "crown" on Jesus' head, not as the reward for optimization but as the verdict rendered through cruciform obedience on behalf of lost humanity. If the crown is received in Christ "for us," then all attempts at immortality drift toward a rival soteriology. This is because they treat human dignity as being ultimately grounded in augmented intelligence, engineered longevity, or invulnerability.

Most pointedly, Hebrews 2:5–9 specifies the mechanism of restoration. It is not the evasion of death, but Christ becoming the "atoning sacrifice" (1 John 2:2) for the

"sins" of the "whole world." This truth sets a theological boundary line. Medicine and technology may serve life and neighbor-love, and they may even be extraordinary mercies. Yet they cannot bear the weight of redemption, because Scripture identifies death's defeat with Jesus' vicarious suffering and resurrection, not with indefinite biological extension or the displacement of embodied dependence (1 Cor 15:54–56). Where transhumanism promises a crown without the Cross, Hebrews 2:5–9 insists that the crown named by Psalm 8 is obtained through the Cross and bestowed as a divine gift.

2.5 Lutheran Integration

Within a Lutheran framework, Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2:5–9 clarify both the appropriate use of technology and the proper object of hope. Because the "crown" is bestowed in the Messiah, the Christian is freed from making technology a ladder to obtain security, status, or immortality. The Law names and judges the sinful drive to convert Psalm 8's vocation into self-sovereignty in which the phrase "you subjected / put under" is treated as a warrant for domination or self-deification. In contrast, the Gospel announces that the representative Son of Man has already borne our curse and secured our eternal destiny. Jesus became a finite and frail human "for a little while" (Heb 2:9) and was "crowned with glory and honor" by tasting "death for everyone." Human dignity is therefore not negotiated by performance but received in Christ.[21]

This is where the theology of the Cross supplies needed ethical clarity. God's decisive act is not revealed in visible invulnerability, but in the suffering Messiah. He restores repentant, believing sinners by entering human weakness. That pattern sets the limits of Christian discourse about alleged "progress." Technology may be embraced vigorously as an instrument of mercy within vocation, but it must remain a servant rather than a savior. It is fitted for penultimate goods such as healing, alleviation, assistance, and service. Meanwhile, ultimate blessings, such as righteousness, death's defeat, and the final ordering of the coming world, remain God's gift in Christ.[22]

Thus, the Psalm 8 / Hebrews 2:5–9 unit yields a coherent Lutheran ethic. Believers affirm the derivative dignity of being a "mortal/fragile human" and a "son of Adam/human being" as crowned by God. They also confess the fulfillment of that crown in Jesus "for us," and resist any program that relocates the hope of the "coming world" into human technique. The Church's posture is neither technophobic nor technolatrous. Instead, it is confident in promise, active in mercy (as opposed to a quietist withdrawal from technological engagement), and patient for the day when what Scripture says is true will also be what the world unmistakably sees.[23]

3.0 Genesis 11:1–9: The Babel of Bio-Enhancement[24]

If Psalm 8 (read through Heb 2:5–9) anchors human dignity in God's gift and fulfills human dominion in Christ's cruciform victory, Genesis 11:1–9 offers a sobering counter-portrait of a community that treats its ingenuity as a ladder to security, unity, and self-made glory. The tower of Babel episode is not an anti-technology fable; rather, it is a spiritual diagnosis. Human creativity, here expressed in a genuine technological advance, is pressed into the service of a deeper desire to manufacture a future without dependence on the Creator. In that sense, Babel becomes a mirror held up to modern bio-enhancement narratives that quietly relocate hope from promise to prowess and from gift to grasping.

The text's relevance to transhumanist ambition lies precisely in its realism. The tower of Babel episode does not begin with horns and pitchforks, but with coordination, progress, and a plausible fear of vulnerability. Yet the historical narrative exposes what happens when fear and pride converge: the will to consolidate, to control, and to "make a name" that can outlast the fragile creature (in essence a futile immortality project).[25] Genesis 11 thus sharpens the focus of the question this essay explores. Will humanity's tools remain masks of God for neighbor-serving vocation, or will they become rival redeemers, promising a kind of salvation by design?[26]

3.1 Exegetical Analysis of Genesis 11:1–9

3.1.1 Setting the scene: unity after the flood and the tension beneath it (v. 1)

Verse 1 opens with an arresting portrait that the "whole earth had one language and a single vocabulary." On the surface, this is an image of harmony. Human beings can understand one another without friction or mistranslation. However, within Genesis's larger narrative arc, that unity is not morally neutral. It resides within a post-fall world where sin tends to bend even good gifts inward toward idolatrous pursuits. The issue is not that people share speech; instead, it is what they plan to do with their common verbalization.

The phrase rendered "one language" is vivid in Hebrew. It is literally "one lip," an idiomatic way of saying that the people speak as though with one mouth (or voice). Also, the phrase translated "single vocabulary" suggests not merely a shared terminology, but also a common way of framing reality, including assumptions, aims, and slogans. The narrator is signaling that speech, one of God's gifts for communion, can become an instrument for consolidation. Unity can serve love, but it can also be enslaved by domination. The unfolding biblical account shows how easily this becomes a collective project of self-exaltation.

3.1.2 The migration and the temptation of settling (v. 2)

Verse 2 adds literary motion. As people migrate, they find a plain and settle there. The detail matters. In Genesis, movement and populating the planet are not arbitrary themes. They belong to God's creational and post-flood mandate (1:28; 9:1). The divine command to spread out is not a punishment but a gift. After all, the earth is wide, life is meant to flourish in many places, and human community is intended to exist without becoming a single, centralized monolith.[27]

So then, when Genesis 11:2 emphasizes settling, it is not condemning agriculture or city life. Rather, it raises a theological tension, namely, that inhabiting one region can become a refusal of the Creator's will. People can start to treat one location, rather than God's promise, as their source of security. They can begin to fear dispersal, not because it is evil, but because spreading out exposes their vulnerability. In a fallen world, openness feels intolerable. Consequently, humanity's desire to settle quietly becomes an obsession to control.

3.1.3 Technology as an amplifier: bricks, bitumen, and the thrill of nefarious ambitions (v. 3)

Verse 3 turns explicitly to technological ingenuity: "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." In the ancient Near East, brickmaking was a real innovation, especially where stone was scarce. Brick is modular, uniform, and scalable. It allows human beings to build higher and more expansively than local materials might otherwise permit. Bitumen ("tar") serves as mortar, which functions as another enabling development.

Here, the account is notably candid. It does not demonize this ingenuity. It simply shows that technology can be used to amplify nefarious ambitions. Put another way, it enlarges the reach of sinful intentions. Tools do not create the sinful human heart (Jer 17:9); instead, they extend what the heart already wants. That is why the repeated refrain "Come, let's" (Gen 11:3–4) is so telling. It signals enthusiasm, momentum, and a collective resolve. The builders are not coerced; rather, they are energized. The tower of Babel episode is not an account about a few tyrants forcing the masses. Instead, it is the narrative of a society agreeing on a project to secure their own greatness. That is precisely why it remains unsettlingly relevant. The most spiritually dangerous idolatries are often the ones that feel like common sense.[28]

3.1.4 The core confession of Babel: "let's make a name for ourselves" (v. 4)

Verse 4 identifies the vaunted project. Fallen people decide to "build a city," with a "tower" (often understood as resembling a ziggurat) whose apex pierces the "sky."

This misguided group is keen to prevent themselves from being "scattered abroad" all over the world. Several features deserve careful attention.

First, Babel is communal and self-referential. The phrase "for ourselves" appears with a quiet insistence. These individuals are not building a metropolitan area primarily as a shelter for the weak or as a center of neighborly life. They are erecting a monument to their identity and as a declaration of their self-created future. The city becomes a guarantee that they can hold themselves together. Likewise, the tower serves as a symbol that they can elevate themselves skyward.

Second, the tower's "top" literally reaching to the "heavens" is not mainly about architectural height but theological aspiration. In Genesis, the "heavens" are God's sacred dwelling, the sphere of his supreme authority. The point is not that humans can actually invade the Creator's throne room. Instead, it is that they desire an immortality project that holds ultimate significance. This overhyped endeavor crosses the line into what should rightfully belong to the sovereign Lord alone. The tower is the visible shape of an invisible desire for transcendence without repentance and glory without gift.

Third, the beating heart of the passage is Babel's creed, "let's make a name for ourselves." In Scripture, the concept of a "name" is not merely a label. It signifies identity, reputation, standing, and enduring legacy. To "make a name" is to establish a permanence that defies creaturely fragility. It is to secure significance by construction rather than by receiving it from the Creator.[29] The builders seek what fallen people always desire, that is, a righteousness they can point to, a glory they can manage, and a security they can maintain.[30]

Fourth, the motive clause matters: "so that we will not be scattered abroad." The people's ambition is fueled by fear. Dispersion feels like a threat, not a vocation. They imagine that their displacement will mean a loss of control, identity, and safety. So, this misguided and shortsighted group pursues unity as an absolute. Yet, when the compulsion for it dominates every decision, it becomes oppressive. Babel's unity (a single language, plan, and monument) is not that of love, but of self-preservation.

At this point, the theological conflict is clear. The Creator directs humanity to trust and obey him as they populate the earth. In response, these fallen individuals decide to consolidate their ambitions and efforts out of apprehension. Here, the tower of Babel is not simply an account about hubris. It is pride recruited to calm anxiety, along with an attempt to address creaturely vulnerability by building a substitute source of protection.

3.1.5 Divine descent and narrative irony: God "comes down" (v. 5)

Verse 5 is one of Scripture's sharpest moments of irony: "The Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the people were building." The humans envision a

tower whose "top reaches to the sky" (v. 4). Yet the narrator depicts the Creator as needing to come "down" to see it. The contrast is not cruel, but revelatory. Human grandiosity always looks smaller from the standpoint of God's supreme majesty.

The descent, however, is not only irony. It is also theologically significant. God's coming down shows that he is not absent from human projects. Neither is he apathetic to what people build. The Babel industrialists imagine they can shape their future without any reference to the Creator. The text quietly contradicts that delusion. God attends, assesses, and then acts.[31]

In the wider biblical arc, especially from a Lutheran, Christ-centered reading, this "coming down" also anticipates a pattern. The Lord's decisive works are not acts of human ascent, but divine descent. God's movement toward his creatures is the beginning of both judgment and mercy. The account about Babel shows both.

3.1.6 Judgment that restrains: one people, one purpose, and the danger of totalizing unity (v. 6)

In verse 6, the Creator declares, "If this is the first thing they are doing as one people, who all have one language, then nothing that they intend to do will be too difficult for them." This statement is often misunderstood as divine insecurity, as though the Lord feels threatened by human cleverness and ingenuity. Yet the text points elsewhere. God is not paranoid about being surpassed. His concern is that united sinners, amplified by technology and unrestrained by humility, can do terrible harm, especially when a society treats its central immortality project as unquestionable. The issue is not human capacity; rather, it is human curvature toward self.[32]

Expressed differently, the tower of Babel is a warning about the spiritual danger of frictionless coordination in a fallen world. Under the repressive control of rogue operatives, dissent becomes treason, difference becomes defect, and weakness becomes something to eliminate rather than to shoulder. Totalizing unity is never merely organizational; it is moral. It creates the conditions for unbridled and inhumane coercion. The Creator's intervention, therefore, is not an arbitrary sabotage of progress but a restraint on a scheme that treats creaturely life as raw material for self-salvation.

3.1.7 Confusion and scattering: the mercy inside the fracture (vv. 7–8)

Verses 7–8 describe the Creator's response: "Come, let's go down there and confuse their language, so that they cannot understand one another's speech." As a result, the "Lord scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth, and they stopped building the city." The phrasing "Come, let's go down" deliberately echoes the builders' own refrain. Babel's human council says, "Come, let's build" (v. 4), and God replies, in effect, "Come, let's act."

The parallel highlights a confrontation of wills. Fallen human beings coordinate for self-exaltation, and the Creator intervenes to prevent self-destruction. Here the Law-like character of the event is plain. God judges, disrupts, and blocks the idol-making project. Yet even the judgment is threaded with mercy. Confused language limits human overreach. It introduces friction into the machinery of unrestrained pride. It prevents a unified rebellion from hardening into a single, global, and totalitarian order.[33]

Admittedly, this is an uncomfortable mercy, yet it is mercy nonetheless. The Creator does not annihilate the builders; instead, he restrains them. He breaks the spell of their unanimity. He forces a kind of humility upon the human immortality project by reintroducing a necessary dependence on the need for translation, patience, local communities, and the slow, painstaking work of cultivating mutual understanding. While Babel's fracture is severe, it is also protective. It is judgment that curbs potentially unrestrained hubris.

3.1.8 Babel named: human "confusion" as theological commentary (v. 9)

Finally, verse 9 gives the place its name, "Babel," "because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth." Here, "Babel" sounds like the Hebrew word for confusion. The naming is a theological interpretation. History is not random; instead, it is morally charged. Human beings tried to "make a name" (v. 4) for themselves, but the enduring legacy attached to their project becomes a memorial of bewilderment. "Babel" (v. 9) is what happens when fallen people attempt to secure their eternal identity apart from the Creator. They end up with fragmentation they cannot remedy by their own self-engineered unity programs.[34]

Amazingly, it is precisely here that the canonical horizon opens. Genesis 11 does not end the biblical account. Instead, it intensifies its need. Now that human speech is fractured, how will communion be restored? Also, now that people scatter, how will the nations be gathered without coercion? The rest of Scripture answers not with a human tower but with the Creator's own descent. This occurs first in the incarnation of the Word and then climactically in the Cross, where the Son of God bears the curse of human pride and heals division not by force but by forgiving, redeeming grace.

3.2 Theological Application: Babel and the Lure of Bio-Enhancement

The tower of Babel becomes freshly intelligible when we recognize its logic in contemporary dress. The modern dream is rarely phrased as building a "tower whose top reaches to the sky" (v. 4), but it often carries the same spiritual grammar. Fallen human beings are self-deluded into imagining they can engineer their way

past vulnerability, secure their eternal future, and make a name that outlasts death. Transhumanism, especially in its more sweeping and militant forms, does not merely propose tools for healing; it offers a narrative of ascent. It is an implied salvation story in which finitude is the enemy and technology is the redeemer.[35]

The tower of Babel account helps us see that the deepest question is not "Can we do it?" but "What are we trusting it to do?" Brickmaking in Genesis 11 is not condemned because it is advanced; rather, it is indicted because it symbolizes a false hope. The builders convert a technological capability into an immortality project. Likewise, bio-enhancement becomes spiritually perilous when it shifts from serving embodied life to rewriting what embodied life is for. In that shift, enhancement ceases to be an instrument of mercy and becomes a mechanism to define what it means to be human.[36]

The parallels sharpen at three points:

1. *Name-making and the modern cult of optimization*. Babel seeks a "name," a self-secured identity. Today, "name" can be rebranded as legacy, platform, influence, or even the curated self that refuses limits. Bio-enhancement can easily become a liturgy of self-authoring: "I am what I can upgrade"; "I am what I can control"; "I am what I can extend."
2. *Fear of dispersal and the drive toward consolidation*. The builders fear scattering. Modern enhancement ideologies often fear dependence, whether on the body, community, time, mortality, or even God. The impulse is to centralize agency in the autonomous, normative self.[37] It is to become less contingent, interruptible, and needy. In contrast, the Gospel does not treat creaturely need as a scandal to erase, but as the place where divine mercy takes on human flesh.
3. *Uniformity as a false peace*. Babel's vision of a single, unified system mirrors modern initiatives to standardize by identifying "best traits," "ideal outcomes," and "optimal solutions." When enhancement becomes a social expectation rather than a freely chosen act of care, diversity is reframed as a defect, and any form of weakness becomes unacceptable. The account warns us that a frictionless unity among flawed individuals is rarely benign. Instead, such enforced conformity often creates the conditions necessary for coercion.

So then, Genesis 11 provides a crucial ethical and spiritual boundary. Technology must never be asked to carry eschatological weight. Tools can help, heal, and relieve, but they cannot justify, resurrect, or bestow the "name" that death cannot erase. When enhancement is treated as the route to a final, unending human future, it becomes a rival gospel. The tower of Babel account reminds us how such false gospels end with confusion, fracture, and the collapse of promised permanence.

3.3 Lutheran Integration: Law/Gospel, Divine Descent, and the Gift of the Name

A Lutheran reading of the tower of Babel account is clearest when it is framed by Law and Gospel, not as abstract categories, but as God's active work through his Word. For example, under the Law, Babel unmasks the sinful human heart (Jer 17:9). The tower is the architecture of works-righteousness. It is a visible achievement meant to secure what only the Creator can give.

The builders are not only manufacturing bricks. They are also making a claim. They want a future they can manage and a "name" they can guarantee. Here the Law does what God intended, to expose our inward curve, along with our instinct to treat gift as wage and vocation as self-salvation. Babel is what happens when humanity's technological "can" is harnessed to humanity's spiritual "must," namely, "I must secure myself," "I must justify myself," and "I must not be dispersed."

Yet even Babel's judgment carries a merciful restraint. While God's confusion of language is painful, it prevents something far worse. It undermines a totalizing human project that would have crushed difference and enthroned human glory. In Lutheran terms, this is a function of the Law in curbing sin in the civil realm (the left-hand kingdom).[38] God restrains evil not because he delights in human frustration, but because he refuses to let self-deification continue uninterrupted to its bitter and mortifying end.

Under the Gospel, the tower of Babel account is not answered by erecting a more glorious and enduring stairway to heaven but by a deeper descent. The Creator "comes down" at Babel to judge and restrain. Later, he comes down in Christ to save and raise. The Gospel does not teach that God meets us once we have climbed high enough to reach his sacred enclave. Rather, we learn that the Lord meets us precisely where we are scattered, confused, and unable to build our way back (1 John 4:10). This is why the pattern matters. Babel's descent anticipates the Incarnation's descent. Also, the fracture of human speech anticipates the Spirit's gift at Pentecost, not as a return to coercive uniformity, but as a communion created by God's grace across real differences (Acts 2:1–11; Rom 12:3–7; 1 Cor 12:1–31).

Most importantly, Lutheran theology relocates the "name" question. The tower of Babel episode says, "let's make a name for ourselves" (Gen 11:4). The Gospel says, "You are given a name you could never construct." In Christ, identity is received, not achieved. Also, in the waters of baptism, the Christian is named (Matt 28:19). It is not by personal accomplishment, optimized traits, or technological permanence. Rather, it is by belonging to the crucified and risen Lord. The deepest human longing that Babel misdirects, the heartfelt desire for a lasting name, is not mocked by the Creator. Instead, he answers it through the pure gift of his grace in Christ.

That re-centering yields practical ethical clarity for bio-enhancement in three ways:

1. *Technology as vocation*: We can affirm medicine, prosthetics, and even sophisticated interventions as genuine mercies, that is, "masks of God" through which we serve our neighbor. Yet because vocation can be distorted by greed, pride, or self-interest, the use of technology within our callings demands continual spiritual discernment.
2. *Technology as temptation*: We resist enhancement as "name-making," as an immortality project of self-transcendence that treats finitude as a curse rather than the arena where the Creator meets us in the flesh.
3. *Hope as resurrection, not redesign*: The Christian neither despises the body nor idolizes it. We care for it as a creaturely gift, and we refuse to treat its limits as evidence that God has failed. Our final transformation is promised in Christ's resurrection, not engineered by our own ascent.

Seen in this way, the tower of Babel account does not call the Church to reject technology; instead, it summons the body of Christ to resist technological idolatry. Believers refuse the propaganda that says salvation comes by upgrade rather than by grace. Also, the biblical narrative invites a posture that is both humble and active. It is humble because we are creatures who cannot build our way into the heavens; and it is active because we are neighbors who can use tools in love while waiting for the coming eternal kingdom of grace, mercy, and righteousness that God alone can give in Christ.[39]

4.0 Philippians 2:5–11: *Kenosis* in an Era of Self-Optimization[40]

If the tower of Babel account recorded in Genesis 11:1–9 exposes the longstanding temptation to build a future we can control, Philippians 2:5–11 reveals God's wholly different way of securing the future for us. It is not by human ascent, but by divine descent. The tower's builders said, in effect, "Let us make a name." Paul announces the Father's countermovement. God gives the name, yet by way of the Son's self-emptying and the shame of the Cross. Where self-optimization promises a curated glory through upgrades and ever-higher performance, the Gospel unveils a glory that comes hidden inside humility, obedience, and suffering love.[41]

This truth matters now because the "salvation stories" prevalent in the Global North rarely sound religious, yet they still preach. They tell us how to become whole through relentless self-improvement: more efficient, disciplined, enhanced, and untouchable by weakness. Even when the aims are understandable (such as less pain, fewer limits, and a longer health span), the spiritual grammar can quietly shift. The body becomes a problem to solve, finitude becomes a flaw to erase, and

dependence becomes an embarrassment. In that setting, Philippians 2:5–11 does not merely offer moral advice about humility; it proclaims Christ. He is the eternal Son who refused to treat equality with God as a prize to exploit, who emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, and who was exalted precisely through the Cross.

From there, Paul draws the Church into that cruciform pattern. It is not as a ladder to earn God's favor, but as the shape of life that flows from grace already given. This is where the Lutheran accent is crucial. The passage calls Christians to a disposition and a way of life, but it does so as a result of receiving the gift. Christ's self-humbling is first a saving act for us before it becomes a pattern in us. Only when the Cross is received as sheer mercy does the Church become free to resist the tyranny of self-optimization and to practice a more human, more neighbor-facing way of being in the world.[42]

4.1 Exegetical Analysis of Philippians 2:5–11

4.1.1 The pastoral context: a communal "attitude," not a private self-project (v. 5)

Paul's command is strikingly corporate: "let this attitude be in you." The target is not merely an individual preference, but the shared life of a community tempted toward rivalry, status-seeking, and self-protection. The Greek verb translated "attitude" is not limited to one's inner feelings. It includes orientation, practical judgment, and the posture that shapes how we treat other people. Paul is not promoting a private spirituality of self-improvement. Instead, he is forming a cross-centered people whose shared life reflects the self-giving love they have received in Christ.

That difference matters in an era of self-optimization. Much of modern "improvement" language assumes life is a solo project: craft the best version of yourself; maximize your value; eliminate weakness; and outperform the competition. Paul pushes in the opposite direction. The Christian life is not a solitary climb toward superiority, but a shared life in which the strong bend toward the weak, the honored make room for the overlooked, and the whole community learns to count others more significant than themselves (a truth emphasized in vv. 1–4). The "mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16) is therefore not a technique; rather, it is participation in the life of the One who gave himself for the lost at Calvary.[43]

4.1.2 Christ's eternal preexistence and true deity: "by nature God" (v. 6a)

Paul begins not with Bethlehem, but with eternity. Christ was "by nature God" (or "in the form of God"). The phrase does not mean Jesus merely resembled God or played a divine role. It points to Jesus' true divine status, that is, his full sharing in the reality and glory that belongs to the triune Godhead. This opening clause safeguards the paradox at the heart of the passage. The one who goes low is not

a creature grasping upward. He is the eternal Son who already possesses what no creature can seize.

That is the first theological shock. The account Paul tells is not about a superhero who climbs up toward divinity. It is about the truly divine one who chooses the downward path. In a world of "becoming more," verse 6 begins by recounting the one who already is fully God. He lacks nothing, needs no upgrade, and is threatened by no limitation. From that fullness, he moves freely and deliberately toward fallen, sinful humanity.

4.1.3 Not a "prize to be displayed": refusing divine privilege as self-advantage (v. 6b)

Paul reveals that Christ did not "consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed." This could also be rendered as "something to be exploited" or "used for advantage." Less likely is the view that the *harpagmos* clause refers to an attribute not possessed that must be either seized or grasped. The key idea is not that Jesus lacked equality and tried not to reach for it. The language evokes the posture of maximizing one's rightful privilege. It is the notion of using power to shield oneself from suffering, avoid vulnerability, or secure a comfortable distance from the lowly.

This is where the passage presses directly against the instinct behind self-optimization. At its root, achieving perfection is an attempt to reduce one's vulnerability. It is to become less interruptible, less needy, less exposed to pain, aging, and limitation. Christ does the opposite. Though he has every right to remain above our fragility, he does not cling to his rightful, kingly prerogatives. He does not use his divinity as a barrier between himself and our weakness. He also does not treat glory as something to guard for his own comfort.[44]

4.1.4 "He emptied himself": not subtraction of deity, but addition of servanthood (v. 7)

Next comes the Greek verb that has generated centuries of discussion: "he emptied himself" (*ekenōsen*). Yet the passage itself explains what that "emptying" means. Consequently, we need not imagine that the Son stopped being divine or poured divinity out of himself like liquid from a cup. Paul does not define the emptying as losing something, but as "taking the nature (or form) of a servant" and being "born in human likeness."

The divestment, then, is not a subtraction of Godhood but a willing embrace of lowliness. It is the Son's decision to live his eternal, divine existence under human conditions, including hunger, fatigue, dependence, misunderstanding, rejection, and pain. He does not cease to be who he is. Instead, he chooses to be who he is for the lost in a new way, namely, close enough to bleed and close enough to die.

Paul's wording is careful and precise. Just as Christ was "by nature God" (v. 6), so now he takes the "nature of a servant" (literally, a "slave"; v. 7). The parallel is intentional. The one who truly shares the essence of the Father and the Spirit likewise genuinely embraces a servant's status. This is not virtue signaling; it is a real entry into the conditions of humble and sacrificial service. In Scripture, this involves self-giving for the good of others. It is precisely what an ego-optimization mindset shuns to perfect the self.

Here, the Incarnation is not presented as an inspirational example of humility; rather, it is the concrete means of our salvation. The Son's self-emptying is his solidarity with the same people optimization cultures often overlook, especially, the weak, fragile, failing, and dependent. Jesus of Nazareth does not stand over them as an unattainable ideal; instead, he stands with them as their Redeemer.[45]

4.1.5 "He humbled himself": obedience all the way down (v. 8)

Paul intensifies Christ's descent with a sequence of phrases that move step by step toward the nadir of his humiliation. Verse 7 states that Jesus of Nazareth was "born in human likeness." Also, his "appearance was like that of any other man" (literally, "was found in appearance as a man").

Verse 8 reveals that the Messiah went further in his self-sacrificing journey by humbling himself and becoming "obedient to the point of death." This especially included dying on the Cross as an atoning sacrifice for humanity's sins (2 Cor 5:21). The rhetorical piling up is deliberate. Paul is not merely stating that Jesus died. The apostle is tracing the manner and depth of Christ's self-giving, so that the Church sees what kind of Lord he is, and therefore what kind of redemptive life flows from him.

The Messiah's humility is not an invisible spiritual attitude, but a publicly recognizable existence lived under the ordinary conditions of humanity. The Son's self-emptying becomes a historical, embodied reality that can be seen, rejected, misunderstood, and finally executed at Calvary. Salvation does not happen at a safe distance from the material world.

Christ's humiliation is neither an accident nor the tragic outcome of political forces. It is chosen, not because suffering is intrinsically good, but because divine love is willing to be abased for the sake of the beloved. This guards the Gospel from being reduced to a lamentable account about a good man crushed by the overwhelming forces of injustice.

Paul identifies the shape of Christ's humility as obedience. This is not portrayed as begrudging compliance with arbitrary rules, but as the Son's faithful submission to the Father's saving will. In Lutheran terms, this is saving obedience. Jesus does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Paul describes the Messiah's obedience at

its extreme, namely, to the "point of death" (Phil 2:8). The Son does not circumvent death; instead, he goes through it, or as Hebrews 2:9 declares, he fully experiences "death for everyone."

Paul adds the phrase "even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). In the apostle's day, crucifixion was designed to degrade and publicly shame. Here the theology of the Cross becomes unavoidable. God's glory is revealed "under the opposite," where human eyes least expect it. The apostle clarifies that the Son's divestment is a deliberate embrace of servant-like obedience that goes all the way to an ignominious end.

4.1.6 "Therefore God also highly exalted him": the Father's vindication of the crucified Son (v. 9)

Verse 9 begins with "Therefore" (*dio*, "for this reason"). Paul is stating a divine logic. Christ's exaltation is the Father's answer to the Son's humiliation. This is vindication, not bargaining. The Cross is not an embarrassing detour that must be corrected by a subsequent bestowal of glory. Rather, it is the path the Father deliberately chose, and the exaltation is his public "Yes" to that path.

"God also highly exalted him" does not signal an increase in deity but the public installation of the crucified Son as Lord. The Father sets before the world what faith already confesses. The One who was shamed is the rightful King of the entire universe. God also bestowed on the Messiah the "name that is above every name." We learn that the Father gives; the Son does not seize. The movement is gift, not grasping.

The "name" given to the exalted Christ is the public manifestation of the divine majesty and saving lordship that he possessed eternally. This exaltation denotes no ontological change, but rather the glorification and exercise of his divinity in his human nature. "Lord" (*kyrios*; v. 11) is thus neither a magical word nor a mere title, but the confessed reality that the crucified and risen Son is true God and true man. The apostle's "therefore" (*dio*; v. 9) should be read as Gospel proclamation, not Law. Christ's humiliation did not earn his exaltation; it accomplished our eternal salvation. Thus, the Father's exaltation of the Son is the declaration that redemption is complete. The believers' humility flows from this grace as its fruit, not as a condition for reward (for example, "humble yourself sufficiently, and God will exalt you").

4.1.7 "So that … every knee will bow": the purpose of exaltation and the scope of Christ's lordship (v. 10)

Verse 10 ties the Father's exaltation of the Son to a public, cosmic aim: that all creation (personified) acknowledges Jesus' supreme power and everlasting jurisdiction. The phrase rendered "at the name of Jesus" points to confessed authority and worshipful homage. "Every knee will bow" depicts comprehensive submission and reverence. It is creation's acknowledgement of Christ's rightful rule. This is both sobering and

comforting: sobering because no rival potentate remains standing, and comforting because the Sovereign before whom all bow is the one who first bowed low for us.

Paul's threefold sweep—"in heaven and on earth and under the earth"—signals that no realm lies outside Christ's dominion. It is a rhetorical way of saying the Messiah's lordship is universal. The Old Testament resonance matters. The apostle's prose echoes worship language reserved for Yahweh, now centered on Jesus.[46] The apostle's statement is not narrowing hope to the measurable world. Instead, it widens the believers' confident expectation to the reality of Christ's universal reign.

4.1.8 "Every tongue will confess": the universal acclamation that completes the hymn (v. 11)

Verse 11 completes verse 10. If "every knee" denotes universal homage, then "every tongue" (v. 11) depicts open acknowledgement. It is the assent of creation (personified) to the identity and authority of the crucified and exalted Messiah. The Greek verb rendered "confess" is not merely a bare, reluctant admission. Rather, it carries a richness that can include praise and thanksgiving. The point is not a forced slogan but the fitting acknowledgement of reality.

The content is precise, specifically, "Jesus Christ is Lord." In keeping with what was noted above, "Lord" (*kyrios*) is the term the Septuagint regularly uses for the divine name, Yahweh.[47] The implication is that the confession belongs in the sphere of worship. Moreover, it is to the "glory of God the Father." Christ's sovereignty and majesty do not compete with that belonging to the Father; instead, these attributes reveal him with clarity (John 1:18). Jesus' exaltation results not in self-congratulation but in God's glorification (17:4–5).

In summation, Philippians 2:5–11 unfolds as a single, coherent movement. The eternal Son refuses to treat his divine status as self-advantage, enters our ordinary human condition as a bondservant, and carries that lowly obedience to the shame of crucifixion. Then the Father responds to the Son's cruciform obedience by raising him to the highest honor, granting him the supreme name, so that all creation across every realm must finally acknowledge aloud what faith confesses now: "Jesus Christ is Lord." In turn, this open affirmation magnifies, rather than competes with, the "glory" of the Father (and the Spirit).[48]

4.2 Canonical Connections to Hebrews 2

Hebrews 2 opens with a claim that sets the horizon. The coming inhabited world is not subjected to angels. This situates the discussion within God's forward-looking purpose for humanity. The author cites Psalm 8 to show that God intended human beings, who are frail creatures remembered by God, to be crowned with honor and entrusted with stewardship. Yet Hebrews 2 also insists on the solemn tension that we do not presently see everything arranged under human dominion. This realism

refuses the urge to treat the human condition as a project we can complete by dogged resolve and clever ingenuity.

Where Philippians 2 narrates the Son's downward movement as taking the servant's form, Hebrews 2 presents it as being made "for a little while" lower than angels. Both texts insist that God does not redeem from a safe distance. The Son comes close enough to bear weakness, mortality, and the burden of death. Furthermore, Hebrews 2:9 declares that Jesus is "crowned … with glory and honor" because of his suffering death, and that by the grace of God, Jesus endures death for everyone. This matches the pattern of Philippians 2. The cross-shaped path is the route God chose to disclose and enact his saving purpose. The turning point is not evasion, but Christ's death undertaken for the lost.

Hebrews 2 is candid. We do not yet see the promised ordering of creation fully displayed, and yet the eyes of faith recognize Jesus as the already-secured fulfillment of God's intent. Philippians 2 parallels this with its horizon of universal acknowledgement. The final truth about the Messiah will one day be openly confessed. Based on these two passages, Christians can welcome temporary, earthly blessings without expecting transhumanist technologies to achieve the eternal perfection that Scripture reserves for the Son's rule.

Moreover, Hebrews 2 reads Psalm 8 as truly about humanity and insists the "not yet" remains about humanity's vocation, which Jesus repairs and fulfills. Philippians 2 locates the final shape of human life in the reign of the crucified and exalted Christ. Taken together, both texts clarify the boundary line, namely, humanity's future is not a product of self-transcendence, but a gift received in Christ. Hebrews 2 and Philippians 2 likewise teach that God's way of restoring humanity runs through the Messiah's lowliness and suffering love, and that the Father's vindication of that path defines what "glory" actually is. That canonical harmony sets the stage for ethical discernment in an age obsessed with the pursuit of self-optimization.[49]

4.3 Theological Application: *Kenosis*, Embodiment, and Discernment in a Culture of Self-Optimization

If Hebrews and Philippians together teach that God's "way up" runs through the Messiah's lowliness, then the Church's ethical task is not difficult to name, only challenging to practice. We are called to live as people who refuse to treat creaturely limits as ultimate enemies and technological power as a rival redeemer. So then, the question is not whether believers may use advanced tools. Instead, it is whether our use of these aligns with Christ's self-giving love or quietly retrains our hearts to pursue a different gospel, one that promises life by upgrade rather than by grace.

Admittedly, self-optimization rarely announces itself as idolatry. It often appears to foster virtues such as discipline, aspiration, responsibility, and self-care. Yet the heart of the immortality project can subtly take on a religious connotation. It offers

a creed ("you are what you improve"), a liturgy (tracking, measuring, and refining), and a vision of salvation (a future secured by mastery over weakness). Philippians 2 places that entire endeavor under a bright light. God is not revealed by Christ insulating himself from vulnerability. The Son discloses the Father by drawing near to the vulnerable, entering our limits, and giving himself away.

Here, Christian anthropology is not embarrassed by the body. Scripture does not treat enfleshment as an early stage to surpass, as though salvation were graduation into pure mind. The Son of God did not bring salvation to the lost by abandoning flesh. Rather, he saved us by taking it, honoring it, suffering in it, and raising it to new life.[50] On the one hand, weakness is not intrinsically good, and the Church should not romanticize pain. Yet, on the other hand, weakness is not meaningless. It is the condition Christ embraced to redeem us, and therefore frailty cannot be treated as sheer disgrace.[51]

The implication is that believers are free to receive medical and technological help with gratitude. Even so, the same freedom also permits refusal, especially the false narrative that says our worth depends either on our performance or our longevity. A useful way to express this truth is to distinguish servant-tools from savior-tools. Servant-tools aim at healing, relief, and assistance that enable ordinary human life. Savior-tools claim (whether explicitly or implicitly) to deliver what only God promises: escape from finitude, conquest of death as an ultimate reality, or a new kind of "humanity" grounded in engineered superiority.[52]

In Philippians 2, Paul's summons is communal. The Church's witness is not only defined by personal restraint. It is also a shared way of life that contradicts the loneliness of optimization culture. When a society trains people to curate, protect, and improve the self, the Church becomes a place where people learn to receive life as gift, to confess their brokenness without shame, and to honor the weak as indispensable members of Christ's body.

4.4 Lutheran Integration: Law/Gospel Clarity, the Theology of the Cross, and Technology as Vocation

The canonical witness this essay has traced does not merely inform a Lutheran approach to transhumanist desire; it stabilizes it. Lutheran theology refuses two equal and opposite errors: making ethics into a ladder for earning righteousness and shrugging off ethical discernment as though grace rendered created life morally weightless. The pattern of Philippians 2:5–11, read alongside Hebrews 2:5–9 and the Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11:1–9, allows robust technological use as a work of mercy while denying technology the role of a pseudo-savior.

God's decisive self-revelation is not found where human beings instinctively look for it, that is, in visible strength, control, and invulnerability. Instead, it is found in the suffering Messiah and the Cross. This is not a lionizing of pain; rather, it is

a refusal to lie about where God has promised to be for sinners. The Christian can pursue healing vigorously and still confess that final deliverance does not come by escaping the body, but by the crucified and risen Lord who redeems embodied life.

The Law exposes the heart's bent toward self-salvation. This is seen in fallen humanity's desire to secure a "name," to outrun dependence, and to make death negotiable by ingenuity. The Gospel does not merely reprove our grasping. It also announces that Christ has already borne what we cannot fix and has been vindicated by the Father for doing so. Where the Law unmasks the false gospel of "salvation by improvement," the true Gospel grants the freedom to receive creaturely life as gift and to use tools without venerating them.

A Lutheran reading of Philippians 2:5–11 is careful. The Christlike "attitude" is not first a program for spiritual achievement; instead, it flows from Jesus' saving work already given for us. Righteousness before God is received, not produced. Consequently, the Son's self-emptying is not a burdensome demand to imitate, but a liberating gift that shapes us for self-giving love to our neighbor.

God cares for the world through ordinary means (such as people, institutions, and technologies) so that human beings can heal, shelter, and protect one another. Within that framework, medical interventions and assistive devices can be received as mercies. Yet vocation supplies a boundary. Tools are for love of neighbor, not for self-deification. When enhancement becomes a bid for superiority or a means of securing identity, vocation is no longer the governing aim.

Lutheran realism helps keep the conversation steady. Christians may support technological development that alleviates suffering and serves temporal goods, without pretending that such work delivers the kingdom of God. The idolization of technology (*technolatry*) treats penultimate goods as the basis to achieve ultimate redemption. In contrast, an inordinate fear of technology (*technophobia*) rejects penultimate goods because they cannot secure freedom from human frailty. Lutheran theology avoids both extremes by refusing to confuse what technology can do (offer real help) with what only God can do (save, justify, raise the dead, and make all things new in Christ).[53]

Believers can affirm vigorous technological mercy while resisting enhancement narratives that redefine human dignity in terms of capacity, productivity, or engineered superiority. Christians can also refuse the religious dogma of escape, because the Son's saving path honors the body and promises its redemption, not its replacement. Lutheran integration yields a cruciform compass. The closer a practice moves toward serving the neighbor within creaturely life, the more naturally it fits vocation. Oppositely, the more it moves toward securing the self against creaturely life, the more it begins to mimic the tower of Babel delusion and contradict the mind of Christ.

5.0 Addressing Objections

At least two objections surface whenever transhumanism is critiqued on theological grounds.[54] The first appeals to human calling: "Aren't people meant to create, improve, and heal?" The second questions posture: "Isn't this just fear of progress?" Both deserve a serious reply. Christianity is not allergic to innovation, and it does not sanctify suffering. Yet the central issue remains one of spiritual weight, specifically, whether technology is received as a tool of mercy within creaturely life or trusted as a deliverer from creaturely life. The distinction is not subtle. It is the difference between vocation and salvation-by-design.[55]

5.1 The "Co-Creator" Defense

The "co-creator" defense often begins well. Human beings are commanded to cultivate and steward the earth (Gen 1:28), and Christians have long recognized that medicine, engineering, and agriculture can serve the neighbor. Within a Lutheran construct, such work belongs to vocation. God provides sustenance through ordinary means, such as hands, institutions, and tools. In this sense, it is correct to reject a passive piety that treats the world as if it should only be endured.

Yet the problem is not whether humans make and mend. The issue is what kind of future we imagine those efforts can secure. The term "co-creator" can quietly inflate human agency until it begins to sound like "co-redeemer." Scripture does not present finitude as a mistake awaiting correction. Psalm 8 portrays humanity as frail yet crowned by divine gift, while Hebrews 2:5–9 asserts that crown is fulfilled in the Messiah. The movement is not human ascent into invulnerability, but divine descent into vulnerability, followed by resurrection and exaltation. The Christian hope is grounded in what God gives, not what people engineer.

This distinction helps clarify an ethical boundary without resorting to slogans. Therapies that restore or support ordinary embodied life typically align with neighbor-love. They aim at healing, relief, and participation in daily callings. Enhancement-as-salvation, by contrast, aims at overcoming embodied life by treating dependence as indignity and mortality as a technical embarrassment. The difference is not that one uses advanced tools and the other does not. Rather, it is the narrative each practice communicates about what it means to be human and what we are allowed to hope for.[56]

A prosthetic that helps a person walk, an implant that restores hearing, or a treatment that slows degenerative disease can be received as mercy precisely because it does not require the body to be despised in order to be helped. Yet the same technologies can be framed and eventually demanded within a narrative of optimization in which "normal" becomes an obsolete category and "unaugmented" becomes a failure. When that shift occurs, the neighbor's good quietly yields to a

new moral economy. Superiority is praised, weakness is penalized, and the human person is valued by capacity.

Here the Law/Gospel distinction brings needed clarity. The Law exposes the heart's recurring temptation to convert gift into wage and creaturely limits into shame. It names the spiritual drift that turns technological power into a righteousness project, that is, a modern form of making a "name" (Gen 11:4). The Gospel does not reprimand longing. Instead, it fulfills it with a promise that technology cannot keep. Our final rescue from death is not an upgrade but a gift, specifically union with the crucified and risen Christ, who entered our weakness "for a little while" and secured redeemed humanity's destiny in himself (Heb 2:5–9). Therefore, Christians may robustly affirm human creativity while refusing to assign it an ultimate task.

The practical question, then, is not merely "Can we?" but "What are we trusting this to do?" If a technology is expected to confer final identity, secure ultimate meaning, or neutralize death's certainty, it has crossed from tool to idol. Vocation remains wide enough for innovation and narrow enough to resist self-deification.

5.2 The "Luddite" Accusation

The second objection focuses on tone rather than logic by asking, "Isn't this critique just technophobia disguised as religious concern?" That query is understandable. Christians can romanticize "naturalness" and treat any intervention as suspect, as if refusing help were a mark of holiness. Such a posture is neither compassionate nor faithful. The believer who prays "deliver us from evil" (or the "Evil One"; Matt 6:13) is not required to pretend that disease is beneficial or pain is virtuous.

Still, the critique offered here is not anti-technology; it is anti-technolatry. The target is not the use of tools for healing but the elevation of tools into a saving horizon. In many transhumanist accounts, suffering becomes meaningless by definition, finitude becomes intolerable, and death becomes an engineering problem. That is not simply a medical ambition; rather, it is a rival eschatology. It asks technology to deliver what Scripture reserves for the Father's act in the Son, specifically, the defeat of death and the renewal of redeemed humanity.[57]

A Lutheran theology of the Cross can hold two truths together without contradiction. First, suffering is an evil to be resisted, and Christians may pursue healing with vigor and gratitude. Second, the elimination of suffering cannot become the ground of hope, because God has located the believers' confident expectation in the crucified Messiah. He alone meets sinners "under the opposite" and in the resurrection that no technique can produce. The Cross does not glorify pain. Instead, it proclaims the truth about where God has pledged to be for the weak, the fearful, and the dying.

This is why the "Luddite" label fails. A Luddite rejects technology simply because it is technology. The Church's calling is more demanding. Use technology

for love of neighbor while refusing to venerate it. That refusal is not indifference to suffering; rather, it is protection against a deeper cruelty. When technology is treated as a pseudo-savior, it eventually demands sacrifices. The weak become problems to solve, the dependent become burdens to manage, and the unenhanced become "irresponsible" or "left behind." A society that cannot tolerate limits will struggle to affirm the inherent value of limited people.[58]

Pastorally, these distinctions matter. Many who live with disability or chronic illness rely on assistive technologies as genuine mercy. A Christian critique of transhumanism must never imply that receiving help is a failure of faith. The question is not whether we accept aid. Instead, the issue is whether we accept a new hierarchy of worth in which dignity rises and falls with performance, productivity, or engineered advantage. The Gospel rejects that hierarchy. Christ identifies with the lowly and gives himself for them. Therefore, the Church should be the place where need is not shameful and strength is not a claim to superiority.

Finally, Christians may encourage research and innovation while evaluating and critiquing the promises attached to them. We can pursue penultimate goods (such as health, relief, and safety) without demanding that they deliver ultimate goods (such as righteousness, immortality, and the final ordering of the world to come). That is not a fear of progress. Rather, it is theological realism shaped by the candor of Hebrews 2:8 ("we do not yet see everything in subjection") and the Church's assurance ("but we look to Jesus"; v. 9). In short, technology may be a servant of mercy, but it must not be asked to become a rival redeemer.[59]

6.0 Conclusion

Transhumanism raises questions that are not primarily technical but theological. What is a human being, what is our destiny, and where may ultimate hope rest? Many enhancement proposals pursue genuine aims, such as healing, relief, and extended capacity for service. Yet transhumanism often gathers those objectives into a larger promise, namely, deliverance from finitude itself, and a future secured by human design. The Gospel does not deny the longing that animates such hopes; it names it honestly. It then locates its fulfillment where it actually belongs, in the crucified and risen Messiah, who alone can carry the salvific weight of redeemed humanity's eternal future.

6.1 Synthesis

This essay has argued that Scripture's canonical pattern consistently resists salvation-by-ascent. Psalm 8 grounds human dignity in God's gift. Frail humanity is remembered and crowned by divine generosity, not by autonomous achievement.

Hebrews 2:5–9 then makes the decisive Christological claim that Psalm 8's promise is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. The passage's realism is also a rebuke to modern impatience. Human mastery is incomplete and will remain so until God's eternal kingdom is openly disclosed. Hope, therefore, is not engineered on our timetable but secured in the Son who tasted "death for everyone" (Heb 2:9).

From there, Genesis 11:1–9 exposes how technology becomes spiritually perilous when it is recruited into an immortality project. The tower of Babel episode is not an anti-innovation fable. Rather, it is a diagnosis of the heart's shift from trust to self-securing construction: "let's make a name for ourselves." Ingenuity amplifies a deeper fear of scattering, dependence, and vulnerability. The result is not only pride but also a totalizing unity that cannot tolerate weakness or difference. God's disruption is judgment, yet also restraint. It is a severe mercy that limits harm when sinners coordinate without humility.

Philippians 2:5–11 supplies the Bible's countermovement. Where Babel reaches upward, Christ comes downward. The eternal Son refuses to treat equality with God as self-advantage and takes the form of a servant, humbling himself to death on a cross. This is not only an ethical example; it is also the saving way God chose. In an era of self-optimization, the passage redefines glory. It is not invulnerability achieved through self-improvement, but divine love revealed through self-giving. The Gospel's path does not bypass creatureliness; rather, it redeems it from within.

These texts yield an incisive conclusion. Technology may serve penultimate benefits (such as repair, relief, and assistance), yet it must not be asked to deliver ultimate goods (such as justification, death's defeat, and God's eternal kingdom). When enhancement is framed as salvation, it becomes a rival gospel. It is a crown without the cross, a future without promise, and a "name" secured without grace.

6.2 Distinctive Lutheran Contribution

As the citations in this essay show, research on the ethics of transhumanism from a Christian perspective is growing rapidly. A Lutheran approach clarifies this debate by maintaining a distinction between gift and grasping, and by speaking with equal candor about sin and grace. The Law/Gospel distinction functions as a theological safeguard. The Law does not simply warn against obvious vice. It also exposes the heart's subtle drive to turn even good pursuits into righteousness projects. People want a security they can manage, an identity they can display, and a future they can control. Transhumanism intensifies that temptation by offering technical means that appear to place the limits of creaturely life on the negotiable list. The Law tells the truth about this drift before it hardens into idolatry.

This diagnostic use of the Law is essential because the struggle against a theology of glory is not only external but internal. It persists even in believers, who remain at

once righteous in Christ and still sinners. Even the redeemed are continually enticed to treat technology as a means of self-justification, especially by trying to quiet the anxiety of creaturely limits through control rather than through faith. Indeed, the impulse to build a private tower of "Babel" does not disappear at conversion. It must be drowned daily through repentance and a renewed understanding of one's identity in Christ.

Concerning the Gospel, it does more than correct a misplaced hope. It gives what the Law demands but cannot supply, specifically, a righteousness from God and a hope grounded outside the self. Christ does not redeem by lifting us out of finitude, but by entering it. This includes taking flesh, bearing sin, suffering death, and rising for our justification and life. This grace-forward center prevents two equal and opposite errors. It resists technophobia that refuses genuine mercies, and it resists technolatry that enthrones human technique. Because salvation is received, not achieved, Christians are freed to use tools without needing them to secure meaning, worth, or destiny.

Here the theology of the Cross is especially clarifying. A theology of glory looks for God in visible strength, control, and upward movement. The Cross teaches that God reveals himself "under the opposite" in the suffering Christ. Moreover, any theology that seeks God in visible strength, rational mastery, or technological triumph is not only morally mistaken but also fundamentally misguided in its way of knowing God.

A theology of the Cross does not romanticize pain; instead, it anchors hope where God has promised to be for sinners. It also protects the weak. In a culture trained to prize optimization, the Cross insists that dignity is not measured by performance. The crucified Lord meets human beings in dependence and gives them a future by promise, not by progress.

Lutheran vocation then restores technology to its proper role. God often cares for neighbors through ordinary means (such as skills, institutions, medicines, and devices) so that the Church can affirm robust engagement with healing arts as works of mercy. Yet vocation also draws the boundary. Tools are for loving the neighbor within embodied life, not for escaping an earthbound existence. When technology becomes a ladder to self-deification or a substitute for resurrection hope, it has exceeded its calling.

6.3 Final Charge

The Church should not respond to the transhumanist desire with either mockery or panic. The longing beneath it, such as deliverance from suffering, a lasting name, or life that death cannot steal, is a human aspiration Scripture takes seriously. The Christian answer is not to deny these sorts of yearnings, but to locate their fulfillment in the Messiah.

Practically, this essay calls for technological sobriety. Christians may pursue healing vigorously and receive medical advances with gratitude, while refusing to treat them as ultimate. We can support innovation that relieves suffering without adopting the propaganda that finitude is a defect and death is negotiable by design. We can use tools as servants of mercy while resisting their promotion into pseudo-saviors.

This posture also shapes the Church's public witness. If enhancement becomes an expectation, the vulnerable will be pressured to justify their continued existence by increasing their capacity. The Church must resist that insidious logic by embodying a different measure of worth. It is one that affirms baptismal identity rather than engineered advantage, neighbor-love rather than self-optimization, and resurrection hope rather than the indefinite extension of temporal existence. The faith community formed by the Cross must remain a place where need is not shameful, where weakness is not despised, and where persons are not valued by their output.

In sum, the Christian life combines active mercy with patient hope. We work for penultimate goods without confusing them with God's eternal kingdom. We refuse to build modern towers that promise a crown without the Cross. We also confess, with quiet assurance, that the future of redeemed humanity is not a technological achievement but a divine gift. It is the new humanity in Christ, given through the crucified and risen Messiah and consummated in the resurrection of the dead.

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Notes

1. Authorship and Use of AI: This essay is the author's scholarly work, and the author accepts full responsibility for its arguments, evidence, and conclusions. AI tools were used in a limited support role: flagging potential sources for the author's independent review, suggesting alternative organizational arrangements, and revising author-drafted prose at the sentence level. AI did not originate the essay's reasoning, theological claims, exegetical conclusions, Lutheran confessional judgments, or constructive proposals. The author independently evaluated every substantive suggestion, verified every cited source, and checked relevant claims against primary texts, established scholarly methods, and peer-reviewed research.
2. See Michael Latzer, "Digitalization, AI and the Rise of Techno-Religion: Transhumanist Promises and the Challenge to Enlightenment," *Telecommunications Policy* 50 (2026): 103115. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2025.103115; Katleho Mokoena, "Transcendence in African Spirituality and the Techno-Utopia," *Practical Theology* 18, no. 2 (2025): 139–151. https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2025.2477336.

3. In classic Lutheran usage, the "mask of God" refers primarily to divine care delivered through the neighbor in vocation (such as feeding through farmers, protecting through magistrates, and healing through physicians). Here the concept is applied secondarily to the tools and structures those neighbors use, so that technologies remain instruments of mediated care rather than independent "masks" alongside persons. See Kimbell Kornu, "The Pilgrim's Progress or Regress? The Case of Transhumanism and Deification," *Religions* 15, no. 8 (2024): 904. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080904; William G. Fredstrom, "Wendell Berry and Martin Luther on Creatureliness in a Technological Age," *Lutheran Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2025): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1353/lut.2025.a950806.

4. See J. Menacho and L. Puig-Puig, "In Tech We Trust? On Salvation through Technology," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 60, no. 3 (2025): 677–99. https://doi.org/10.16995/zygon.16878; W. W. Suwanto, "Transcendence or Transformation: A Theological Critique of AI Transhumanism and Union with Christ," *Jurnal Jaffray* 23, no. 1 (2025): 1–34. https://doi.org/10.25278/jj.v23i1.1007.

5. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Evangelical Heritage Version, 2019 Wartburg Project, Inc. All rights reserved.

6. See Daekyung Jung, "Transhumanism and Theological Anthropology: A Theological Examination of Transhumanism," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 64, no. 2 (2022): 172–94. https://doi.org/10.1515/nzsth-2022-0009; Wiesław Łużyński, "Christian Hope and the Promise of Transhumanism: The Perspective of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI," *Collectanea Theologica* 94, no. 4 (2024): 199–211. https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2024.94.4.07.

7. For an explanation concerning how a Lutheran framework for faithful medical practice within secular institutions could be constructed, see Dan Lioy, "The *Imago Dei* in the ICU: Why Every Patient Matters," *Verba Vitae* 3, no. 2 (August 10, 2026): 9–46. https://verba-vitae.org/index.php/vvj/article/view/128.

8. See John H. Evans, "The Theological Debate Over Human Enhancement: An Empirical Case Study of a Mediating Organization," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 55, no. 3 (2020): 615–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12619; Ted Peters, "*Imago Dei*, DNA, and the Transhuman Way," *Theology and Science* 16, no. 3 (2018): 353–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2018.1488529.

9. For an explanation concerning why competence in scholarly exegesis, anchored in Hebrew and Greek, remains essential, see Dan Lioy, "Why the Words Still Matter: Recovering Biblical Languages as an Act of Pastoral Love," *Promissio: A Journal of Confessing Theology* 1, no. 1 (2026): 37. https://promissio.ilt.edu/index.php/pj/article/view/84.

10. Here a distinction is made between created goods that serve life within time from eschatological goods that only the Father secures through the Son.

11. See Denis Alexander, "Enhancing Humans or a New Creation? A Christian Critique of Transhumanism," *Cambridge Papers* 18, no. 2 (June 2009). https://www.cambridgepapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/18-2-Enhancing-humans-or-a-new-creation.pdf; Graham J. Jenkins, "Transhumanism and Catholic Social Teaching," *Religions* 16, no. 8 (2025): 971. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16080971; Samson Tadelle Demo, "Deconstructing Transhumanism: A Metanoia from *Homo Deus* to *Homo Kenosus*," *Conspectus* 36, no. 1 (2023): 84–96. https://doi.org/10.54725/conspectus.2023.3.1.

12. The discourse in this section has been informed by the exegetical and theological discussions of Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2:5–9 appearing in the following: F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle*

to the Hebrews, rev. ed., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 71–77; Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), 36–38; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 2nd ed., vol. 19, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 104–10; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 16, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 48–52; Paul Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 144–57; Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Tanner, "Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1–41," in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. Nancy délaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 120–28; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 63–70; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 36, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 213–23; Patrick Henry Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2000), 15–16.

13. For more on this point, see Dan Lioy, "The *Imago Dei*: Biblical Foundations, Theological Implications, and Enduring Significance," *Verba Vitae* 1, no. 3–4 (Autumn 2024): 45. https://verba-vitae.org/index.php/vvj/article/view/25.

14. For more on this point, see Dan Lioy, "Creation and the Meaning of Life in the Apocalypse: Eschatological Renewal and Divine Purpose," *Verba Vitae* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2025): 7–8. https://verba-vitae.org/index.php/vvj/article/view/54.

15. See Rick Brannan, Ken M. Penner, et al., *The Lexham English Septuagint*, 2nd ed. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Ps 8:6.

16. The Septuagint's rendering of *'elohim* as *angeloi* is consistent with, and likely influenced by, a wider Second Temple interpretive tradition that equated the *bene elohim* ("sons of God") with angels. Evidence for this identification appears in 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. At the same time, the Septuagint's use of *angeloi* for *'elohim* is sporadic, indicating a selective rather than systematic translation strategy. See Jared Compton, "Made Lower than Angels: A Fresh Look at Hebrews 2:5–9," *Themelios* 49, no. 3 (2024). https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/made-lower-than-angels-a-fresh-look-at-hebrews-25-9/; Jason Maston, "'What is Man?' An Argument for the Christological Reading of Psalm 8 in Hebrews 2," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 112, no. 1 (2021): 89–104. https://doi.org/10.1515/znw-2021-0005.

17. For a consideration of Paul's *theologia crucis*, as exemplified in 2 Cor 11:16–12:10, see Dan Lioy, "Paul's Theology of the Cross: A Case Study Analysis of 2 Corinthians 11:16–12:10," *Conspectus* 20, no. 1 (September 2015): 89–133. https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC178216.

18. Most Greek manuscripts read "by God's grace" (*charíti theoû*), while a minority variant reads "apart from God" (*chōrís theoû*). The former enjoys broader external support and coheres with Hebrews' soteriological emphasis on divine grace.

19. For an examination of a distinctively Lutheran theological anthropology, which emphasizes the integral unity of body and soul against reductive philosophical frameworks, see Dan Lioy, "Embodied Souls: Exploring Human Personhood in the Age of AI," *Verba Vitae* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2025): 31–62, https://verba-vitae.org/index.php/vvj/article/view/36.

20. See Yanto P. Hermanto, "*Imago Dei* and Artificial Intelligence: A Theological Inquiry into Personhood and Human Ontological Boundaries," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2025): 5. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i1.10877; Stoyan Kitanov, "Rethinking the Complexities of the Body and Disability: Theological Account," *Religions* 15, no. 9 (September 2024): 2. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091113.

21. See Paul Martens and Wemimo B. Jaiyesimi, "The Recovery of Human Dignity in Protestant Christianity and Its Ethical Implications," *Religions* 14, no. 3 (2023): 425. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030425; Steven Umbrello and Paul O'Hara, "Human Dignity in the Digital Age," *Journal of Ethics and Emerging Technologies* 35, no. 1 (2025): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.55613/jeet.v35i1.165.

22. See King-Ho Leung, "The Technologisation of Grace and Theology: Meta-theological Insights from Transhumanism," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 33, no. 4 (August 2020): 479–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946820909747; N. Gray Sutanto, "Work Under the Fall," *Reformed Faith & Practice: The Journal of Reformed Theological Seminary* 9, no. 1 (December 2024). https://journal.rts.edu/article/work-under-the-fall/.

23. For an extensive explanation of the glorious new creation that awaits God's reborn children, as detailed in Rev 21, see Dan Lioy and George Coon, *John's Unfolding Cosmic Drama: A Literary and Theological Analysis of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2026), 377–81.

24. The discourse in this section has been informed by the exegetical and theological discussions of Genesis 11:1–9 appearing in the following: Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 350–59; Ronald Hendel, *Genesis 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. John J. Collins, vol. 1A, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024), 390–407; K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 466–86; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 233–41.

25. For an examination of the comprehensive scope of fallen human existence, which is characterized by existential futility, universal mortality, and the absolute impotence of human resources against death's dominion, see Dan Lioy, "Victory over the Vapor: How the Cross Alone Annihilates the Culture of Death," *Verba Vitae* 2, no. 4 (Winter 2025): 7–32. https://verba-vitae.org/index.php/vvj/article/view/76.

26. See William G. Fredstrom, "Vocational Attunement in Our Distracted Digital Age," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 24, no. 6 (December 2024 / January 2025). https://learn.elca.org/jle/vocational-attunement-in-our-distracted-digital-age/; Benson O. Igboin, "The Illusion of Limitlessness: Engaging Cornel du Toit's Perspective on Transhumanism and Being," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 46, no. 3 (2025): a3351. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v46i3.3351.

27. See Theodore Hiebert, "The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World's Cultures," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 29–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/27638419; Bobby Kurnia Putrawan, Ludwig Beethoven J. Noya, and Alisaid Prawiro Negoro, "Centripetal-centrifugal Forces in the Tower of Babel Narrative (Gen 11:1–9)," *Old Testament Essays* 35, no. 2 (2022). https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2022/v35n2a5.

28. See Isaac Nahon-Serfaty, "Destination Babel: Communication, Technology, and Responsibility," *Journal of Jewish Ethics* 8, no. 1 (2022). https://doi.org/10.5325/jjewi-

ethi.8.1.0111; Wolfgang Vondey, "A Political Theology of Glossolalia: Reconciling the Tongues of Babel, Jerusalem, and Corinth," *Pneuma* 33, no. 2 (2025): 233–51. https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-bja10063.

29. See Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas: Encyclical Letter on Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence* (May 15, 2026), The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html. The encyclical reinforces this essay's analysis by warning that contemporary technological culture often reenacts Babel's "name-making" impulse, especially by pursuing permanence and self-sufficiency through power and optimization rather than receiving identity as a God-given gift grounded in creaturely limits and communion.

30. See Leonard Ndzi, "Unity and Pride: An Exploration of the Motivations Behind the People's Decision to Build the Tower in Genesis 11:1–9," *Greener Journal of Social Sciences* 14, no. 2 (2024): 212–20. https://doi.org/10.15580/gjss.2024.2.102524152; Steven W. Tyra, "Babeling Nationalism: Reading Genesis 11:1–9 with Luther and Calvin," *Principia: A Journal of Classical Education* 3, no. 1 (2024): 21–42. https://doi.org/10.5840/principia20246208.

31. A similar contrast appears in Revelation 20:9, where an evil army under Satan's command spreads across earth's "broad expanse" and surrounds the fortified camp of the "saints," which is the "beloved" community of the redeemed. Just as the malevolent horde boldly advances upward, God sends down "fire" from "heaven" to "devour" them. See Lioy and Coon, *John's Unfolding Cosmic Drama*, 364.

32. In other words, a human-centered or anthropocentric bias, which is countered by the Creator's sovereign preemption of fallen humanity's sinful plans. See J. Kim, "Artificial Intelligence and the Sustainable Future of Co-Creation," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 60, no. 1 (2025): 18–30. https://doi.org/10.16995/zygon.17283; Eduardo R. Cruz, "Artificial Vice? Artificial Intelligence and Threats to the Self," *Theology and Science* 23, no. 2 (2025): 249–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2025.2472119.

33. See Michael Laffin, "Babel, Tyranny and Totality: Reading Genesis 11 with Luther," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 31, no. 4 (2018): 379–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946818792166; Laura Perrings, "The Tower of Babel: The Correction of God's People," *Denison Journal of Religion* 7 (2007). http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/religion/vol7/iss1/2.

34. For a consideration regarding how radical contemporary critical theory (RCCT) operates as a rival worldview that fragments human identity into politicized categories of oppression and privilege, relativizes truth to power dynamics, and erodes inherent dignity by subordinating it to ideological narratives, see Dan Lioy, "Redemption, Not Revolution: Human Flourishing through Cross-Shaped Love," *Verba Vitae* 3, no. 1 (May 3, 2026): 9–38, https://verba-vitae.org/index.php/vvj/article/view/98.

35. It is important to distinguish between modest enhancement proposals (such as therapies that restore ordinary bodily and cognitive capacities within human limits) and transhumanist visions. Modest enhancements can often be received as instruments of vocation when governed by love of neighbor and honest acknowledgment of creaturely limits. In contrast, maximalist posthuman projects aim at engineered immortality, radical self-transcendence, or fundamental redefinition of what it means to be human. In doing so, they relocate eschatological hope from God's promise to human technique and therefore exemplify the theology of glory this essay critiques. See Paschal M. Corby, "An Innate Despair: The Philosophical Limitations of Transhumanism and its Misplaced

Hope in Human Enhancement," *The Linacre Quarterly* 92, no. 2 (2025): 182–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/00243639241281977; Mikael Leidenhag, "Saved through Technology: Exploring the Soteriology and Eschatology of Transhumanism," *Religion Compass* 14, no. 11 (2020): e12377. https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12377.

36. See Benjamin Parviz, "Christian Hope and Transhumanism," *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality* 31, no. 2 (August 2025): 69–81. https://doi.org/10.1093/cb/cbaf006; Ximian Xu, "Shall We Sanctify Ourselves with Biomedical Technology? A Reformed Appraisal of Moral Bioenhancement," *Theology and Science* 22, no. 2 (2024): 292–308. https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2024.2351641.

37. For an explanation regarding how the myth of the autonomous, normative self arose and became the catalyst for the sexual revolution, see Dan Lioy, "A Pauline Response to the Myth of the Autonomous, Normative Self," *Verba Vitae* 1, no. 1–2 (March 29, 2024): 53–65. https://verba-vitae.org/index.php/vvj/article/view/4.

38. In other words, the political or civil use (the *usus politicus*) of the Law. Admittedly, throughout the essay, the primary concern is the theological use of the Law (the *usus theologicus*), which drives sinners to despair of self-salvation and thus to the Gospel.

39. See Douglas C. Youvan, "The God They Cannot Face: A Resonant Critique of the New Technological Babel" (2025). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Douglas-Youvan/publication/390947658_The_God_They_Cannot_Face_A_Resonant_Critique_of_the_New_Technological_Babel/links/6804464dbfbe974b23adf35b/The-God-They-Cannot-Face-A-Resonant-Critique-of-the-New-Technological-Babel.pdf; Daniel L. Sutherland, "From Babel to AI: Idolatry, Transhumanism, and the Crisis of *Imago Dei*." *American Academy of Religion* (AAR), 2025. https://www.academia.edu/download/122227240/Sutherland_BabeltoAI_ConstructiveTheology_AARSE2025Paper.pdf.

40. The discourse in this section has been informed by the exegetical and theological discussions of Philippians 2:5–11 appearing in the following: Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 191–229; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, vol. 43, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 99–135; Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 96–109; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 95–116.

41. See Roger Haydon Mitchell, "Kenosis or Sovereignty? Christ Jesus and the Disclosure of the Divine Mind," *Theology* 127, no. 3 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X241232103; Angela Gloria Erum, "An Exegesis of Philippians 2:1–11," *American Journal of Biblical Theology* 26, no. 1 (2025): 1–20. https://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/ErumAG01.pdf.

42. See John M. G. Barclay, "Benefiting Others and Benefit to Oneself: Seneca and Paul on 'Altruism,'" in *Paul and Seneca in Dialogue*, ed. Joseph R. Dodson and David E. Briones (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 109–126. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004341364_007; Simeon Zahl, "Engineering Desire: Biotechnological Enhancement as Theological Problem," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 32, no. 2 (2019): 216–228. https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946819827138.

43. See John M.G. Barclay, "Does the Gospel Require Self-Sacrifice? Paul and the Reconfiguration of the Self," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2023): 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/09539468221132095; Jos De Kock, "Spirituality and Theological Formation:

Seven Critical Considerations," *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 1 (2020): 101–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/19397909241234294.

44. See Mark J. Keown, "The Missional Power of the Christ-Hymn," *Religions* 15, no. 6 (2024): 711. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060711; Ramarolahy Patricia Josette and Robijaona Rahelivololoniaina Baholy, "The *Kenosis* of Jesus Christ: Model of the Christian Life According to Philippians 2:5–11," *Britain International of Humanities and Social Sciences Journal* 6, no. 1 (2024): 25–38. https://doi.org/10.33258/biohs.v6i1.1061.

45. See Ligita Ryliškytė, "Kenotic Solidarity in Discernment," *Religions* 15, no. 12 (2024): 1453. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121453.

46. An analysis of the passage indicates that it exhibits balanced parallelism, rhythmic language, and potentially antiphonal structure, features characteristic of early Christian hymnody. For these reasons, many specialists propose that Paul is either quoting or adapting a preexisting hymn that may have already been familiar to the Philippian congregation. See Michael C. Magree, "Modern Exegesis of Philippians 2:6–7," in *The Interpretation of* Kenosis *from Origen to Cyril of Alexandria: Dimensions of Self-Emptying in the Reception of Philippians 2:7* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 8–46. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198896661.003.0002; William Shiell, "Singing to 'Lord Jesus Christ': A Prose Hymn and Its Philippian Recipients," *Religions* 14, no. 10 (2023): 1228. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101228.

47. As Lioy and Coon note on page 51 of John's Unfolding Cosmic Drama, in Exodus 3:14–15, God reveals two names to Moses: "I am" (*ʾehyeh*) and "Lord" (*yhwh*), both derived from the Hebrew verb, *hayah* ("to be"), suggesting meanings like "I am" and "he is" (or "he exists"). Some specialists interpret *yhwh* as a declaration of God's aseity (a reference to his self-existence and independence from creation). However, in the context of Exodus, the name emphasizes the Creator's active presence and steadfast commitment to redeem Israel, rather than solely the abstract, objective truth of his reality. This focus is evident in the pillar of cloud and fire (13:21–22) and Moses' plea for God's abiding presence (33:14–15). Thus, while *yhwh* may etymologically mean "he is," its primary significance in Exodus is the Creator's redemptive presence with Israel.

48. See Eric Covington, "'Their End Is Destruction': Reading Philippians as Philosophical Dialogue," *Religions* 15, no. 4 (2024): 462. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040462; Gregory E. Lamb, "Beyond the Greco-Roman or Jewish Monocle: Reading Philippians and Paul 'Kaleidoscopically'," *Religions* 15, no. 4 (2024): 467. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040467.

49. See Andrew Jake Morgensen, "Kenotic Anthropology: Becoming More Human, Not Less," paper presented at the RCSA Academic Symposium 2025, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2025. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57b0a5c2bebafb2459fb2cf0/t/67e1c1b16dac6212406eb557/1742848434390/a1)+Andrew+Jake+Morgensen_Symposium+Final+Paper.pdf; Bradley Jersak, "Biblical and Christological Grounds for Voluntary *Kenosis*," *The Kenarchy Journal* 5 (2023): 1–30. https://kenarchy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Kenarchy_Volume5.1.pdf.

50. These observations directly challenge gnostic tendencies that salvation means escape from embodied, material existence. By affirming that Christ redeems finitude through his incarnation, the essay aligns with the Lutheran maxim *finitum capax infiniti* (the finite is capable of holding the infinite).

51. See D. J. Louw, "A Christian Spirituality of Imperfection: Towards a Pastoral Theology of Descent within the Praxis of Orthopathy," *Acta Theologica* 41, no. 2 (2021): 70–95.

https://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at/article/view/5887; M. Tumeinski, "The Gift of Peace, Christians with Impairments, and the Church," *Horizons* 48, no. 1 (2021): 122–54. https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2021.5.

52. See Jason T. Eberl, "Who Wants to Live Forever? Transhumanist Immortality and Christian Eternity," *Christian Bioethics* 31, no. 2 (2025): 82–91. https://doi.org/10.1093/cb/cbaf004; David Hershenov, "Why Christians Should Not Embrace Extreme Transhumanism," *Christian Bioethics* 31, no. 2 (August 2025): 92–102. https://doi.org/10.1093/cb/cbaf005.

53. See Ximian Xu, "Growth or Decline: Christian Virtues and Artificial Moral Advisors," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 38, no. 1 (2025). https://doi.org/10.1177/09539468241305014; Ximian Xu, "Hope, Christian Morality, and the Ethics of Predictive AI," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 38, no. 1 (2025). https://doi.org/10.1177/09539468251324787.

54. For a more extensive critique of transhumanism in direct dialogue with theistic ethical frameworks, see Roberto Di Ceglie, "Transhumanism vs. Theistic Ethics," *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 9, no. 1 (2025): 384–402. https://doi.org/10.14428/thl.v9i1.86003; Ryan Lemasters, "Religious Transhumanism as a New Religious Movement: Sketching a Model of the Development of Religious Transhumanism," *Religions* 15, no. 8 (2024): 885. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080885; Michael Agerbo Mørch, "Is Moderate Transhumanism Compatible with Christian Faith?" *Theology and Science* 24, no. 1 (2025): 97–108. https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2025.2592332; Tobias Tanton, "Extending the Transhuman Person: Religious Practices as Cognitive Technological Enhancements," *Religions* 16, no. 3 (2025): 272. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16030272.

55. See comparable deliberations in the following: Michael S. Burdett, "Incarnation, Posthumanism and Performative Anthropology: The Body of Technology and the Body of Christ," *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality* 28, no. 3 (December 2022): 207–16. https://doi.org/10.1093/cb/cbab009; Michael Burdett and King-Ho Leung, "The Machine in the Ghost: Transhumanism and the Ontology of Information," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* (2023): 714–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12886; Khegan M. Delport, "The Artifice of Eternity: Transhumanism and Theosis," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 9, no. 1 (2023): 1–27. https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2023.v9n1.at1; Manitza Kotzé, "Transhumanism as a Positional Good, Economic Inequality, and a Response from Christian Ethics," *In die Skriflig* 58, no. 1 (2024): 1–7. https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3072.

56. Concededly, the line between "restoring" and "enhancing" is hard to draw, because what counts as "normal" changes with the person, the setting, and the technology available. Consequently, this essay uses a different criterion: does the technology serve the neighbor as a helpful tool, or is it being treated as something that can either save us or secure our eternal future? See Raymond R. Hausoul, "Hope and Transhumanism," in *The Oxford Compendium of Hope*, chap. 49 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025), 825–42. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197618240.003.0049; Bjørn Hofmann, "Human Enhancement: Enhancing Health or Harnessing Happiness?" *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 16 (2019): 87–98. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-018-9888-z.

57. See Michael Baggot, L.C., "The Daring and Disappointing Dreams of Transhumanism's Secular Eschatology," *Nova et Vetera* 22, no. 3 (2024): 841–78. https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2024.a934929; Oliver Krüger, "The Future Never Dies: A Relational Approach to

Secular and Religious Entanglements of Posthuman Utopia," *Religions* 54, no. 3 (2024): 453–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2024.2362066.

58. See Massimo Leone, "Technology and Sacrifice," *Religions* 15, no. 6 (2024): 692. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060692; Amy Debates, "Christianity and Transhumanism in the Inequity Era," *Christian Bioethics* 31, no. 2 (August 2025): 121–29. https://doi.org/10.1093/cb/cbaf007.

59. See Michael Stephen Burdett, "Proximate and Ultimate Concerns in Christian Ethical Responses to Artificial Intelligence," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36, no. 3 (2023): 620–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/09539468231180135; Pavel-Iosif Pungilă, "Christian Perspectives on Technology: A Dialog Between Faith and Innovation," *RAIS Journal for Social Sciences* 8, no. 2 (2024): 154–59. https://journal.rais.education/index.php/raiss/article/view/249.

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Making Persons?

Luther, Transhumanism, and the Limits of Human Specification

Dennis Bielfeldt

1.0 A Family and a Scorecard

In May 2026, Rob Stein reported for National Public Radio on a new reproductive market. Christian Ward, a tax accountant with Type 1 diabetes, and his wife Julia, a nurse practitioner, had signed up for Nucleus Genomics primarily because they wanted to reduce the chance that a future child would develop Christian's disease. Nucleus marketed polygenic embryo scores not only for disease risk but for height, body mass index, longevity, predicted IQ, eye color, hair color, baldness, acne, and handedness. Ward himself remarked on the strangeness of being able to consider hair and eye color alongside disease risk, while Julia emphasized that their principal concern was medical. Orchid Health, in Palo Alto, California, largely concentrated on health risks. Herasight operates an embryo-screening laboratory in Morrisville, North Carolina, assessing health and nonmedical traits. Nucleus Genomics advertised what its founder called "genetic optimization." The phrase is arresting because the underlying act is so ordinary. Nothing need be edited, and no new gene need be inserted. Several embryos may already exist, and a scorecard can help prospective parents decide which one to transfer.[1] The case is philosophically tidier than many of the examples that have carried the transhumanism debate for thirty years. Neural uploading, radical life extension, and inheritable genome editing quickly provoke an argument about whether the technology will work. Embryo scoring is already sold even though its claimed clinical benefits remain unproven. The moral question therefore arrives before scientific maturity: what happens when a hope for a healthy child becomes a comparative specification applied across embryos? I write for the family, genetic counselor, physician, and pastor who may encounter this decision, as well as for the philosophical seminar.

The scientific caution is substantial. The American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG) published a points-to-consider statement in 2024 warning against treating polygenic embryo scores as though they had established clinical utility; the American Society for Reproductive Medicine reached a similarly skeptical conclusion in its 2026 journal opinion. A 2026 survey of 152 reproductive medicine physicians found much greater willingness to consider polygenic screening for serious disease than for nonmedical traits, as well as considerable reluctance to let polygenic scores override ordinary embryo-ploidy or morphology judgments.[2] Type 1 diabetes is a complex condition: a polygenic score concerns susceptibility, not a diagnosis or a guarantee that disease will be prevented. The number of embryos available for comparison and the interaction of genetic with environmental factors further limit what such scores can promise. None of this decides the ethics. It does, however, prevent a speculative promise of precision from carrying moral weight the science has not earned.

I shall take the Wards as my anchor because their case joins four questions that are too often discussed separately. What conception of human nature licenses transhumanist enhancement? When does a duty to prevent harm become a duty to improve? What happens to the grammar of benefit when selection determines which embryo is implanted? Finally, what, after philosophy has done its work, can Christian theology add without being smuggled in as a premise of a secular argument? My answer draws on an account of divine address and creaturely particularity defended on independent theological grounds elsewhere. Here I state its relevant premises openly and examine what follows for embryos already in existence. The final question leads to Luther's *oeconomia*, the household, and to the doctrine usually called the three estates. I shall not assume that readers know what those terms mean; most working theologians today do not employ *oeconomia* at breakfast, and there is no virtue in pretending otherwise.

2.0 From Humanism to Transhumanism

Transhumanism did not begin in a fertility clinic. The word is usually associated with Julian Huxley, who in 1957 spoke of humanity deliberately transcending itself. Nick Bostrom's influential history places Huxley within a longer genealogy of Enlightenment perfectibility, evolutionary thought, and later technological optimism.[3] The term then receded before reappearing among the extropians of the 1980s and 1990s, advocates of open-ended human improvement through reason, technology, and self-transformation. Max More gave the movement much of its modern vocabulary: reason, technological self-transformation, individual choice, radical life extension, and movement toward a posthuman condition.[4] It is tempting to dismiss this as California enthusiasm with a metaphysics attached. That would be too easy,

however, for the serious transhumanist claim involves a significant ethical issue: what is the normative status of inherited human limits? Bostrom puts the point memorably, writing, "transhumanists view human nature as a work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways."[5] The sentence denies that the form in which humanity happens to have arrived carries decisive normative privilege simply because it is inherited. Since evolution has already altered capacities, medicine already changes natural histories, education already reorganizes cognition, and technology already expands what human bodies can do, why should the present phenotype suddenly be sacred?

That question has force. An opponent of enhancement must distinguish the claim that a change alters inherited human form from the claim that it is wrong. The former does not entail the latter. I shall call this the Malleability Argument.

Argument [AN]—The Malleability of Human Nature

P1. A change is not morally impermissible merely because it alters an inherited human trait unless inherited human form has independent normative privilege.

P2. Since human capacities and forms of life are historically and technologically malleable, inheritance alone does not establish such privilege.

C. Therefore, the bare fact that an intervention alters inherited human nature does not establish its impermissibility.[6]

AN is a limited dialectical argument about warrant. It does not establish that inherited human form lacks normative privilege; it shows that bare inheritance, taken by itself, does not supply the independent moral premise needed to condemn change. The restriction matters. Other arguments for the value of embodied human life may succeed, even though the appeal to inheritedness alone fails. The appendix therefore marks the body of considerations under discussion explicitly, rather than treating the absence of warrant from one consideration as absence of warrant altogether.

Although AN is a defeater of one objection, it is silent on the questions of which changes are good, which are just, and which are obligatory. This point matters because enhancement debates regularly move too quickly from "unnatural" to "wrong." Plainly, Bostrom is justified in demanding another premise.

Bostrom makes a parallel move with respect to the issue of dignity. In "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity," he argues that dignity need not be tied to exact conformity with the present human phenotype. A being with greater capacities for agency, self-direction, cognition, and flourishing need not possess less dignity simply because it has become posthuman.[7] Again, the argument is defensive, blocking the inference from posthuman difference to degraded status. Crucially, it does not

yet tell us what makes the posthuman numerically identical with the human who undertook the transformation. That question is easier to overlook because ordinary grammar supplies the answer before metaphysics has earned it. When we say, "I shall enhance myself," the pronoun "I" quietly does a great deal of work, but to what does this "I" refer? What is that by virtue of which the one who is human is precisely the same one as the one now posthuman?

The practical moral argument became sharper in Julian Savulescu's work. His principle of procreative beneficence roughly says that when prospective parents can choose among possible children, they have moral reason to select the child expected to have the best life, given the relevant information. In later work Savulescu makes the continuity with treatment explicit: if one accepts an obligation to prevent disease and promote well-being, why should genetic enhancement be morally excluded simply because it goes beyond therapy? The clinic's advertisement says, "You may choose." Procreative beneficence asks whether, under some conditions, the morally serious sentence is "you should so choose."[8]

Recent discussions of transhumanism have widened the question again. While Bostrom's *Deep Utopia* asks what a meaningful life would look like after many of the instrumental problems that occupy present life have been solved, Timnit Gebru and Émile Torres attack a different trajectory, arguing that transhumanism often travels in a wider ideological bundle with extropianism, singularitarianism, cosmism, effective altruism, and longtermism.[9] I shall not adjudicate that wider dispute here, for the embryo case is difficult enough for our purposes. However, the recent literature does show that transhumanism has moved from a philosophy of technological possibility toward a dispute about what human beings ought ultimately to become.

3.0 The Case for Enhancement

The enhancement position deserves its best argument, for a weak opponent makes a weak victory. Clearly, when a parent can prevent a serious harm to a child by a safe vaccination, few believe that the parent may ignore that possibility simply because the child's unvaccinated state is "natural." Furthermore, few would object to interventions for the child that predictably improve health without introducing morally relevant new costs. As such, why then should the label *enhancement* defeat the reason that has already justified treatment?

This is the intuitive route into what I shall call the Enhancement Obligation Argument. I state it in ordinary language in the text, leaving its fully regimented form for the appendix. The order matters, for while formal symbols are useful when they expose an ambiguity or a missing premise, they should not be asked to create an argument the prose has not yet made.

Argument [AO]—The Enhancement Obligation Argument

P1. If an agent can, by a treatment, bring about a morally relevant increase in the expected well-being of a determinate beneficiary (paradigmatically, by preventing an expected, serious harm) at reasonable cost and risk, the agent has a *pro tanto* obligation to do so.

P2. If an enhancement would bring about the same morally relevant increase in the expected well-being of that same beneficiary at reasonable cost and risk, the agent has the same *pro tanto* obligation to employ it, for the label 'enhancement' is not itself a morally relevant feature capable of defeating the obligation in P1.

P3. Some genetic or reproductive interventions classified as treatments or enhancements can produce such increases in expected well-being for determinate beneficiaries at reasonable cost and risk.

C. Therefore, where P1–P3 apply to the same beneficiary, prospective parents can have a *pro tanto* obligation to use an available genetic or reproductive intervention.

The word *same* in P2 carries the pressure, and it is worth seeing why rather than simply asserting it. The claim is that a duty structurally identical to the duty to treat also holds for enhancement when treatment and enhancement produce the same improvement in the *same* person's expected well-being. The question then becomes what precisely is the one putatively "the same" in enhancement? P2 is therefore a positive parity claim and not merely a negative one. To deny that the label defeats the obligation is not yet to affirm that the obligation transfers, for something other than the label might still distinguish the cases, and a critic who grants the former has not thereby granted P2.

AO presupposes a determinate beneficiary. A vaccination is given to this child, whereas embryo selection can determine which of several existing embryos will receive the opportunity to develop. One might have a duty to prevent malady S in beneficiary a without thereby having a duty to select a different beneficiary in place of a. That distinction is independent of whether therapy, prevention, and enhancement exhaust the relevant clinical classifications: the formal argument need range only over interventions shown to be treatments or enhancements. Its conclusion cannot be extended to selecting among embryos without an additional premise about comparative prospective lives. (The appendix supplies the restricted derivation.)

Savulescu's stronger embryo-selection principle supplies the needed bridge. Call it BP, for Procreative Beneficence:

Bridge Principle [BP]—Procreative Beneficence

If a reproductive choice determines which person will exist, prospective parents have *pro tanto* reason to choose among the available possible children the child whose life is expected to go best, other things being equal.

AO and BP should not be merged (see the appendix for their distinct schemata). AO quantifies over an agent, an intervention, and a determinate beneficiary; BP compares outcomes associated with members of an available set of embryos. Even granting the premises of AO supplies neither a well-being ranking across distinct possible lives nor a rule for acting on that ranking. A patient-affecting obligation is not thereby a selection principle. Conversely, BP gives a *pro tanto* reason, not automatically an obligation, to prefer one prospective life, and competing moral reasons may defeat it. The distinction turns on the objects and normative force of the two principles, not on a verbal difference between treatment and enhancement. Selection among embryos already formed also introduces a further question concerning what is owed to each existing organism, as the theological argument will show.

Bostrom's account of posthuman dignity now raises a further problem. Suppose an agent *a* is human at t_1 and, because of reasons grounded in human flourishing, ought to undergo transformation P. Suppose P succeeds so radically that *a* is no longer human at t_2. We have something like:

$$H(a,t1) \rightarrow O[a,P(a)]$$

$$P(a) \rightarrow \neg H(a,t2).$$

What follows about the force of the original norm at t_2? Nothing follows merely from those two formulas. Some obligations are transition-directed. Because I am sick, I ought to become healthy, and once healthy, the obligation generated by sickness disappears. That comparison, however, creates an awkward question for transhumanism, for is humanity functioning like a pathology whose good lies in its own supersession? Surely that is too strong, for if humanity is merely a developmental platform, what makes posthumanization a fulfillment of human good rather than replacement of one good by another?

The question is not verbal but concerns the persistence of a normative ground through a transformation that is defined partly by leaving that ground behind. I shall return to it after considering the principal objections.

4.0 Three Objections and What They Actually Show

Three objections to the enhancement position have shaped the literature, and each must be stated at full strength before its reach can be measured. They are not arguments of one type. Sandel's concerns the internal goods of a practice, Habermas'

reciprocity presupposed by moral equality, and the problem raised by Agar and Parfit, the logical form of benefit itself. I take them in that order. None of them, taken alone, yields a prohibition, but each blocks a route the enhancement argument had hoped to travel.

4.1 Sandel and the Good of Receptive Parenthood

Michael Sandel's *The Case Against Perfection* is often treated as a generalized protest against biotechnology. Its strongest argument is more exact, however, for Sandel's worry is about the form of agency expressed when parenthood becomes a project of mastery. The good at issue is giftedness: the capacity to receive a child whose worth is not conditional upon conformity to a parental specification.[10]

This should not be caricatured as a demand that parents stop choosing. Parents routinely choose schools, neighborhoods, medical treatments, diets, religious practices, musical lessons, and innumerable other things that shape a child's future, sometimes badly. Sandel's objection concerns a different exercise of choice: the use of preferences to determine which embryo is transferred for gestation and, where others are excluded, which future child will be raised. On the theological premise defended later, responsibilities toward existing embryos do not begin only when transfer occurs.

Call the parent *p* and the parent's own set of selection criteria C; I regiment these labels fully in the appendix.

Argument [AG]—The Giftedness Argument

P1. Proper parental love includes a receptive disposition toward the child as a person whose worth does not depend upon satisfying a prior parental specification.

P2. In nonmedical embryo-trait selection, a prior parental specification can be causally decisive in determining which embryo is transferred for gestation, and in some cases which developmental continuant will be raised by the intending parents.

P3. A practice that makes comparative specification govern a consequential decision about which existing embryo receives a developmental opportunity places the good described in P1 under pressure.

C. Therefore, nonmedical embryo-trait selection places the receptive disposition described in P1 under a standing risk of strain, even when the parents' eventual love for the child is entirely sincere. (The appendix sets out a restricted regimentation using the developmental continuant d(e), receptivity Rcv(p,x), and allocation Alloc(p,e,C).)

What does the formalization show? It does not prove the normative premise, for first-order logic cannot manufacture the value of receptive parenthood. It locates the disputed premise instead. The criterion-set is not simply one influence on the education or treatment of a fixed recipient. It may determine which existing embryo receives transfer now and, if others are excluded, who is afforded the opportunity of gestation at all. That structural difference requires moral assessment; it does not itself prove parental love defective.

A parent may say, quite truthfully, "I selected this embryo and I love this child without condition." Sandel need not deny the sincerity, since love after birth and the public grammar of selection are distinct matters. A person may love the result of a market transaction while the market still changes the social meaning of the good exchanged. Sandel develops that wider corruption argument elsewhere.[11] In the reproductive case, the question is whether a prior comparative filtering rule has been allowed to govern which existing embryo receives a consequential opportunity for development.

James Tabery's warning about the "illusion of control," reported in Stein's NPR account, is suggestive but not decisive. Sandel's argument does not require a sociological prediction that selecting parents will become less affectionate. It asks whether comparative optimization ought to organize a consequential choice about embryonic life. That is a question about the practice, not a diagnosis of the hearts of particular mothers and fathers.

4.2 Habermas and Authorial Asymmetry

Jürgen Habermas approaches enhancement from another direction. In *The Future of Human Nature*, he asks whether intentional genetic programming can threaten the reciprocal moral self-understanding of persons by giving one person a kind of unilateral authorship over another's biological starting conditions.[12] The worry belongs to his account of moral equality and communicative reciprocity. While a later person may contest an upbringing, reject a parental religion, forgive bad schooling, or refuse an inherited social role, a deliberately programmed biological trait appears different because the programming is built into the starting point from which later self-revision proceeds.

Embryo selection is not genetic programming; the selected embryo's genome remains unaltered. A bridge to Habermas must therefore concern the self-understanding of the later person, not simply the fate of another embryo. One might learn that one's presence in the family depended upon a calculated profile outranking that of other embryos conceived by one's parents. Such knowledge does not necessarily destroy reciprocity, but it can make one's existence appear conditionally approved in a way that ordinary upbringing does not.

Argument [AA]—The Authorial Asymmetry Argument, Extended to Selection

P1. Reciprocal moral self-understanding can be placed under strain when a person's constitutive biological starting point appears to have been unilaterally governed by another's contested preferences.

P2. Deliberate genetic programming can instantiate the authorship described in P1 by fixing traits according to parental purposes.

P3. Selection does not alter a genome, but a later child can know that their place in the family depended upon a prior comparison in which predicted traits caused one existing embryo to be transferred and others to be excluded.

P4. Where that condition obtains, preference-driven selection may pose an analogous challenge to the selected person's retrospective understanding of unconditional welcome; the analogy does not require claiming that the chosen genome itself was programmed.

C. Consequently, some preference-driven selection practices face a Habermasian objection concerning the selected child's eventual self-understanding. This does not prove that such harm occurs or that every transfer-order decision has the same significance.

Let SelProfile(p,e,C) mean that parent p selected embryo e because its score under preference-set C outranked alternatives, and let LaterKnows(x,SelProfile(p,e,C)) say that the later person x, developed from e, knows this fact. The proposed authorial analogy depends on the relation between those two descriptions and possible impairment of reciprocity, rather than on defining selection as genomic editing.

$$\forall p \forall e \forall C[(\text{SelProfile}(p,e,C) \wedge \text{LaterKnows}(d(e),\text{SelProfile}(p,e,C))) \rightarrow \text{PossibleStrain}(d(e),p,C)]$$

The displayed conditional makes the disputed bridge visible. A defender of embryo selection may reject it, pointing out that a child can understand selection as loving medical prudence or as an act of welcome rather than as conditional acceptance. That reply is stronger for decisions concerning grave disease than for height or eye color. Habermas' argument supplies a possible second-person objection; the first-person and fiduciary claims of other embryos are addressed by the Reception Argument, not falsely attributed to Habermas.

Nor should we assume that mere knowledge of genetic selection undermines self-respect. That would need empirical and moral defense. Habermas helps specify what must be defended: whether a consequential parental decision can be justified to the later person as compatible with reciprocal standing, rather than as a verdict upon which preferred qualities warranted that person's existence.

The contrast with editing thus remains real, but the analogy is neither empty nor certain. Its application turns on which criteria governed selection and what significance they could reasonably bear for a person who later learns of them.

4.3 Agar, Parfit, and the Beneficiary Problem

Nicholas Agar's Humanity's End is concerned primarily with radical enhancement and with the continuity between present human persons and their radically enhanced successors.[13] The embryo case introduces a related but cleaner identity problem. Derek Parfit's non-identity discussion made the general form familiar: many reproductive choices do not make one and the same person better or worse off, but they do help determine which person exists.[14]

That point is easily blurred. Suppose embryo e1 is transferred in world w1 and distinct embryo e2 in world w2. A standard person-affecting benefit comparison requires that one and the same beneficiary exist in both alternatives and fare worse in one. Under an explicitly origin-sensitive identity principle, the individuals developing from distinct embryos are themselves distinct. In that model, the familiar sentence "selection made this child better off than this child otherwise would have been" fails: the counterfactual alternative contains another child, not a worse-off version of this one. Origin-sensitivity is a substantive premise, not a theorem of first-order logic. The appendix states it explicitly.

Argument [AC]—The Beneficiary/Identity Argument

P1. A standard comparative claim that an intervention makes beneficiary x better off requires a relevant alternative in which that same x exists and fares worse.

P2. In the restricted, origin-sensitive comparison at issue, selecting e1 rather than distinct embryo e2 results in different later individuals, not two outcomes for the same individual.

P3. Consequently, that comparison does not by itself sustain the ordinary treatment claim that the selected child is better off than *that same child* would have been if e2 had been selected.

C. AO therefore cannot justify selection merely by importing the person-affecting benefit structure of treatment. A further principle such as BP would have to defend a comparative choice between lives, and the independent standing of the embryos remains another question.

AC does not show that selection is wrong; it identifies why treatment of an established beneficiary and choosing among embryos are different moral problems. Savulescu's procreative beneficence openly advances an impersonal comparative principle, so

the AO–BP distinction itself is not new. The further point of this article is that language about merely *possible* future persons can obscure the status of embryos who already exist and may have claims that the ranking does not discharge.

The embryo case also reveals the ambiguity in saying that 'there is no child before selection.' There are existing embryos; what is disputed is whether, and in what sense, each is already the same individual as the later child. A biological-organism account and a psychological account may answer differently. The important result is conditional: once selection changes the beneficiary, AO cannot establish a benefit to one and the same person across the alternatives.

5.0 The Transhumanist *Aporia*

The preceding arguments concern selection among existing embryos. A different transhumanist claim, however, concerns *self*-transformation: that this individual, now human, can become genuinely posthuman without being replaced by a successor, and that the reasons for undertaking the transformation remain intelligible across it. Not every transhumanist program asserts this. A project concerned only with future generations may accept succession rather than personal persistence. The *aporia* developed here addresses the stronger promise of the numerical survival of the one transformed.

Three requirements appear together.

The Transhumanist Commitment Set

I—Identity: enough persists for the posthuman to be numerically this same individual rather than a successor or replacement.

T—Transcendence: enough changes for the result genuinely to transcend the human rather than remain merely an unusually capable human being.

N—Normative continuity: the dignity, goods, reasons, or obligations appealed to in justifying the transformation remain applicable across the transformation.

Write $\Gamma_{TH} = \{I,T,N\}$ for this informal commitment set, not yet a formal first-order theory. The three claims need not be inconsistent. They create a demand for an account that can satisfy them jointly: if humanity is essential to the individual's persistence, T threatens I; if personhood carries persistence instead, the relevant identity criterion requires defense; and if the reasons for transformation are rooted in human goods, N requires an account of their continuing application after the change. What appears as a paradox is more accurately a problem of jointly defensible interpretation.

T must be construed strongly. Ordinary changes in capacity, including a pacemaker or cochlear implant, do not count as genuine transcendence of the human. In the radical case under consideration, the outcome ceases to qualify as human according to the relevant, independently stated criterion for being human. This does not prejudge whether the *person* persists: an account may make humanity accidental to personhood. The question is whether any defensible criterion tracks the numerical individual across that loss of human classification.

The orange-apple example is crude and useful. Suppose someone says, "This orange became this apple." We immediately ask what the demonstrative "this" is tracking across the change. If orange and apple name sortals with incompatible persistence conditions, the sentence cannot be rescued by pointing to spatiotemporal proximity. Something similar happens when a transhumanist writes:

$$H(a,t1) \wedge \neg H(a,t2).$$

The repeated constant a has already assumed numerical identity across the transition. Notation is doing us a favor by showing the assumption, but it has not justified it.

A defender may answer that "human" is not the persistence-bearing sortal; "person" is. Then we write:

$$H(a,t1) \wedge P(a,t1) \wedge \neg H(a,t2) \wedge P(a,t2).$$

Very well. What are the persistence conditions for P? Consciousness? Psychological continuity? A biological organism? An information pattern? A primitive thisness? The transhumanist can choose, but the choice is no longer a footnote. It determines whether self-enhancement is enhancement of this one or production of a successor sufficiently similar to inherit the rhetoric.

The normative issue is distinct. A reason to improve present human capacities need not survive unchanged once the subject is no longer human. Some reasons are transition-directed and expire upon success; other reasons, including duties respecting a particular person, may remain. N therefore does not say that every prior obligation persists, but that those goods and duties essential to the justification of *this individual's* transformation do not silently disappear or shift to a replacement. An account must specify which reasons survive and why.

Model theory can expose the assumption beneath a claim of persistence. A formal structure may represent one history continued in two successors, but it cannot tell us whether the represented relation is numerical identity. That depends upon an independently warranted constraint on admissible interpretations; Section 6 and the appendix make the difference explicit.

6.0 Model-Theoretic Clarification

The distinction between satisfaction and admissibility is useful precisely because more than one account of persistence can satisfy a thin description of continuity. I shall distinguish the formal relations, consider five competing accounts, and state what the branching example proves. Its technical construction appears in the appendix; its philosophical limits remain here.

6.1 Proof, Satisfaction, and Consequence

It helps to put three relations on the table. If Γ is a formal theory (a set of sentences) and φ a sentence, then

$$\Gamma \vdash \varphi$$

means that φ is derivable from Γ by stipulated proof or "transformation" rules. The consequence relation here is purely syntactic. If, however, M is an interpreted structure, then

$$M \models \varphi$$

means that M satisfies φ, or equivalently that φ is true in M under the interpretation supplied by M. This is a satisfaction relation, not yet semantic consequence. By contrast,

$$\Gamma \models \varphi$$

means that every structure or model satisfying Γ also satisfies φ. In first-order logic, soundness and completeness together connect the syntactic and semantic sides such that, where the formalization is genuinely first-order, $\Gamma \vdash \varphi$ iff $\Gamma \models \varphi$.[15]

That result is important and limited. While model theory does not give us an algorithm for every philosophical problem or choose the intended interpretation of "human," "person," "same," or "dignity," it does tell us what follows under a stipulated interpretation. Philosophical judgment begins where that formal result leaves off, asking which interpretations are most warranted by the subject matter we intend to discuss.

I have developed elsewhere a four-stage sequence distinguishing semantic satisfaction, admissibility, comparative adequacy, and truth.[16] Satisfaction asks whether a structure makes the theory true, while admissibility asks whether that model survives decisive constraints of the inquiry; comparative adequacy then ranks the surviving models by relevant virtues, and the resulting judgment can provide defeasible warrant for assertion. Truth, however, is a different matter entirely, for it concerns whether reality is as the asserted proposition says it is. The order matters because a model can succeed formally and still be the wrong model of the subject matter.

For present purposes, I write

$$\Gamma \models_K \varphi$$

where K is an independently defended class of admissible L-structures. Every member of K satisfying Γ must also satisfy φ. What matters is the justification for K: without it, restricting the range of models gives no additional warrant for a claim about personal persistence. The appendix develops a finite branching example for which unrestricted consequence and consequence over K differ.

6.2 Accounts of Persistence and the Branching Test

Five persistence accounts are in play: biological, psychological, informational, person-sortal, and haecceitistic. These are philosophical proposals rather than models of a single formal signature. Each must explain what makes a later stage a continuation of this individual instead of a suitable successor.

The biological account identifies persistence primarily with organismic continuity and accordingly handles embryo-to-adult continuity naturally because the embryo and adult can be stages of one living organism. It similarly deals well with ordinary bodily enhancement. The pressure comes with radical posthumanization, however, for if substrate replacement becomes sufficiently extensive, what organism can be said to continue? A defender can broaden biological continuity, but the more permissive the criterion becomes, the less obvious it is that biology is doing the individuating work.

The psychological account identifies persistence with suitable continuities of memory, intention, character, consciousness, or other psychological relations. While this account fits much of the ordinary language of selfhood and can survive dramatic bodily change, it is plagued by the Branching Problem, for if one psychological history is copied into two equally continuous successors, both may stand in the relevant similarity relation to the predecessor, even though numerical identity cannot branch in the same way.

The informational account makes the problem sharper. If the self is an information-bearing pattern, substrate independence becomes easier to imagine. Yet duplication is possible because one pattern can be instantiated twice. Exact pattern type-identity is an equivalence relation among implementations; weaker similarity may be symmetric without being transitive. Neither relation is numerical identity. Let ~ here denote pattern type-identity. Then a ~ b does not yield identity:

$$a \sim b \nvdash a=b.$$

Replication is easier to establish than survival. A transhumanist who is content with a successor may accept that consequence, but the promise that I shall survive requires more.

The person-sortal account says that humanity is accidental to persistence while personhood is not. This is perhaps the most natural way to preserve I and T together. The human at t_1 and posthuman at t_2 are the same person even though they differ in species membership. However, the solution merely relocates the work, for we still need an account of the persistence conditions for personhood. If those conditions are psychological, biological, or informational, the earlier problems return. If personhood is primitive, however, the account approaches the haecceitistic account discussed next.

The haecceitistic account gives the individual a primitive thisness or primitive identity capable of surviving qualitative alteration. While this account handles radical intrinsic change remarkably well, its cost is explanatory, for a primitive haecceity can stop a regress without thereby telling us why this particular is non-substitutable or why the normative significance attaching to it persists. The account may secure numerical identity and leave N underexplained.[17]

6.3 Satisfaction Is Cheap; Admissibility Is Not

The worked construction, now in the appendix, gives an exact result. A thin theory of informational continuity permits one predecessor to be connected to two distinct simultaneous successors. Once the admissible structures are constrained by non-branching numerical identity, the theory no longer entails that the predecessor persists as both. Yet the constraint leaves open whether either successor is identical with the predecessor. Who, then, is supposed to have survived? Nothing in the satisfaction relation answers that question, and the admissibility condition must be defended before the restricted consequence can carry metaphysical weight.

Admissibility Tests for Identity Models

1. Extension: does the model classify ordinary cases of persistence and replacement in ways we have independent reason to accept?
2. Modal profile: does it remain stable under copying, branching, radical bodily change, memory loss, and other counterfactual cases relevant to the theory?
3. Explanatory role: does the proposed relation explain why this one persists, or does it merely redescribe a pattern of similarity?
4. Normative continuity: does the model explain why dignity, obligation, benefit, and harm continue to concern this individual rather than a successor who resembles the individual sufficiently?

The fourth test bears especially on radical enhancement. Where the promise is that this person will survive, reasons owed to this person cannot be discharged by producing a sufficiently similar successor. The continuity relation requires its own defense.

Biological continuity provides a familiar explanation of embryo-to-adult development; psychological and informational continuity survive some bodily changes but can also be duplicated. A person-sortal account must explain its persistence conditions, and primitive thisness cannot substitute for an account of normative standing. The formal result chooses among none of them.

Embryonic twinning exhibits the difficulty in another setting: one early organism may give rise to two successors, although non-branching identity cannot identify it with both. That limitation concerns persistence. It leaves open what care the early organism is owed before division.

The language of a teleo-space may collect the possibilities and normative constraints involved in such a comparison. It adds no theorem to the argument made here.[18]

7.0 A Theological Change of Warrant: Divine Address and Personal Non-Substitutability

The identity problem is now clearer, though not uniquely solved. Christian theology enters with a different warrant. Neither first-order logic nor the limitations of intrinsic accounts entail a doctrine of creation. Invoking God merely because biological or psychological accounts face difficulty would repeat the God-of-the-gaps error in metaphysics.

The theological proposal arises independently from a doctrine of creaturely particularity I first defended in these pages and have since developed further.[19] Its thesis is that personal non-substitutability need not be grounded finally in qualitative profile, structural position, or brute intrinsic haecceity. The deeper ground can be divine address: the Father's loving donation of this creature as an irreducible "you"[20] within the inseparable action of Father, Son, and Spirit.[21] The Logos articulates what is so given into intelligible form; the Spirit orders the field normatively. The proposal is extrinsic in the relevant sense that what makes this one non-fungibly this one is not finally a property hidden inside the individual.

This is stronger than saying that God loves creatures already individuated. Divine address, on this account, grounds the non-substitutability of a creature received as an irreducible "you," not the arithmetic fact that there is one creature here or two. "Counting is downstream from love" concerns the order of explanation: enumeration distinguishes individuals, but does not tell us why this one cannot be replaced by another of equal capacities. Two pennies can be numerically distinct and remain fungible. Persons are not merely countable; the loss of this one is not made good by producing someone sufficiently similar.[22]

Three questions must be distinguished here. Numerical distinctness asks whether a and b are two rather than one; diachronic identity asks whether a at one time is the very individual encountered at another; moral non-substitutability asks why the loss of a cannot be compensated simply by producing b, however similar b may be. The fact that two human organisms are numerically distinct does not, by itself, settle their moral standing. Nor does the bare assertion of a primitive thisness yield a norm of protection. Divine address is proposed to do more than mark an identity: within a Christian account of creation it grounds the worth of this individual as one to whom care is owed. That normative work is a further theological claim, not a theorem about identity.

What happens to the transhumanist *aporia* under this model? The first result is that radical intrinsic change need not by itself destroy identity, for if the identity of the creature is not constituted by one privileged intrinsic profile, then change from H at t_1 to ¬H at t_2 does not automatically imply replacement. The second result is that normative continuity no longer has to supervene simply upon present capacities. The creature's non-fungible worth is grounded in the divine relation that gives this one, even while capacities and forms change. In that respect, an address model has resources for I, T, and N that the intrinsic models lack in combination.[23]

The address model rests on theological grounds independent of the finite example. Christological resurrection confesses that the crucified Jesus himself is raised, not a qualitative successor; creaturely love refuses to treat one person as replaceable by a similar individual; and Scripture speaks of God's knowing and forming particular human lives. The first ground concerns numerical persistence, the second moral non-substitutability, the third a creative relation that does not wait upon the emergence of mature rational capacities. Psalm 139:13–16 speaks of God's formation and regard in the womb; Jeremiah 1:5 addresses the prophet as known before birth; Luke 1:41–44 ascribes significance to the unborn John. These texts are not embryological treatises, and Jeremiah's prophetic call cannot simply be generalized as a proof of every embryo's full moral standing. They do give Christian theology reason to speak of divine regard for unborn particular lives. Mere *de re* creation would be insufficient—the creation of a penny is likewise particular. The further claim is a personal address whose object is received as a "you."

The embryo application therefore involves an explicit theological premise. An embryo already in existence is an individual living human organism, not merely a possible future conception. That biological fact does not by itself establish personal moral standing. My proposal is that God's personally directed and valuing address already concerns this embryonic life. The scriptural witness just considered, taken with Christian claims about creation and the protection owed to vulnerable neighbors, supports this judgment without making it a theorem. Accordingly, the embryo belongs among the existing claimants whose interests parental authority

must consider. A reader who rejects this premise will reasonably reject some of the ethical conclusions that follow; the precise disagreement concerns divine regard and moral standing, not the algebra of identity.

Where one embryo gives rise to twins, numerical identity cannot pass to both later individuals under a non-branching account; whether the earlier organism persists as one, or as neither, remains disputed. Divine address does not resolve the numerical question. It affirms that the earlier living organism stands within God's regard, just as each later twin does, without locating the ground of their worth in a measurable feature of the early embryo.

There is an irony worth noticing. Radical transhumanism needs thisness more desperately as transformation becomes more radical. If the later being differs only slightly from me, ordinary continuities do most of the work, but if the later being differs radically in body, capacity, lifespan, memory architecture, and perhaps species membership, the sentence "that is still me" needs a much more robust ground. The more successfully transhumanism transcends the human, the more difficult it becomes to explain the demonstrative "this" using only the intrinsic properties being transcended.

This result will matter when we return to embryo selection, for a preference-driven selection system operates by profiles, and the theological account says that the person is not finally a profile. While that does not make genetic information useless, it does tell us what genetic information cannot tell us: why this one is non-fungibly this one.

One last distinction prevents a false inference. Radical posthuman transformation poses a problem of persistence across time: will the later individual still be this one? Embryo selection presents a different problem: several developing individuals exist, and a decision favors one over others. The cases are related because qualitative profiles do not themselves establish the identity or worth of the individuals concerned, but the argument against embryo selection does not follow simply from the transhumanist *aporia*. It requires the additional moral premises now brought into view.

8.0 Luther's *Oeconomia* and the Three Estates

Divine address supplies an account of the standing of particular creatures. What sort of authority, then, belongs to those who must care for them? Luther's three estates furnish a historically specific answer concerning the household. I shall distinguish his account of divine institution and human administration from the fiduciary principle I propose to draw from it, since a sixteenth-century doctrine of household vocation cannot be made into a ruling on embryo selection without further argument.

8.1 What Does *Oeconomia* Mean?

The word oeconomia will sound archaic to many readers and misleadingly familiar to others. It is the Latinized form of the Greek *oikonomia*, the ordering or management of the *oikos*, the household. In classical usage, the household included more than the modern nuclear family, involving marriage, children, servants, property, work, production, education, and the ordinary governance required to sustain a common life. The term therefore overlaps with what later became "economics," but Luther's *oeconomia* cannot be translated simply as the economy, nor is it the patristic "economy of salvation." In the texts relevant here, it means the household estate, broadly conceived.[24]

This matters because Luther's three estates are not three social classes, that is, clergy, nobility, and peasantry under new names. They are instead overlapping orders in which ordinary people live: *ecclesia*, the order constituted by God's Word and worship; *oeconomia*, the household and its associated work of marriage, nurture, labor, education, and provision; and *politia*, civil or political order. The same person may inhabit all three at once. A mother may hear and confess the Word in *ecclesia*, rear children and manage a household in *oeconomia*, and live as citizen or magistrate within *politia*. "Estate" here names a structured field of vocation and authority, not a caste.[25]

Luther's Genesis lectures provide the most direct creation-theological exposition. Commenting on Genesis 2:16–17, he places the institution of the church before the household and the polity; the household is then constituted within the creation narrative. In the prelapsarian setting coercive civil governance is not yet the remedy that sin will require. Luther's next observation matters as much as the sequence of institutions: Adam is charged with the administration of the household. Thus God institutes the *oeconomia*, yet human beings genuinely administer it. Gift and human making are not rival explanations, for Adam acts within an order he neither originates nor owns without limit.[26]

The distinction extends beyond the Genesis lectures. In the 1528 *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, Luther describes the three hierarchies and their concrete duties in home, city, and church.[27] In the 1539 circular disputation he states that God ordained three hierarchies—household, polity, and church—while also saying that magistracy and household, though human ordinances, have God's testimony.[28] The *Large Catechism* supplies the complementary account of parental office: other earthly authority is related to parental authority, yet parents themselves remain subject to God's command; children are given, and parents are commanded to raise and govern them according to his will.[29] The historical materials establish neither a ban on technology nor a rule about embryo transfer. They establish a distinction between the source of an office and the authority exercised within it.

8.2 A Short History—and a Warning

The vocabulary has its own history. Luther's *oeconomia* belongs to the classical and late-medieval discourse of household governance; sixteenth-century Lutheran writers then developed explicitly Christian accounts of household life. Justus Menius' *Oeconomia Christiana* (1529) is a pertinent example.[30] Later Lutheran ethics systematized the three estates under the language of divine orders or orders of creation. That later history, especially twentieth-century appeals to allegedly given arrangements of nation, state, and social hierarchy, should not simply be read back into Luther.[31] What matters here is the historically identifiable relation of institution to administration, not the claim that every inherited household arrangement has permanent divine sanction.

The historical warning also guards the constructive argument. 'God institutes' is a consequential claim and an easily abused one; it cannot baptize whatever arrangement happens to exist. Luther's prelapsarian Adam already works, tends the garden, and employs *industria et ars*. But innocent Adam also receives a genuine prohibition. Human making and creaturely limitation therefore belong to the same creational grammar.[32] Nor may we distribute the three estates into rigid boxes, as though *oeconomia* concerned gift while *politia* alone concerned management. Parents plan, prescribe medicine, divide work, keep accounts, and exercise prudent discretion. A household without management would not be holy; it would be hungry.

The question must be narrower: what is constitutive of the household's relation to persons as persons?

8.3 Institution, Administration, and Reception

Reception is my constructive term, not Luther's name for a modern reproductive principle. Nevertheless, the Genesis 2 exposition provides a real linguistic basis for it. Luther says that Adam does not take Eve *ex suo arbitrio*; he waits for God to bring her. Eve is offered by God, Adam is prepared *ad Heuam suscipiendam*, and upon her presentation he recognizes her (*agnoscit eam*). The point is not that Adam remains inert or refrains from naming, for he recognizes and names Eve. It is that his recognition responds to one already given, rather than bestowing her identity or worth by prior specification.[33]

The analogy has a limit that ought not be concealed. The Genesis narrative concerns the presentation of Eve to Adam, not a choice among embryos, and it supplies no direct legal or clinical rule. It would be extravagant to infer that Luther prohibits every deliberation about marriage, conception, or medical treatment. The historical text contributes a grammar of divine donation and human recognition. Its application to comparative embryo ranking depends upon an additional account of who is already owed care and what reasons can justify treating such individuals differently.

The theme reappears in Luther's treatment of children. In his exposition of Genesis 9, he calls offspring God's gift and observes that human beings do not always receive them as such. Elsewhere he describes it as a lofty designation that children are God's gift; commenting on Genesis 16, he says that when offspring are given the house is built and the *oeconomia* rightly constituted.[34] These claims concern generation and household life, not a historically available practice of genetic screening. They nonetheless explain why reception is more than an attractive modern metaphor: it interprets Luther's pairing of divine gift and responsive human recognition.

None of this makes the household passive. The *Large Catechism* says that God gives children and commands parents to raise and govern them. Luther's Genesis lectures likewise affirm that the God who formed Adam from the earth continues to create human beings through parental generation.[35] Human procreation, education, healing, and governance are real forms of agency, not mere occasions for divine action. The office is entrusted to parents precisely so that they may act for the good of others. But authority to act for another is not identical to authority to make that individual's worth depend upon a preferred list of characteristics.

Luther's contrast between divine institution and human administration has a further bearing upon authority. The command to govern and nurture the household is not ownership of those entrusted to it. Parents may exercise judgment precisely because the members of the household have claims upon their care. The authority is real, but its purpose supplies its limits: its exercise must answer to the good of those for whom it is exercised. This is a constructive ethical inference from Luther's vocational grammar, not a passage in which Luther adjudicates IVF. A fiduciary interpretation makes the inference explicit.

Luther's 1542 *Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage* adds a pastoral witness.[36] Addressing grief over children lost before baptism, Luther does not treat the unborn or stillborn merely as failed reproductive projects; he directs the grieving toward God's mercy. The text is not a proof of a modern theory of zygotic personhood, and his precise question concerns salvation and consolation. It nevertheless supports the claim that the unborn belongs within the scope of theological concern rather than being measured only by parental expectation.

These materials permit a Reception Argument whose theological, historical, and moral premises can be tested separately.

Argument [AR]—The Reception and Fiduciary Administration Argument

P1. [Theological standing] On the account of divine address defended in Section 7, each already-existing embryonic human organism has prima facie moral standing. Its interests must therefore enter parental deliberation

even when other embryos possess more attractive predicted characteristics; standing alone does not settle a conflict among claims.

P2. [Entrusted office] In Luther's oeconomia, household authority is administered under divine institution rather than owned without limit. Appropriated normatively, parental authority is fiduciary: those exercising it are answerable to the good of those entrusted to their care.

P3. [Fiduciary judgment] Where several beings possess prima facie claims, the allocation of a consequential opportunity requires reasons concerning their interests, justice among them, or the legitimate purposes of the entrusted office. The more irreversible the deprivation, the stronger the required justification. This principle is defensible in other relations of entrusted care; it does not follow from the historical Luther texts alone.

P4. [Beneficiary and preference] In the origin-sensitive comparison of AC, selecting one embryo rather than another does not improve the selected embryo's genetic prospects. Transfer may nonetheless give an existing embryo a developmental opportunity; another may lose that opportunity. A parental preference for nonmedical predicted traits is not, without further justification, a fiduciary reason sufficient to govern a consequential allocation. Serious medical risk may be relevant to a fair transfer sequence, though a superior medical score does not itself override the claims of others.

P5. [Clinical application] Polygenic ranking can govern transfer order or permanent exclusion. When surplus embryos are created with exclusion anticipated, the allocation problem begins before screening; where each embryo remains genuinely intended for transfer, the case concerns the justification and consequences of sequence.

C. [Conditional conclusion] Given P1–P5, preference for nonmedical predicted traits alone does not justify materially consequential transfer priority or permanent exclusion. Grave medical considerations can contribute to a defensible transfer order, subject to the claims of other embryos and the risks of treatment; a score cannot, without further grounds, justify their indefinite abandonment or destruction.

The argument's warrant must be located where it belongs. P1 is a theological judgment about embryonic standing, independently developed in Section 7; it does not already declare every allocation illicit. P2 characterizes the parental office through Luther, while P3 advances a fiduciary principle that one can test against familiar duties of trustees, guardians, and clinicians entrusted with the good of others. P4 examines whether genetic scores answer to that principle and keeps distinct an embryo's inherited prospects and the developmental opportunity afforded by transfer. P5 identifies the relevant decisions. The appendix sets out the conditional inference;

its validity is no substitute for defending the theological and ethical premises, which is precisely what the article undertakes.

8.4 What Is Being Administered?

A household cannot avoid specifying outcomes. Parents treat illness, provide education, and seek the conditions under which children flourish. These acts concern a recipient whose worth is already acknowledged. Where embryos exist, however, choosing which receives transfer allocates an opportunity among claimants. Viability, risk to the mother, and the burdens of repeated procedures can matter to that decision, but preference for a predicted child cannot claim the status of a treatment without identifying the person treated and the good secured.

The point concerns the jurisdiction of an entrusted office. Triage can be unavoidable, and responsible parents must sometimes act under imperfect information; what they need is a reason addressed to the interests of the claimants, not an attractive score standing in place of such a reason.

There is an obvious objection. Decisions about when to conceive, and with whom, affect who will exist. I agree, but before conception there is no existing embryo whose developmental opportunity the decision allocates. Once several embryos have been produced, a different question arises because a policy of selection now governs organisms which, on the theological account, already have claims. The identity of the later child remains relevant; the moral status of those who exist at the time of choice cannot be dissolved into a comparison among possible future persons.

What should parents do when one embryo faces a grave disease risk and another does not? Selecting e_2 rather than e1 does not improve e_2's inherited genetic prospects: no genotype is repaired by transfer. Yet e_2 already exists, and transfer may afford it an opportunity for development which, under a different decision, would be denied. Equally, e_1 may lose that opportunity. We have therefore left the familiar treatment case for a problem of allocating goods among claimants. Serious medical considerations can bear upon that allocation because parents undertake the provision of care, and foreseeable grave suffering bears upon what caring for the child will involve. Habermas's criterion of reasonably presumed consent helps explain the difference in moral reasons: protection from grave suffering can normally be justified to a future child, whereas height or eye color ordinarily expresses the chooser's taste. Yet even a sound medical reason for ordering transfer does not extinguish e_1's claim, and probability, severity, maternal risk, possible treatment, and the burdens of delay must enter the judgment. The distinction gives moral reasons their appropriate weight without converting comparative ranking into a warrant for abandonment.[37]

Luther's account cannot decide every clinical conflict. It establishes that extensive competence in the household coexists with a limit upon its authority; Adam's

labor and ingenuity were no exemption from that limit. A technology can rank outcomes without thereby establishing what parents ought to do with those ranked.

8.5 Disease Selection and the Embryos Not Chosen

Suppose embryo e_1 has a much higher estimated risk of a devastating early-onset disease than embryo e_2. Selection cannot make e_2 genetically healthier: e_2 already possesses its genome. Transfer may, however, provide e_2 with a developmental opportunity which would otherwise go to e_1. The decision thus involves competing claims and foreseeable burdens rather than the benefit of replacing one possible child with a genetically preferable version of itself. A grave medical risk can give parents reason to order transfer, but the claim of e_1 survives that judgment. The Wards' concern about Type 1 diabetes is understandable; the present polygenic estimate, however, is considerably less determinative than a test for a serious single-gene disorder, and no prediction supplies a general license to abandon another embryo.

A disease-risk comparison and a choice for eye color can employ the same scoring machinery, but their reasons differ. Avoiding substantial foreseeable illness can be argued from the child's good; a preference about appearance ordinarily expresses the chooser's taste. The 2026 physician survey describes a similar difference in attitudes, but cannot establish that normative conclusion. Nor does the difference automatically vindicate PGT-P as presently marketed: professional societies continue to question its clinical readiness.[38]

As the ranking turns toward eye color, stature, or speculative intelligence, what interest of an existing embryo authorizes the choice? The traits are properties of the embryos being compared; they are not goods which the act of selection supplies to any of them. The possibility of loving the child who is eventually born is not disputed. The difficulty concerns the justification of a selection policy which governs the developmental prospects of individuals whose value, on the argument advanced here, precedes their score. Sandel's giftedness argument and Luther's account of the household converge at this point, though from different premises.

The marketed practice brings the question into focus. Scores matter most when embryos compete for transfer opportunities, and some IVF plans anticipate that only part of an existing cohort will ever be transferred. If embryos are created in surplus precisely so that a subset may be ranked and discarded or left indefinitely stored, the exclusionary decision has been built into the plan before scoring begins. Genuine sequential transfer, permanent deferral, destructive research donation, and deliberate destruction are different acts, but the moral claims of an existing embryo are not cancelled by its place on a scorecard. I have argued elsewhere in this journal that terminating a human life God intends is morally grave.[39]

This argument converges with the February 2026 position of Lutherans For Life, a co-publisher of this journal, in condemning practices that deliberately exclude embryos judged unsuitable. But the positions differ in scope: Lutherans For Life also rejects IVF for bypassing the one-flesh design of procreation, whereas the Reception Argument does not establish that general prohibition and can allow medically justified transfer order without equating priority with exclusion. Where embryos are deliberately created in excess of a plan for transfer so that lower-ranked embryos can be eliminated or indefinitely excluded, the fiduciary argument condemns the governing rationale rather than merely requesting more careful ranking. That one selected child may have a higher predicted welfare score cannot answer the prior claims of the others.[40]

9.0 Conclusion

The Wards wanted to spare a future child serious illness, a hope which anyone who has watched a child suffer can understand. Yet the polygenic scorecard poses a problem prior to the question of genetic improvement: several embryos may already exist, and selecting one assigns a developmental opportunity that another does not receive. One is not thereby making an existing embryo genetically better. What justifies the allocation?

Sandel's concern about receptive parenthood, Habermas's concern about a later child's understanding of its origin, and Parfit's non-identity problem remain different arguments. The branching illustration likewise distinguishes numerical persistence from continuity without telling us which individual survives. Their convergence lies in the question each presses upon easy talk of enhancement: which individual is at issue, and what reason has actually been given for acting toward that one?

Christian theology answers first by placing particular embryonic lives within the field of divine address. Luther's *oeconomia* then helps characterize parental authority as administration held in trust, and the fiduciary inference developed here subjects its allocation decisions to the interests of those whose care is at stake. Serious medical risks can furnish relevant reasons for a transfer order; preference for a nonmedical profile does not, without further grounds, do so. Nor can the prediction that one child will fare better be treated as though it cancelled another embryo's claim.

The criticism therefore bears most heavily on a practice that creates embryos with permanent exclusion anticipated. A genuine plan to transfer them in sequence must be judged differently, according to clinical risk, parental capacity, and fair consideration of each embryo. The moral question is not whether parents may use technology. It is whether their authority to care for a child extends to deciding that another existing human life, less well ranked, may be left behind.

A child's good warrants medicine, care, and responsible judgment. Yet a profile is not a person, and parental authority is not a license to make existing persons interchangeable. The market can arrange them on one screen; it cannot determine what one owes to each.

Appendices

Appendix, Argument AN

Take A to mean that an intervention alters inherited human form; N that inherited human form enjoys independent normative privilege; and J that A alone suffices to justify a verdict of moral impermissibility. Let B denote the restricted considerations actually introduced in AN—bare inheritance and its demonstrated malleability, without an independent argument for N. $W_B(\psi)$ means that ψ is warranted on B. This context index matters: lack of warrant on B does not imply that no other evidence could warrant N. AN can be written as a propositional argument about these epistemic claims, but its second premise remains a dialectical judgment concerning B, not a logical consequence of malleability alone:

P1′. $W_B(J) \rightarrow W_B(N)$

P2′. $\neg W_B(N)$ [given only B]

C. $\neg W_B(J)$ [*modus tollens* from P1′ and P2′]

The schema is valid as a conditional inference once its premises are granted. P2′ does not assert ¬N and does not preclude $W_{B'}(N)$ for a richer body of reasons B′. AN defeats the appeal to inheritedness alone; it does not disprove every moral argument against enhancement.

Appendix, Argument AO

Let D(x) mean that x is a determinate beneficiary across the contemplated alternatives; Can(a,m,x) that a can employ intervention m for x at reasonable cost and risk; MRΔW(m,x) that employing m would secure a morally relevant increase in x's expected well-being; and Treats(m) and Enhances(m) the two categories invoked in the parity argument. O(a,m,x) abbreviates the *pro tanto* obligation of agent a to employ m for x. This deontic expression is a schematic predicate, not a complete semantics for obligation. Set $B(a,m,x) := D(x) \wedge Can(a,m,x) \wedge MR\Delta W(m,x)$, and $G(m) := Genetic(m) \vee Reproductive(m)$.

P1*. $\forall a \forall x \forall m[(B(a,m,x) \wedge Treats(m)) \rightarrow O(a,m,x)]$.

P2*. $\forall a \forall x \forall m[(B(a,m,x) \wedge Enhances(m)) \rightarrow O(a,m,x)]$.

P3*. $\exists a \exists x \exists m[G(m) \wedge B(a,m,x) \wedge (Treats(m) \vee Enhances(m))]$.

C1. $\forall a \forall x \forall m[(G(m) \wedge B(a,m,x) \wedge (Treats(m) \vee Enhances(m))) \rightarrow O(a,m,x)]$.

C2. $\exists a \exists x \exists m[G(m) \wedge O(a,m,x)]$.

C1 follows from P1* and P2* by cases on the explicitly stated disjunction; C2 follows from C1 and P3*. The proof does not assume that all interventions are either treatments or enhancements. P3* makes the existential instantiation explicit: it identifies at least one qualifying genetic or reproductive intervention of one of the two kinds covered. None of this entails BP, because AO contains no principle for ranking the lives of different beneficiaries. The classification of treatment and enhancement may be contested, and a preventive measure outside both categories falls outside this schema. The philosophical work lies in defending P2 and applying D(x), not in the validity of the inference.

Appendix, Bridge Principle BP

Let E be a nonempty finite set of available embryos, and $_W$ a fixed ranking of expected well-being of lives anticipated to develop from its members. Suppose, for the simplified case, that $_W$ has a unique maximizer $Best_W(E)$. Write Avail(p,E) for availability to prospective parent p and Reason(p,e,E,C) for a pro tanto reason to choose e from E under C. Reason is a four-place predicate in a schematic, many-sorted regimentation allowing parent and embryo-set variables; it is not the deontic obligation predicate O of AO. No general duty to maximize expected well-being is assumed. This selector compares different prospective lives rather than treating a single fixed beneficiary:

BP. $\forall p \forall E[(Avail(p,E) \wedge Nonempty(E) \wedge UniqueBest_W(E)) \rightarrow Reason(p, Best_W(E), E, C_W)]$.

Here C_W is the criterion-set that induces the ranking $_W$ over prospective lives; it is not the genome of the selected embryo. The notation is schematic and many-sorted, not a claim that ordinary unsorted first-order logic quantifies over literal sets without a theory of membership.

Appendix, Argument AG

Let s(p,C) name the embryo selected for immediate transfer by p under criterion-set C in a case where selection occurs. Let d(e) name a later developmental continuant of e under the stated assumption of singleton development without fission or fusion. Let Rcv(p,x) mean the disposition to receive x without treating x's worth as conditional on a prior specification. Let Alloc(p,e,C) mean that p uses C in assigning a consequential opportunity to embryo e, and let RiskR(p,x) mean that the procedure puts later parental receptivity under risk. RiskR is a contestable normative predicate, not a calculated probability.

The descriptive core is origin-sensitive and explicitly limited:

- $s(p,C) = e_i$
- $e_i \neq e_j \rightarrow d(e_i) \neq d(e_j)$ [an origin-sensitive assumption of this restricted model]
- Alloc(p,e,C) when s(p,C)=e and C materially governs the opportunity assigned to embryo e.

We distinguish an allocation concerning the embryo from its possible expressive effect upon the later child. Let NonMed(C) indicate a nonmedical criterion-set and Decisive(p,e,C) that C materially determined the allocation.

P1. $\forall p \forall x[\text{ProperLove}(p,x) \rightarrow \text{Rcv}(p,x)]$.

P2. $\forall p \forall C \forall e[(\text{NonMed}(C) \wedge s(p,C)=e \wedge \text{Decisive}(p,e,C)) \rightarrow \text{Alloc}(p,e,C)]$.

P3. $\forall p \forall e \forall C[\text{Alloc}(p,e,C) \rightarrow \text{RiskR}(p,d(e))]$.

C. $\forall p \forall C \forall e[(\text{NonMed}(C) \wedge s(p,C)=e \wedge \text{Decisive}(p,e,C)) \rightarrow \text{RiskR}(p,d(e))]$.

C follows from P2 and P3. P1 explains why the risk matters, though it is not needed for formal validity. An allocation may remain justified on other grounds; the fact that a preference-driven selection can place receptivity at risk does not prove a parent's later love conditional. The fiduciary question about embryos themselves is argued separately in AR.

Appendix, Argument AC (notation)

Use the two-world notation Ex(x,w), Gen(e,x,w), and $\text{Better}(x,w_1,w_2)$ for existence, development, and comparative welfare of a *single* individual in two alternatives. The restricted origin-sensitive account adds an explicit origin principle OP, stating that distinct source embryos yield distinct later individuals in the comparison. OP is an additional metaphysical premise rather than a law of logic; without it $x \neq y$ does not follow. A standard person-affecting benefit claim requires:

$\forall x \forall w_1 \forall w_2[\text{Better}(x,w_1,w_2) \rightarrow (\text{Ex}(x,w_1) \wedge \text{Ex}(x,w_2))]$.

The origin-sensitive principle, followed by its application to the case, is:

OP. $\forall e \forall f \forall x \forall y \forall w \forall v[(\text{Gen}(e,x,w) \wedge \text{Gen}(f,y,v) \wedge e \neq f) \rightarrow x \neq y]$.

Case. $\text{Gen}(e_1,x,w_1) \wedge \text{Gen}(e_2,y,w_2) \wedge e_1 \neq e_2$.

Hence $x \neq y$, by OP and the case. The conclusion depends on OP: remove that origin principle and the case does not imply $x \neq y$. OP can be disputed, particularly outside the restricted singleton-development model. AC therefore blocks an unargued transfer of AO *within this comparison model*; it does not prove the origin principle, settle twinning or fusion cases, or itself establish duties toward embryos already formed.

Appendix, Branching and Restricted Consequence

A finite first-order example gives the distinction some teeth. Let the domain consist of temporal stages. Use the signature L = {H,Q,C,S,Sim,h,u,v}. H and Q classify stages as human and posthuman; C(x,y) expresses directed informational continuity; S(x,y) says that stages belong to one numerically persisting individual; and Sim(x,y) means that two stages are simultaneous. S is not logical identity. The constants h, u, and v denote one earlier stage and two later stages. For the proposed branching case, u and v are distinct and simultaneous. This is a structural analogy: its formal domain need not contain embryos, but a pre-twinning organism and two later descendants generate a branching pattern worth comparing.

Let Δ_0 contain $h \neq u$, $h \neq v$, $u \neq v$; H(h), ¬H(u), ¬H(v), Q(u), Q(v); C(h,u), C(h,v); Sim(u,v); and the first-order axioms making S reflexive, symmetric, and transitive. The predicate Sim is interpreted so that Sim(u,v) holds. The theory Δ_0 says nothing about whether stages u and v belong to the same persisting individual. In particular, it does not include ¬S(u,v). That omission matters.

A structure with S interpreted as the universal relation satisfies Δ_0 and makes S(h,u) ∧ S(h,v) true. Thus $\Delta_0 \not\models \neg(S(h,u) \wedge S(h,v))$. Now restrict attention to K, the class of structures in which distinct simultaneous stages cannot both belong to one numerically persisting individual. Write its general constraint as NB: $\forall x \forall y \forall z[(S(x,y) \wedge S(x,z) \wedge Sim(y,z)) \rightarrow y=z]$. Because Δ_0 asserts Sim(u,v) and $u \neq v$, we have $\Delta_0 \models_K \neg(S(h,u) \wedge S(h,v))$. The restriction does work: the inference fails over unrestricted structures but follows over K. Equivalently, $\Delta_0 \cup \{NB\}$ has that consequence in ordinary first-order semantics. The two formulations differ in warrant rather than in logic: writing NB into the theory would treat non-branching as one more descriptive premise, whereas restricting the class of structures marks it as an independently defended constraint on what counts as a model of persistence at all.

Non-branching still does not tell us which successor survives. Three admissible interpretations of S on {h,u,v} remain: identity only (M_0), the partition {h,u}/{v} (M_1), or {h,v}/{u} (M_2). All satisfy Δ_0 within K. The universal bridge C(x,y) → S(x,y), however, is inconsistent with Δ_0 over K, because the given C-relations would force both successors to be numerically continuous with h. The example does not prove which S-relation obtains. In twinning, it clarifies why one earlier embryo cannot be stipulated numerically identical to two later distinct individuals under a non-branching account. It does not settle the moral standing of the earlier organism or the later twins.

Appendix, Argument AR (Reception and Fiduciary Administration)

For a simplified case, let E be a nonempty finite set of existing embryos, p an intending parent, and C a governing criterion-set. Claim(e) means that e has prima facie

moral standing; HouseholdAuth(p,E) says that p has consequential authority over E; Fid(p,E) that the authority is fiduciary. Prio(p,E,C) means that C governs an order of transfer, while Excl(p,E,C) means that it governs permanent exclusion. JustPri and JustExc express justified allocations; SuffPri and SuffExc express reasons sufficient, respectively, for ordering transfer and for permanent exclusion. ProfileOnly(C,E) means a ranking governed solely by parents' preferences for predicted nonmedical traits; ScoreOnly(C,E) means that a comparative score, whether medical or not, is advanced as the sole reason for exclusion. MedGrave(C,E) means that C tracks a serious and reasonably predictable risk of grave illness; RelevantPri(C,E) means that such risk is relevant to a fair ordering, without prejudging the final judgment. These are schematic, typed predicates. The theological warrant for Claim, and the normative grounds for the sufficiency predicates, lie in the argument's prose rather than in logic.

P1. $\forall e(e \in E \rightarrow \text{Claim}(e))$.

P2. $\text{HouseholdAuth}(p,E) \rightarrow \text{Fid}(p,E)$.

P3a. $[\text{Fid}(p,E) \wedge \forall e(e \in E \rightarrow \text{Claim}(e)) \wedge \text{Prio}(p,E,C)] \rightarrow [\text{JustPri}(p,E,C) \rightarrow \text{SuffPri}(C,E)]$.

P3b. $[\text{Fid}(p,E) \wedge \forall e(e \in E \rightarrow \text{Claim}(e)) \wedge \text{Excl}(p,E,C)] \rightarrow [\text{JustExc}(p,E,C) \rightarrow \text{SuffExc}(C,E)]$.

P4. $\text{ProfileOnly}(C,E) \rightarrow \neg\text{SuffPri}(C,E)$.

P5. $\text{MedGrave}(C,E) \rightarrow \text{RelevantPri}(C,E)$.

P6. $\text{ScoreOnly}(C,E) \rightarrow \neg\text{SuffExc}(C,E)$.

C1. $[\text{HouseholdAuth}(p,E) \wedge \text{Prio}(p,E,C) \wedge \text{ProfileOnly}(C,E)] \rightarrow \neg\text{JustPri}(p,E,C)$.

C2. $[\text{HouseholdAuth}(p,E) \wedge \text{Excl}(p,E,C) \wedge \text{ScoreOnly}(C,E)] \rightarrow \neg\text{JustExc}(p,E,C)$.

Given the typed reading, both conclusions follow. P2 is required: without the fiduciary characterization, the conditional duties in P3a and P3b are not triggered. P1 supplies standing rather than the result of a particular allocation. P4 and P6 are contestable normative premises; their support lies in the fiduciary analysis and cannot be extracted from AC's origin-sensitive identity principle alone. P5 records the relevance of serious medical reasons, not their automatic sufficiency: proportionality, maternal risk, and competing embryonic claims remain to be judged. This is a conditional regimentation of a theological argument, and its value is to show where philosophical and theological disagreement must occur.

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Notes

1. Rob Stein, "These Companies Help Parents Try to Pick Their Babies' Traits. Experts Are Wary," NPR, May 6, 2026. Stein reports that Christian Ward, who has Type 1 diabetes, signed up for Nucleus Genomics primarily to reduce the risk of the disease in a future child, and that Nucleus marketed both disease-risk and nonmedical-trait predictions. The report does not establish that the Wards had already selected among scored embryos.
2. Theresa A. Grebe et al., "Clinical Utility of Polygenic Risk Scores for Embryo Selection: A Points to Consider Statement of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG)," *Genetics in Medicine* 26, no. 4 (2024): 101052, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gim.2023.101052; Ethics Committee of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine and Practice Committee of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, "Use of Preimplantation Genetic Testing for Polygenic Disorders (PGT-P): An Ethics Committee Opinion," *Fertility and Sterility* 125, no. 1 (2026): 24–30, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fertnstert.2025.10.023; Rémy A. Furrer et al., "Decision-Making Criteria in Polygenic Embryo Screening: A Survey of Reproductive Medicine Physicians," *Genetics in Medicine* 28, no. 8 (2026): 102631, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gim.2026.102631.
3. Julian Huxley, "Transhumanism," in *New Bottles for New Wine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 13–17; Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 1–25.
4. Max More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," in *The Transhumanist Reader*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 3–17, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118555927.ch1. More's earlier "Transhumanism: Toward a Futurist Philosophy" appeared separately in *Extropy* 6 (1990): 6–12.
5. Nick Bostrom, "Human Genetic Enhancements: A Transhumanist Perspective," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 37, no. 4 (2003): 493–506, 493, https://doi.org/10.1023/B:INQU.0000019037.67783.d5.
6. For the restricted-context warrant analysis, including the explicitly indexed W_B predicates and a *modus tollens* derivation, see Appendix, Argument AN. The restriction prevents an inference from lack of warrant on one stated basis to lack of warrant on every possible basis.
7. Nick Bostrom, "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity," *Bioethics* 19, no. 3 (2005): 202–214, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8519.2005.00437.x.
8. Julian Savulescu, "Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children," *Bioethics* 15, nos. 5–6 (2001): 413–426, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8519.00251; Julian Savulescu, "New Breeds of Humans: The Moral Obligation to Enhance," *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* 10, suppl. 1 (2005): 36–39, https://doi.org/10.1016/

S1472-6483(10)62202-X; Julian Savulescu and Nick Bostrom, eds., *Human Enhancement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

9. Nick Bostrom, *Deep Utopia: Life and Meaning in a Solved World* (Washington, DC: Ideapress, 2024); Timnit Gebru and Émile P. Torres, "The TESCREAL Bundle: Eugenics and the Promise of Utopia through Artificial General Intelligence," *First Monday* 29, no. 4 (2024), https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v29i4.13636. Here extropianism names the futurist program associated especially with Max More and the Extropy Institute, emphasizing open-ended improvement through reason, technology, and deliberate self-transformation. Singularitarianism is the expectation that accelerating technological development, often centered on artificial general intelligence, will culminate in a technological singularity beyond which ordinary projections about human society become unreliable. Cosmism places human or posthuman development within a cosmic horizon, often joining radical life extension, space expansion, and the large-scale transformation of intelligence.
10. Michael J. Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), esp. 45–62, 85–100.
11. Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).
12. Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), esp. 51–52, 57–76.
13. Nicholas Agar, *Humanity's End: Why We Should Reject Radical Enhancement* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).
14. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), part IV.
15. For the standard distinction between proof and satisfaction, see Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," in *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics*, 2nd ed., trans. J. H. Woodger (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 152–278; Wilfrid Hodges, *A Shorter Model Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–10. Soundness and completeness connect syntactic derivability and semantic consequence for first-order logic.
16. Dennis Bielfeldt, *The Logic of Faith: Model Theory and the Meaning of Theology*, chap. 5, manuscript submitted to Cascade Books, 2026. The chapter develops the sequence semantic satisfaction, admissibility, comparative adequacy, and truth, with comparative adequacy supplying defeasible warrant for assertion rather than constituting truth.
17. Robert Merrihew Adams, "Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity," *Journal of Philosophy* 76, no. 1 (1979): 5–26; Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). The same numerical-identity problem becomes even sharper in bodily resurrection, where the identity claim must cross a rupture in ordinary biological and psychological continuity; see n. 23 below.
18. Dennis Bielfeldt, "Teleo-Spaces: Differentiated Possibility, Normative Weighting, and the Ontology of Intelligibility," working paper, substantially revised 2026, https://www.academia.edu/164598090/Teleo_Spaces_Differentiated_Possibility_Normative_Weighting_and_the_Ontology_of_Intelligibility.
19. Dennis Bielfeldt, "Personal Identity, Divine Love, and Extrinsic Individuation," *Verba Vitae* 1, nos. 3–4 (2024): 21–44. The working papers cited in the notes that follow extend that argument, but its core, namely the failure of intrinsic principles of individuation for persons and the case for grounding personal identity in divine intentionality, is set out and defended there.

20. The address model shares a family resemblance with dialogical and relational personalism—Martin Buber's I–Thou, Karl Barth's account of the human being as covenant partner, John Zizioulas' being as communion, and Robert W. Jenson's narrative account of personal identity—though it grounds non-substitutability specifically in Trinitarian address rather than in encounter or communion as such. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970); Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960); John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

21. Dennis Bielfeldt, "Counting Is Downstream from Love: Divine Address and the Ground of Individuation," Theological Metaphysics Study Paper in Philosophical Theology, substantially revised July 2026, https://www.academia.edu/165167583/Counting_Is_Downstream_from_Love_Divine_Address_and_the_Ground_of_Individuation; Dennis Bielfeldt, "Particularity, Intelligibility, and the Ground of Teleo-Spaces," working paper, revised 2026, https://www.academia.edu/164543428/Particularity_Intelligibility_and_the_Ground_of_Teleo_Spaces_Differentiated_Possibility_Trinitarian_Grammar_and_the_Ontology_of_Addressability.

22. Bielfeldt, "Counting Is Downstream from Love." The argument distinguishes numerical distinctness from personal non-substitutability: countability by itself does not explain why the absence of this one cannot be made good by another sufficiently similar instance.

23. The resurrection analogy concerns numerical identity, not merely exact similarity. Christian resurrection claims are not satisfied by a qualitatively exact successor: the one raised must be numerically the one who died, and the paradigm is the crucified Jesus, not a successor answering to his description. If death interrupts organismic integration and psychological process, neither sameness of matter nor remembered profile by itself fixes that identity. For the contemporary debate, see Peter van Inwagen, "The Possibility of Resurrection," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 2 (1978): 114–21; Dean W. Zimmerman, "The Compatibility of Materialism and Survival: The 'Falling Elevator' Model," *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (1999): 194–212; and Trenton Merricks, "The Resurrection of the Body," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 476–90. On divine regard for the unborn, see the discussion of Psalm 139:13–16, Jeremiah 1:5, and Luke 1:41–44 below; those texts do not themselves settle every modern question about an embryo's persistence through twinning.

24. On the classical background and Luther's use of *oeconomia*, see Timothy Shaun Price, "Luther's Use of Aristotle in the Three Estates and Its Implications for Understanding *Oeconomia*," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 18, no. 2 (2015): 373–389.

25. For a concise account of Luther's three estates as overlapping spheres of human life rather than social classes, see Oswald Bayer, "Nature and Institution: Luther's Doctrine of the Three Orders," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1998): 125–159; repr. in *Freedom in Response: Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies*, trans. Jeffrey F. Cayzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 90–118.

26. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883–2009), 42:79.3–20; 87.11–40 (hereafter WA); *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia

Publishing House, 1958), 104–105, 115–118 (hereafter LW). The controlling WA text reads, "Haec est institutio Ecclesiae, antequam esset Oeconomia et Politia" and, after the institution of the church, "etiam Oeconomia constituitur"; at WA 42:79.20, "Oeconomiae administratio est demandata." The English discussion in the text follows the sense of LW rather than presenting a new translation.

27. Martin Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), WA 26:504.30–505.10; LW 37:364–365. Luther describes the three hierarchies and the concrete duties of home, city, and church.

28. Martin Luther, *Disputationes circulatim expediendae* (1539), known editorially as the "Zirkulardisputation," WA 39/2:42.1–4; 52.5–23; 53.1–4; LW New Series, vol. 72, *Disputations I* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2024), 580–626. Thesis 52 reads, "Tres enim hierarchias ordinavit Deus." The preface/report material adds, "Quamvis magistratus et oeconomia etiam sint humanae ordinationes, attamen habent testimonium Dei." Translations in the text are mine; the complete disputation is available in English in LW 72.

29. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism* (1529), Fourth Commandment, WA 30 I:152.19–29; 156.9–17; 156.27–31; *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 400–410. The *Large Catechism* is not printed as a standalone work in the original fifty-five-volume American Edition; accordingly, the English parallel is cited from the *Book of Concord* rather than attaching an inexact LW reference. The WA text at 156.27–31 says that God has given children and commanded parents to raise and govern them according to his will.

30. On early Lutheran development of household ethics, see Justus Menius, *Oeconomia Christiana* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1529), with Luther-related material in WA 30 II:62–63; Price, "Luther's Use of Aristotle," 373–389; Niels Henrik Gregersen, "From Oeconomia to Nordic Welfare Societies: The Idea of a Third-Zone Lutheranism," *Theology Today* 76, no. 3 (2019): 224–232.

31. On the later development and contested historical baggage of "orders of creation," see Taylor D. Holleyman, "The Orders of Vocation: A Brunnerian Proposal," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 25, no. 1 (2023): 114–133, https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12571; Bayer, "Nature and Institution." The nineteenth- and twentieth-century doctrine should not simply be read back into Luther without qualification.

32. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, WA 42:50.25–33 (LW 1:67) on *industria et ars*; WA 42:78.20–40 (LW 1:102–103) on human work and custody before the Fall; WA 42:82.41–83.12 (LW 1:108–109) on the command given to innocent Adam; and WA 42:115.35–40 (LW 1:153), where the temptation is cast as the invalid inference, "Deus dedit vobis omnia ... Ergo una haec arbor vobis non est prohibita." Extensive dominion and real creaturely limits therefore coexist.

33. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, WA 42:90.10–34; 100.22–31; 101.40–41; 102.12–24; 103.7–16; cf. LW 1:119, 133–139. The WA text says that Adam does not take Eve "ex suo arbitrio" but waits for God to bring her; Eve is "offertur ... ab ipso Deo"; Adam is "paratus ... ad Heuam suscipiendam" and then "agnoscit eam." Luther also expounds Adam's naming her Ischa/Virago. Translations in the text are mine.

34. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, WA 42:354.31–37 (LW 2:131); 580.26–39 (cf. LW 3:42–47); 643.40–41 (LW 3:134). The relevant phrases are "prolem esse donum Dei," "tanquam Dei donum liberos amplectuntur," "cum proles datur, aedificatur domus, et recte constituitur Oeconomia," and "liberi sint Dei donum." Translations in the text are mine.

35. Luther, *Large Catechism*, WA 30 I:156.27–31; *Book of Concord*, 410; and Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, WA 42:95.25–35; LW 1:127. For the latter passage, LW translates the point that the God who formed the first human from earth still creates human beings through parental generation.

36. Martin Luther, "Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage" (1542), WA 53:205–8; LW 43:247–50.

37. Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 52. His presumption of consent concerns therapeutic genetic intervention. Its application here to the order of transfer among existing embryos is a constructive analogy, not a claim that Habermas directly addresses embryo ranking.

38. Furrer et al., "Decision-Making Criteria in Polygenic Embryo Screening," 102631. The surveyed reproductive medicine physicians were substantially more willing to consider polygenic embryo screening for serious medical conditions than for nonmedical traits.

39. Bielfeldt, "Personal Identity, Divine Love, and Extrinsic Individuation," 39.

40. Lutherans For Life, "In vitro Fertilization," in *Position Statements of Lutherans For Life* (Nevada, IA: Lutherans For Life, updated July 27, 2026), 24. The statement was adopted February 16, 2026. Where all embryos are genuinely intended for subsequent transfer, scores may change priority without proving that any embryo has been deliberately excluded. The practical ethics differ where a protocol creates or ranks more embryos than the parents plan to transfer, knowing that some will remain indefinitely stored or be destroyed. Both intentions and reasonably foreseeable outcomes deserve independent assessment.

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Created, Not Constructed

Transhumanism, the *Imago Dei*, and the Preciousness of Human Life

Dan Hackmann

1. Introduction: The Value That Enhancement Cannot Confer

Transhumanism can promote the preservation and enhancement of life, but those aims cannot by themselves establish the unconditional worth of every human being. A theistic account grounds that worth in a relationship to God rather than in capacities, preferences, or social consensus. By treating dignity as given rather than earned, it offers a stable basis for affirming the people most vulnerable to being judged less valuable, including those whose lives cannot be enhanced, optimized, or made socially useful.

This thesis identifies both the attraction and the limit of transhumanism. The movement gathers diverse proposals under a common aspiration: to use science and technology to overcome disease, cognitive and physical constraints, aging, and perhaps death itself. In its moderate forms, this aspiration overlaps with medicine's ancient work of healing. In its more radical forms, however, it becomes a project of directed evolution in which present humanity is a provisional platform for a posthuman future. The decisive theological question is therefore not whether technology may alter human life; human beings have always transformed their conditions through tools, medicine, and culture. It is whether technological transformation serves persons whose worth is already given, or whether worth increasingly becomes measured by the capacities transformation can produce.

Yuval Noah Harari's *Homo Deus*[1] provides a particularly revealing account of the second possibility. Harari describes a future in which humanity's ambitions turn from overcoming famine, plague, and war toward achieving happiness, immortality, and divinity. His text is exploratory rather than a technical manifesto, and it includes warnings about inequality, data power, and a possible "useless class." Nevertheless, its imaginative horizon makes visible a secular eschatology: salvation

is redescribed as mastery over biological limitation. Jan C. Bentz[2] is therefore right to read Harari's vision as a secular utopian myth, provided that "myth" names a narrative of destiny rather than a simple falsehood. The deeper issue is whether such a narrative can explain why every human life remains precious when it contributes little to the promised future.

This article argues that the Christian doctrine of the *imago Dei* supplies a more adequate and fruitful grammar for that discussion. "More adequate" means that it accounts for equal and unconditional dignity without tying moral status to measurable functions. "More fruitful" means that it can affirm healing and creativity while criticizing domination, exclusion, and fantasies of self-redemption. The result is neither an indiscriminate rejection of enhancement nor a theological blessing of innovation. It is a criterion of discernment: technology is good when it serves the creaturely good of persons and communities; it becomes idolatrous when it claims to establish the value, destiny, or salvation of the human being.

The debate is best framed as a contest between anthropologies rather than as a simple opposition between scientific optimism and religious conservatism. Bostrom's programmatic definition presents transhumanism as the reasoned use of technology to overcome basic human limitations while also requiring sustained attention to risks and ethical consequences[3] His account is neither a merely technical proposal nor an unqualified celebration of novelty: it presupposes that expanded capacity, prolonged life, and morphological freedom ordinarily enlarge the field of human flourishing. The strength of this position is its insistence that technological development should remain subject to rational scrutiny, distributive justice, and protection against catastrophic harm. Its anthropological limitation, however, is that the good of the person tends to be articulated through autonomy, preference, and the enlargement of possible experience. Bostrom can therefore identify dangers to present and future persons, but his framework leaves less fully explained why persons whose agency cannot be enlarged—or whose dependence cannot be overcome—possess an equal and inviolable worth.

Cole-Turner approaches the same desire for transformation from within Christian theology. He recognizes an affinity between transhumanist restlessness and Christianity's own language of healing, sanctification, resurrection, and participation in divine life, even while disputing the means and end of that transformation.[4] This qualified affinity prevents theology from treating every technological intervention as rebellion against creation. At the same time, it exposes a decisive difference: transhumanism commonly imagines transformation as the technical intensification of presently valued capacities, whereas Christian transformation is received through grace and ordered toward communion with God and neighbor. Cole-Turner thus shifts the question from whether human beings should be transformed to what kind of transformation constitutes fulfillment, who accomplishes it, and whether its benefits

can be separated from justice, reconciliation, and the common good. Shatzer makes the comparison more concrete by arguing that technology is formative before it is spectacular. Technologies do not remain external tools but cultivate habits, desires, perceptions, and patterns of discipleship long before radical enhancement becomes possible.[5] On this account, the anthropological stakes of transhumanism are already present in ordinary practices that normalize speed, control, self-design, and freedom from dependence. Shatzer therefore supplements Bostrom's attention to future risks and Cole-Turner's eschatological discernment with an account of moral formation: the relevant question is not only what technology enables but what kind of person and community its habitual use helps to produce. Read together, the three sources establish complementary levels of analysis. Bostrom clarifies the aspirations and internal ethical safeguards of transhumanism; Cole-Turner evaluates its promise of transformation through Christian doctrines of creation and redemption; and Shatzer identifies the practices by which its anthropology can become socially embodied. Their differences support a discriminating theological approach rather than a categorical rejection of technology. The issue is not whether humanity may seek healing or transformation, but which goods define transformation, which practices form the desiring subject, and whether the governing account of the person can protect those who do not—or cannot—embody its preferred future. The *imago Dei* becomes decisive at precisely this point because it locates dignity prior to autonomy, enhancement, and social usefulness, thereby supplying a criterion by which technological aspirations may be welcomed, limited, or refused.

2. Harari's Utopia and the Moral Deficit of Optimization

Harari's account belongs to a broad transhumanist constellation rather than exhausting it. Transhumanism includes life extension, genetic and pharmaceutical enhancement, cognitive augmentation, human–machine interfaces, cryonics, and speculative proposals such as mind uploading. These projects differ greatly in maturity and moral significance. It would therefore be unjust to treat assistive technology, gene therapy, and cybernetic immortality as versions of one undifferentiated program. Yet they are joined by a normative question that technology cannot answer from within itself: what counts as improvement, and for whom?

Scientific knowledge can identify means for extending life or increasing a capacity. It cannot, solely by describing what can be done, establish why longevity, intelligence, autonomy, or happiness should be ranked as ultimate goods. Every program of enhancement presupposes an anthropology and a hierarchy of goods. If intelligence is enhanced, which forms of intelligence are preferred? If suffering is reduced, how are pain, vulnerability, sacrifice, and dependence to be understood? If life is extended, what makes the extended life good? The language of optimization

conceals these judgments by presenting them as technical necessities, although they remain moral and metaphysical choices.

This problem sharpens in Harari's narrative because the future appears to be governed by values that his genealogical method also renders contingent. Human meanings are treated as historically constructed, while enhancement, longevity, and expanded control appear as self-evident advances. If values are products of changing biological and cultural systems, the ideal of becoming *Homo Deus* is one contingent preference among others. It may be desired by the powerful without being binding on those who cannot, or do not wish to, participate. The technological project thus borrows normative force from moral commitments that neither data nor engineering generates.

The resulting danger is not that transhumanists necessarily despise life. Many emphatically seek to prevent involuntary death, reduce suffering, and widen access to beneficial technologies. The danger is subtler: life may be prized chiefly as the bearer of agency, experience, productivity, or improvable potential. On that basis, some lives can appear richer in value than others. Persons with profound cognitive disabilities, those unable to express preferences, the chronically dependent, and the dying expose the weakness of any account in which the worth of a person tracks capacities. If enhanced agents possess more of the qualities that supposedly ground value, why should they not possess greater moral status?

Harari's own warnings about inequality confirm that this is not an artificial concern. Technologies capable of altering bodies and minds may be distributed through markets and institutions already marked by unequal power. The difference between the enhanced and the unenhanced could become not merely economic but anthropological. A society committed to optimization may formally protect vulnerable people while imaginatively regarding them as obsolete. The question of preciousness is therefore prior to policy: before asking how enhancements should be distributed, one must ask whether the human subject has a worth that no distribution, achievement, or failure can create or cancel.

Bostrom's canonical account complicates any caricature of transhumanism as indifference to justice. His FAQ explicitly asks whether enhancement will benefit only the rich, whether posthumans might threaten unaugmented persons, and how existential risks from advanced technologies should be governed.[6] These concerns show that transhumanism can contain genuine commitments to prudence, distributive fairness, and the protection of future persons. Yet Bostrom's normative center remains "morphological freedom": the individual's liberty to use technology to reshape bodily and cognitive capacities, together with an enlarged range of possible experiences and forms of life. Justice therefore tends to govern access to enhancement and protection from its harms, while the account of the good is organized around autonomy, preference, and expanded capability. The unresolved question

is whether this framework can explain equal dignity when autonomy is severely limited, preferences cannot be expressed, or enhancement offers no plausible benefit. Bostrom protects vulnerable persons as subjects of moral concern, but the capacities he prizes cannot themselves supply a non-gradual basis for their inviolability.

Levin presses the criticism at the level of philosophical anthropology. Her Aristotelian alternative rejects the assumption that flourishing can be produced by aggregating discrete improvements in memory, intelligence, longevity, or control.[7] Human powers belong to an integrated form of embodied life and acquire their meaning within practices, relationships, character, and political institutions. On this view, a technically intensified capacity may fail to improve the person if it fragments agency, weakens shared goods, or magnifies inequality. Levin thus reveals that the debate is not adequately framed as enhancement versus prohibition. It concerns rival accounts of flourishing: one treats capacities as variables available for optimization, while the other asks how particular powers contribute to the good of a whole life lived with and among others.

Bentz extends this critique from anthropology to eschatology. He interprets Harari's projected convergence of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and data systems as a secularized promise of salvation: finitude is to be overcome through increasing prediction, control, and redesign.[8] The force of this reading is not that Harari offers a simple program or ignores technological danger. Rather, the imagined future preserves the structure of religious hope while relocating its agent and end. Technical elites and data-driven systems assume the redemptive role, and liberation is identified with emancipation from biological limitation. The resulting ideal risks judging present humanity by its distance from a technologically perfected future. Persons whose bodies, dependencies, or cognitive forms resist optimization can then appear not merely disadvantaged but anachronistic. Harari himself supplies evidence for this danger. He anticipates a possible separation of intelligence from consciousness and of economic usefulness from personhood, with a technologically empowered elite existing alongside a politically and economically "useless" majority. His warning is diagnostic rather than celebratory, but it exposes a tension within the utopian horizon he describes. If social power increasingly follows enhanced intelligence, data access, and economic utility, an appeal to those same capacities cannot secure the equal status of people who possess less of them. Ethical safeguards may restrain exclusion, yet they remain vulnerable unless equality rests on something more basic than competitive function. Read together, the four sources locate the moral deficit with greater precision. It does not consist in a simple absence of ethical concern: Bostrom foregrounds risk and access, Levin offers an account of integrated flourishing, Bentz exposes the salvific logic of control, and Harari warns of the stratification that technological power may produce. The deficit emerges when concern for justice lacks a non-gradual ground for personal worth. A theological

appeal to the *imago Dei* addresses that lacuna by locating dignity prior to autonomy, consciousness, productivity, or improvable capacity. It therefore supplies not an alternative to practical governance but the anthropological premise that makes the protection of every person—enhanced or unenhanced—more than a contingent preference of the technologically powerful.

3. The *Imago Dei*: Dignity as Gift, Relation, and Vocation

The biblical affirmation that humankind is created in the image and likeness of God[9] has generated several complementary interpretations. Substantive accounts locate the image in features of human nature, often reason or freedom. Relational accounts emphasize communion with God and other creatures. Functional or vocational accounts understand human beings as representatives called to exercise responsible care within creation. No single interpretation settles every anthropological question. Together, however, they resist the reduction of the person to a bundle of optimizable properties.

First, the *imago Dei* names dignity as received rather than achieved.[10] The image is not a performance score. It is not intensified by intelligence, autonomy, health, productivity, or technological sophistication; nor is it erased when such capacities are absent or diminished. Enhancement may change what a person can do, but it cannot make that person more worthy of protection. The doctrine therefore provides a direct answer to the difficult cases that expose capability-based ethics. A person with profound disability and a cognitively enhanced person remain unequal in many powers but equal in basic dignity.

Second, the image is relational. Human identity is not exhausted by self-possession and control; it is constituted through dependence upon God and interdependence with others. Vulnerability consequently need not be romanticized as though suffering were good. Illness may rightly be treated and pain relieved. Nevertheless, dependence is not simply an engineering defect. Infancy, disability, aging, friendship, and political life reveal that persons receive themselves through relations they did not create. A technological ideal centered on radical autonomy can obscure this truth and weaken the practices of patience, solidarity, and care by which a community recognizes every member.

Third, the image is vocational. Human making may participate in responsible creaturely action. Technology is not alien to faith merely because it changes nature; cultivation, medicine, and invention can become forms of stewardship. This perspective avoids a static appeal to "the natural" that would condemn every intervention. Yet vocation also places limits upon mastery. The image-bearer is a

creaturely representative, not an owner with unlimited authority over life. Technical power must answer to justice, the good of the neighbor, and the integrity of creation.

These dimensions make the doctrine more than a theological label attached to conclusions available elsewhere. It integrates ontology, ethics, and destiny. Human beings possess worth because they are called into relation by God; they exercise that worth in relations of responsibility; and their fulfillment lies not in becoming self-caused but in communion with the Creator. The *imago Dei* thereby places every proposal for enhancement within a prior order of gift and obligation.

Theological accounts of the image must nevertheless remain dynamic enough to avoid equating creatureliness with biological stasis. Peters' typology is especially useful here because it distinguishes rational, moral, relational, proleptic, and "created co-creator" models of the *imago Dei*. The rational and moral models identify capacities through which human beings may manifest their distinctive vocation, but taken alone, they risk making the divine image appear measurable and therefore susceptible to technological intensification. The relational model relocates the image in communion with God and neighbor, while the proleptic model understands humanity from the standpoint of its promised fulfillment in Christ. Peters' "created co-creator" formulation further affirms that scientific and technological agency can belong to humanity's creaturely vocation: making and modifying are not intrinsically rebellions against God. Yet creaturely creativity remains accountable to the Creator's purposes and cannot manufacture the eschatological likeness toward which humanity is called. Amplified intelligence, longevity, or control may enlarge agency, but none can turn sinners into saints. The full likeness of God is therefore eschatological and christological, not a quantitative increase in presently admired abilities.[11]

Shatzer complements this account by making the incarnation central to theological anthropology. Because the Word assumes embodied human life, the body cannot be reduced to an accidental container for information or a disposable obstacle to authentic personhood. Incarnation also resists the transhumanist tendency to construe salvation primarily as escape from material limitation: Christian transformation concerns the redemption of embodied persons, not the replacement of embodiment by a supposedly superior substrate. Shatzer's emphasis is additionally formative. Technologies do not merely alter isolated functions; they habituate persons to particular understandings of dependence, control, and the good life. The question is therefore not only whether an intervention changes the body, but whether its use trains Christians to receive embodiment as gift and vocation or to regard it chiefly as defective material awaiting redesign.[12]

Fasoli's analysis of vulnerability supplies a philosophical bridge between these theological claims and the ethics of emerging technology. Vulnerability is not simply exposure to harms that better engineering might eliminate. It arises from embodied, finite, temporal, and relational existence itself. This does not make suffering

intrinsically valuable or prohibit efforts to prevent disease and injury. It does mean that projects of radical disembodiment or mind uploading evade the conditions of personal existence rather than straightforwardly perfecting them. Vulnerability also has an ethical significance: because embodied persons are dependent and exposed to one another, technological power generates obligations of care, solidarity, and protection that cannot be reduced to maximizing autonomous choice.[13] Read together, Peters, Shatzer, and Fasoli yield a more differentiated account of the *imago Dei*. Peters preserves the openness of creaturely vocation to responsible innovation while locating fulfillment in Christ; Shatzer anchors human identity in incarnation and the formative significance of technological practice; and Fasoli shows why finitude and vulnerability remain constitutive even where particular harms can and should be overcome. Thus, the image names both a present dignity and a promised fulfillment. It authorizes responsible creativity without allowing technological capability, disembodiment, or immunity from dependence to become the measure of resemblance to God.

4. Healing, Enhancement, and the Theological Limits of Mastery

A THEOLOGY OF CREATION SHOULD NOT collapse the distinction between therapy and enhancement into a simple opposition, since both can alter bodies and both can be used well or badly. The distinction remains useful, however, because it asks what an intervention is for. Therapy ordinarily seeks to heal, relieve suffering, restore function, or enable participation. Enhancement seeks capacities beyond an accepted range of health. Radical redesign goes further by treating biological humanity itself as a condition to be surpassed. The movement from care to enhancement to redesign is not morally automatic, but it marks an increasing burden of justification.

The crucial test is whether a technology serves the good of persons or makes the person serve an abstract ideal of improvement. An intervention should be judged by its safety, accessibility, voluntariness, social effects, and account of flourishing. It should also be judged by what it teaches a community to see. A device that enables communication may honor agency and relationship; the same culture may still demean those who cannot use it. A therapy that prevents a debilitating disease may be an act of care; a market that treats every unchosen trait as a defect may intensify anxiety and conformity. The theological issue concerns not only outcomes but formation: technologies shape desires, habits, institutions, and the very standards by which lives are welcomed.

This account clarifies the preciousness of life. Sanctity does not mean preserving biological existence at every cost, nor does it prohibit proportionate medical judgment. It means that no life becomes disposable because it is weak, costly, de-

pendent, or near death. Medical care and the Christian affirmation of creation can therefore converge in resisting discrimination while recognizing that benefit is not identical with maximal extension. The dying person is not a failed technological project, as Harari would seem to suggest. Care may include treatment, palliation, accompaniment, and the refusal to abandon.

The same criterion addresses inequality. If enhancement is interpreted chiefly as individual choice, the social conditions of choice disappear from view. Economic pressure, competition, military interests, and cultural ideals may make an ostensibly optional intervention practically compulsory. The *imago Dei* redirects evaluation toward the common good: do innovations widen participation and solidarity, or do they create castes of optimized and residual humanity? The measure of progress is not the maximum capacity achieved by a few but the justice with which the vulnerable are received.

Such reasoning permits a qualified welcome to technology. Healing, assistive systems, and carefully governed forms of enhancement can express love of the neighbor. The theological boundary is crossed when increased power is confused with increased worth, when finitude is treated as moral failure, or when salvation is imagined as a product that technical elites can deliver. The distinction is therefore not "religion versus technology," but creaturely service versus technological sovereignty.

This formative dimension sharpens the therapy–enhancement distinction by showing that the moral significance of an intervention cannot be read from its technical purpose alone. Shatzer argues that technologies carry implicit visions of flourishing and train users into characteristic postures toward the body, time, community, and control. His account shifts attention from spectacular future scenarios to ordinary technological practices: devices and systems can habituate persons to expect immediacy, frictionless choice, and mastery over contingency. Consequently, even a therapeutic technology may participate in an enhancement culture if its use teaches that dependence, patience, or bodily limitation is intrinsically degrading. Conversely, an intervention that extends capacity may remain compatible with Christian discipleship when it enables participation, strengthens relationships, and is received as a limited good rather than as an instrument of self-creation. Shatzer therefore makes moral formation integral to classification: therapy and enhancement name not only different clinical aims but also different narratives about what bodies are for and what forms of dependence a community is prepared to bear.[14]

Cole-Turner places this formative question within a wider theology of transformation. His edited volume resists both technological enthusiasm and blanket prohibition because Christian faith itself anticipates healing, sanctification, resurrection, and participation in divine life. The relevant contrast is therefore not between change and stasis but between rival agents, ends, and modes of transformation. Medical

relief can participate in creaturely care, while enhancement becomes theologically distorted when it treats achievement as a substitute for grace or detaches individual improvement from justice and communion. Cole-Turner's approach also prevents the therapy–enhancement distinction from functioning as a self-sufficient rule: restoring a statistically normal function is not automatically just, and exceeding a normal range is not automatically sinful. Each intervention must be situated within the Christian goods of reconciliation, solidarity, and the common good.[15]

Fasoli deepens this account by distinguishing remediable exposure to harm from vulnerability as a constitutive feature of embodied existence. Projects of dematerialization and mind uploading promise to eliminate vulnerability by escaping the body, but in doing so they evade finitude, temporality, and relational dependence rather than simply curing a pathology. Recognition of constitutive vulnerability does not require passive surrender to preventable suffering. It instead directs technological action toward care: the aim is to reduce avoidable harm without construing every dependency as a defect or every limit as a technical failure. Her analysis thus supplies an ethical criterion for enhancement: interventions should be assessed not only by the autonomy they confer but also by whether they preserve the conditions of mutual responsibility generated by embodied dependence.[16]

Levin's Aristotelian account of flourishing adds a social and political dimension. Capacities cannot be evaluated as detachable goods whose increase necessarily improves a life; their value depends upon their integration within character, practical wisdom, relationships, institutions, and a shared political order. An enhancement chosen by an individual may therefore have public consequences by altering competitive expectations, redistributing opportunity, or narrowing the range of traits regarded as acceptable. Levin's emphasis on liberal-democratic equality is especially important here: nominal choice can become coercive when access to education, employment, or recognition depends upon enhancement.[17] Read together, these authors show that therapy and enhancement are morally distinguishable neither by a fixed biological baseline nor by individual preference alone. Their evaluation requires attention to ends, formative practices, embodied vulnerability, institutional pressures, justice, and the kind of communal life a technology helps to create. The governing question is not merely whether an intervention repairs or augments a capacity, but whether it serves the flourishing of embodied persons whose dignity precedes both treatment and enhancement.

5. Competing Eschatologies: *Homo Deus* and Christian Hope

Transhumanism becomes most theologically charged when it promises not merely better tools but deliverance from mortality. Brent Waters[18] has described Christian-

ity and transhumanism as contending salvific visions, while Ronald Cole-Turner's edited volume shows that Christian responses range from cautious appropriation to sharp critique. John C. Lennox[19] similarly characterizes technological immortality as a parody of Christian hope: both answer the refusal to accept death as the final word,[20] but they identify radically different agents and forms of fulfillment.

Harari's future is utopian in this precise sense. The goods sought—health, happiness, knowledge, and freedom from premature death—are recognizable goods. Yet their convergence in a project of mastery gives history an immanent redeemer: technical power. The enhanced subject is expected to overcome the conditions that once generated religious hope. But new capacities do not abolish finitude. Every increased power opens further dependencies, risks, and questions of purpose. Even an indefinitely extended life would not answer what life is for; a copied pattern of information would not by itself establish personal identity; greater intelligence would not guarantee wisdom or love.

Christian eschatology does not answer these limits by glorifying decay or passivity. Its central confession is resurrection, not resignation. Resurrection differs from uploading or indefinite extension because it is neither escape from embodiment nor continuation secured by human technique. It is God's act of new creation, preserving personal identity while transforming embodied life. Christian hope therefore affirms the goodness of the body more radically than projects that regard biology as obsolete,[21] and it relativizes technological success because fulfillment remains gift.

The distinction also concerns moral transformation. Theosis and sanctification describe participation in divine life through grace, communion, and the reordering of desire. They cannot be reduced to greater memory, intelligence, emotional control, or lifespan. A person may possess extraordinary capacity while remaining unjust; technical enhancement can amplify vice as readily as virtue. The Christian problem is not simply insufficient power but disordered love. Consequently, no engineering program can substitute for reconciliation with God and neighbor.

This eschatological comparison strengthens rather than weakens responsible innovation. Because technology is not salvation, it need not carry impossible expectations. It may be received as a limited practice of care within creation. It can cure some diseases without curing the human condition, extend some lives without conferring eternal life, and expand agency without determining the good. Freed from utopian claims, it becomes accountable to ends it did not create.

Waters crystallizes the contrast by treating transhumanism and Christianity as rival salvific religions rather than merely different attitudes toward innovation. Transhumanist salvation seeks release from bodily limitation through indefinite temporal continuation, enhanced control, and the progressive conquest of contingency. Christian salvation, by contrast, is not the preservation of an autonomous self for an

unlimited sequence of future moments; it is eternal life as reconciled communion with God and participation in a redeemed creation. Waters' comparison therefore exposes a difference in both agency and telos. In the transhumanist grammar, humanity becomes the agent of its own deliverance and technical mastery supplies the means. In the Christian grammar, salvation is received from God through Jesus the Christ, and transformed life is ordered toward communion rather than self-possession. The contrast also changes the meaning of death: death remains an enemy, but it is overcome by resurrection rather than by the indefinite extension of present biological processes.[22]

Lennox develops the christological dimension of this distinction by setting the projected *Homo Deus* beside the Christian confession of the God-man. The resemblance in vocabulary conceals an inversion. *Homo Deus* names an ascent in which humanity seeks divine attributes through accumulated information, artificial intelligence, and biological power; the God-man names God's gracious descent into finite and vulnerable human life. For Lennox, superintelligence cannot resolve the deepest disorder of the human condition because greater cognitive power does not entail moral wisdom, reconcile guilt, or prevent enhanced capacities from magnifying domination. The decisive question is therefore not whether intelligence can exceed current human limits, but whether power can redeem the persons who wield it.[23]

Peters reaches a complementary conclusion through the doctrine of deification. Christian participation in divine life is not a technological amplification of selected human functions. Genetic modification, cybernetic integration, and cognitive enhancement may alter the scope of agency, but they cannot produce holiness or reorder love. Deification is christological and gracious: it concerns conformity to Christ and communion with God, not the acquisition of godlike control. Peters' argument also guards against a false opposition between grace and creaturely creativity. Technology may contribute to healing and responsible co-creation, yet it remains incapable of manufacturing the eschatological transformation it can only anticipate fragmentarily.[24]

Harari's narrative is theologically significant because it preserves the structure of eschatological expectation while relocating its agency and fulfillment entirely within history. The traditional longings to defeat death, attain happiness, and transcend human limitation are not abandoned; they are translated into research agendas governed by biotechnology, computation, and data. Harari's account is often diagnostic and includes stark warnings, but its imagined horizon still renders technical power the principal medium through which humanity's future is to be decided. Bentz interprets this relocation as an immanentized eschatology: a transcendent promise is converted into a worldly horizon of perfection, and speculative technological possibilities acquire the cultural force of a doctrine of last things. His reading clarifies why the issue is not simply optimism. Once the future perfected human becomes the implicit

norm, present embodied humanity can be judged by its distance from that norm, and those least able to participate in enhancement risk appearing as remnants of an earlier stage.[25] Read together, Waters, Lennox, Peters, Harari, and Bentz identify two competing accounts of transcendence. One seeks to overcome finitude through cumulative power, indefinite continuation, and technologically directed evolution; the other receives transformation as resurrection, reconciliation, and participation in divine life. Christian hope contests the conversion of technology into a salvific agent without denying the legitimacy of proximate technological goods. Medicine, artificial intelligence, and enhancement may relieve suffering or extend agency, but their theological legitimacy depends upon their remaining practices of creaturely service rather than substitutes for redemption.

6. Theistic Grounding and the Secular Challenge

A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE TO theological accounts of human dignity comes from contemporary secular ethics. Critics frequently argue that appeals to God, creation, and the *imago Dei* introduce metaphysical assumptions that cannot be universally shared within pluralistic societies.[26] If moral and political communities are composed of individuals holding diverse religious commitments, then a theological foundation for dignity may appear inadequate as a public basis for ethical deliberation. Advocates of secular humanism therefore maintain that human dignity can be defended without recourse to divine creation or theological anthropology. The question, however, is not simply whether dignity can be affirmed without theology, but whether it can be adequately grounded.

Many modern ethical frameworks seek to preserve the concept of dignity while severing it from its historical theological roots. Human rights discourse, liberal political theory, and international legal frameworks frequently invoke the inherent worth of every person while remaining intentionally silent concerning the metaphysical source of that worth. This strategy has achieved significant practical success by generating broad consensus across cultures and religious traditions.[27] Nevertheless, philosophical agreement on the existence of dignity should not be confused with agreement concerning its justification.

One of the most influential secular foundations for dignity is found in the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant famously argued that rational beings possess intrinsic worth because they are capable of autonomous moral action. Human persons must therefore always be treated as ends in themselves rather than merely as means to other ends.[28] Yet Kantian accounts raise important questions when applied to those who cannot fully exercise rational autonomy. Infants, individuals with profound intellectual disabilities, and persons suffering from advanced dementia do not exhibit the degree of autonomous rationality that Kant identified as the basis

of dignity. Contemporary Kantian scholars have attempted to address this problem by appealing to species membership, latent capacities, or participation in moral communities.[29] Nevertheless, the challenge illustrates a broader difficulty for all capacity-based accounts of personhood.

This concern is particularly relevant in discussions of transhumanism. Enhancement technologies are frequently justified on the grounds that greater cognitive capacities, longer life spans, and expanded abilities represent genuine human progress.[30] Yet if superior capacities are taken as indicators of superior flourishing, questions inevitably arise concerning those who lack access to enhancement or who choose not to pursue it. While many transhumanists explicitly affirm equal moral worth, their understanding of improvement often relies upon evaluative criteria that privilege particular forms of performance and functionality.[31]

The challenge extends beyond Kantian ethics to broader secular approaches. Utilitarian perspectives often evaluate actions according to consequences such as happiness, preference satisfaction, or the reduction of suffering. Although these frameworks provide valuable tools for ethical reasoning, they may also struggle to provide an unconditional defense of individual worth.[32] If the value of persons is ultimately associated with their contribution to collective well-being, the protection of vulnerable individuals risks becoming dependent upon calculations of social utility rather than recognition of intrinsic value.

Secular moral realism provides another important alternative. Moral realists argue that objective moral truths exist independently of both human opinion and divine command.[33] Such theories successfully resist moral relativism and preserve the objectivity of ethical obligations. Nevertheless, moral realism frequently describes the existence of moral truths without fully explaining why human beings possess a unique and inviolable moral status. It can tell us that persons ought to be treated with respect, but it often leaves unresolved the ontological question of what kind of beings persons are such that this respect is owed to them.

The theological account seeks to address precisely this ontological dimension. Within Christian theology, dignity is not primarily grounded in what human beings do but in what they are. Human persons possess worth because they are creatures intentionally called into existence by God and created in the divine image.[34] Their value is therefore not earned through achievement, intelligence, autonomy, or social contribution. Because dignity originates in God's relation to humanity rather than in human capacities, it remains constant despite changing circumstances, developmental stages, or physical limitations.[35]

Disability theology provides a particularly important perspective in this discussion. Theological scholars have increasingly challenged assumptions that equate human value with independence, rationality, productivity, or physical perfection.[36]

From this perspective, disability is not evidence of diminished personhood but an expression of the diversity of embodied human existence. Dependence, vulnerability, and limitation are dimensions of the human condition shared by all persons.

The transhumanist aspiration to overcome limitations therefore requires careful scrutiny. While the alleviation of suffering and the treatment of disease are worthy goals, the pursuit of perfection can inadvertently marginalize those whose lives do not conform to prevailing standards of optimization. If flourishing comes to be defined primarily in terms of enhanced capabilities, individuals living with disabilities may increasingly be viewed as existing below an idealized norm.[37] Theological anthropology resists this conclusion by affirming that value does not depend upon conformity to standards of excellence.

Another challenge arises from evolutionary accounts of morality. Evolutionary psychology and related disciplines often explain moral behavior through adaptive processes that promote cooperation, social cohesion, and survival.[38] Such explanations illuminate how moral instincts emerged but do not by themselves establish why moral obligations are binding. A descriptive explanation of morality is not equivalent to a normative justification of morality.[39]

At this point, critics may object that theological accounts merely relocate the problem. Why should the existence of God provide a more convincing foundation for dignity than secular alternatives? The Christian response is that dignity is intelligible because human beings are understood within a larger metaphysical framework. Creation, divine intentionality, and covenant relationship together explain why persons possess enduring value that does not fluctuate with changing capacities or social evaluations.[40]

From this perspective, the doctrine of the *imago Dei* continues to offer a uniquely robust basis for human dignity. It affirms equality without reducing persons to capacities, protects the vulnerable without appealing to utility, and preserves intrinsic worth without dependence upon social recognition.[41] In an era increasingly shaped by enhancement technologies and visions of posthuman transformation, this theological vision serves as a critical reminder that human value is not something to be engineered, upgraded, or optimized. It is something already possessed by every person simply by virtue of being human.

Ultimately, the debate between transhumanism and Christian theology is not merely about technology. It is a dispute concerning the meaning of humanity itself. Transhumanism looks toward the transcendence of biological limits through technological power, while Christian theology points instead to the dignity of creatures whose value precedes all achievement. The future of enhancement ethics will depend in no small measure upon which account proves more capable of protecting the equal dignity of every person in an increasingly technological age.

7. Conclusion

THE CENTRAL QUESTION IS NOT whether transhumanism is concerned about life. Its resistance to disease, disability understood as preventable harm, and involuntary death can manifest a profound concern for human flourishing. The question is whether its characteristic goods can establish why every life is precious. They cannot do so without a moral account prior to technology, because enhancement describes changes in capacity rather than the ground of worth.

Harari's utopic horizon powerfully dramatizes humanity's longing to exceed suffering and death, but it also reveals the instability of a future in which human beings are valued according to their place in technological development. A society oriented toward *Homo Deus* may preserve life while weakening its ability to honor lives that remain ordinary, dependent, or resistant to optimization. Its danger is not simple hatred of humanity; it is a narrowed definition of the human good that can make existing persons appear provisional.

The *imago Dei* offers a more adequate foundation and a more fruitful practice of discernment. It grounds dignity in God's relation to the creature, holds capability together with embodiment and communion, and interprets creativity as responsible vocation. It welcomes technologies that heal and enable participation while refusing to identify greater power with greater worth. It also places human transformation within the horizon of resurrection and grace rather than self-salvation.

The test of any technological future is therefore how it regards those who cannot enter it. If the weak, disabled, unenhanced, aged, and dying retain equal dignity not merely in law but in social imagination and material care, innovation may serve human life. If their presence is treated as a remnant to be managed on the way to a superior species, technological progress has become anthropological failure. Christian theology's contribution is to insist that the person before us is never raw material for the future. The human being is first a creature received from God, bearing a worth that no machine can increase and no limitation can remove.

Ultimately, the debate between transhumanism and Christian theology is not primarily a disagreement about the desirability of technology, but a dispute over the nature and destiny of the human person. Transhumanist thinkers such as Nick Bostrom and Yuval Noah Harari envision the future of humanity in terms of technological self-transcendence, arguing that biological limitations need not define the boundaries of human existence. In different ways, both authors anticipate a future in which enhanced intelligence, increased longevity, and new capacities fundamentally alter what it means to be human. While these aspirations have inspired significant technological innovation, their underlying anthropology tends to locate human value increasingly within the realm of capability, performance, and self-directed evolution.

Christian theological anthropology offers a fundamentally different account. As Ted Peters argues, the significance of human beings is not grounded in the extent of their capacities but in their relation to God as creatures created and sustained by divine love. Similarly, Ronald Cole-Turner maintains that technological enhancement should be evaluated not according to its ability to overcome creaturely limitations but according to whether it promotes authentically human flourishing within the framework of God's purposes for creation. The theological concern is therefore not with enhancement as such but with the possibility that enhancement becomes a substitute soteriology, a means by which humanity seeks redemption through technological power rather than through rightly ordered relationships with God, neighbor, and creation.

This distinction becomes especially significant when questions of disability, dependence, aging, and vulnerability are considered. Transhumanist narratives frequently portray such realities as deficiencies to be overcome, whereas Christian theology often interprets them as dimensions of the shared human condition through which persons experience interdependence, compassion, and community. The contrast reveals two competing visions of flourishing: one defined primarily in terms of optimization and mastery, the other grounded in relationality, creatureliness, and participation in the divine image.

Consequently, the ethical challenge posed by transhumanism extends beyond particular technologies to the values that shape their development and use. As Michael Sandel warns, the pursuit of mastery risks transforming humanity's understanding of giftedness, humility, and moral responsibility. Similarly, Eric Cohen and Yuval Levin argue that a culture oriented toward limitless enhancement may gradually lose sight of those moral and social practices that sustain human dignity independent of achievement or success.[42] From a Christian perspective, technological progress remains valuable and worthy of encouragement, but it must remain accountable to a prior vision of the good rooted in the inherent worth of every person.

The enduring contribution of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* is that it provides a basis for equal dignity that neither rises nor falls with human capacities, social utility, or technological advancement. In an age increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and enhancement technologies, this theological vision serves as a critical safeguard against reducing human worth to measurable performance. The future of enhancement ethics will therefore depend not merely on what technologies humanity develops, but on whether society continues to affirm that human beings possess dignity before, beyond, and apart from any enhancement they may achieve.

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Notes

1. Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London: Harvill Secker, 2016).
2. Jan C. Bentz, "*Homo Deus* as Utopian Myth: Yuval Noah Harari's Transhumanism Contested," *Journal of Religion, Culture & Democracy* (2025), https://doi.org/10.54669/001c.129465.
3. Nick Bostrom, "The Transhumanist FAQ: A General Introduction," Version 2.1, World Transhumanist Association, 2003, 4–5, 22–27, https://nickbostrom.com/views/transhumanist.pdf.
4. Ronald Cole-Turner, ed., *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 1–18, 193–204.
5. Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 15–38.
6. Bostrom, "The Transhumanist FAQ," 4–5, 22–27.
7. Susan B. Levin, *Posthuman Bliss? The Failed Promise of Transhumanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).
8. Bentz, "*Homo Deus* as Utopian Myth: Yuval Noah Harari's Transhumanism Contested."
9. Gen. 1:26–27.
10. Karl Heim discusses this in the following way: "What has thrown me into the infinite cosmos at this precise place, and given me this irrevocable role to sustain? …[T]here are only the two possible answers to it which we know explicitly. Either we have been brought forth out of nothing and are returning to nothing. Or there is a power standing over all beings, which has set each of us at our particular place, in order to draw us into itself, when alone we shall find rest." Karl Heim, *The Transformation of the Scientific World View* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 63-64.
11. Ted Peters, "*Imago Dei*, DNA, and the Transhuman Way," *Theology and Science* 16, no. 3 (2018): 353–62, esp. 353–59.
12. Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God*, esp. the discussion of incarnation, embodiment, and technological formation.
13. Annachiara Fasoli, "Vulnerability, Embodiment and Emerging Technologies: A Still Open Issue," *Philosophies* 8, no. 6 (2023): article 115, esp. sections 3 and 5, https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies8060115.
14. Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God*, 15–38.
15. Cole-Turner, ed., *Transhumanism and Transcendence*, 1–18, 193–204.
16. Fasoli, "Vulnerability, Embodiment and Emerging Technologies: A Still Open Issue," esp. section 5.
17. Levin, *Posthuman Bliss? The Failed Promise of Transhumanism*.
18. 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*, 163–76.

19. John C. Lennox, *2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 86-92.
20. Lennox, *2084*, 157-173. Lennox cites Harari on page 86 of *2084*: "Humans don't die … because God decreed it. … Humans always die due to some technical glitch … Every technical problem has a technical solution." Harari, *Homo Deus*, 22-23.
21. An interesting discussion of this appears in C.S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength* (London: The Bodley Head, 1945).
22. Waters, "Whose Salvation? Which Eschatology? Transhumanism and Christianity as Contending Salvific Religions," 163–76.
23. Lennox, *2084*, 157-161.
24. Peters, "*Imago Dei*, DNA, and the Transhuman Way," 358–62.
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Wounded Glory and Borrowed Light

Transhumanism Read through the Theology of the Cross

Toward a Cruciform Discernment of Accommodation, "Transition," and Enhancement

David Patterson

Prologue: The Gospel According to Upgrade

He comes to us with a bright briefcase and a clean conscience. He speaks in the future tense the way preachers speak in the imperative. He lays his hand upon the human condition and calls it a design flaw. *Pain* is information—delete it. *Aging* is a bug—patch it. *Death* is a solvable problem—hire better engineers.

He is not entirely wrong. Some pain is brute vandalism. Some aging is a long theft. Some deaths are not the ripening of days but the snapping of a thread. Christians who anoint with oil, who pray for healing, who set broken bones and bandage wounds—Christians cannot pretend to be indifferent to suffering. The church is not asked to be stoic; it is asked to be faithful.

But it must be faithful at the foot of the cross, not at the podium of progress.

The theology of the cross begins where the world refuses to linger: at the place where God is most scandalously Himself—hanging, bleeding, mocked, and hidden in His opposite. "The cross alone is our theology."[1] Not the cross as jewelry, not the cross as brand, not the cross as mere mechanism of forgiveness, but the cross as God's manner of being God for sinners: concealed majesty, cruciform mercy, power perfected in weakness.[2]

So when a shining new salvation is offered—when the old human question is answered with a new human technology—the theologian of the cross does not ask first, *Is it impressive?* He asks, *What kind of god does it assume? What kind of human does it require? What kind of future does it promise?* And then, harder still: *Who gets crucified in order for this glory to be purchased?*[3]

If transhumanism is a river, it is not a single stream. It is a watershed. It has tributaries of mercy and tributaries of hubris. It has clear water and glittering poison. Our task is not to damn all tools, nor to baptize all aspirations, but to distinguish the spirits—especially the spirits that arrive dressed as compassion.[4]

2. Three Things We Must Not Confuse (or: The Ethics of Lumping)

Late modern moral discourse has developed a lazy appetite for bundling. If two things share a surface resemblance, we lump them; if they are lumped, we treat them as identical; if identical, we either bless all of it or curse all of it. That is not discernment. That is a riot of analogies.

For the sake of theological clarity—and for the sake of actual neighbors whose lives are damaged by our rhetorical shortcuts—we must distinguish at least three different projects that are often shoved into the same argumentative suitcase:

- Physical accommodation for the disabled: technologies and practices that remove barriers, enable access, or restore lost function so that persons may participate in ordinary human goods—communication, mobility, learning, work, worship, friendship.[5]
- Trans-gender accommodations: social, medical, and institutional practices intended to reduce distress and risk for persons experiencing gender dysphoria (or related incongruence), to enable them to live with greater safety, stability, and coherence—often amid contested claims about the relation of body, self, and identity.[6]
- Super-human adaptations (enhancement): interventions not primarily ordered toward restoration or access, but toward surpassing species-typical capacities—engineered intelligence, radical longevity, augmented cognition, gene editing for traits, cybernetic upgrades for competitive advantage, and the promised arrival of the "posthuman."[7]

To confuse these is to commit a category error with pastoral consequences. A ramp at the sanctuary door is not the same moral question as the dream of mind-uploading. A pacemaker is not the same spiritual project as the abolition of creaturely dependence. A policy meant to reduce harassment is not identical in meaning to a metaphysical claim that the body is merely clay for the sovereign self.

Theology must be precise here not because precision is cold but because imprecision harms. When we collapse these domains, we end up either baptizing everything under the name of mercy or condemning everything under the name of tradition. Both are shortcuts masquerading as conviction.

3. Heidelberg's Knife: *Theologia Crucis* as a Way of Seeing

Luther's Heidelberg Disputation is not a museum piece. It is a blade. It cuts away our romanticism about God and our vanity about ourselves.

A "theologian of glory," Luther insists, calls evil good and good evil. He looks for God where God appears plausible: in strength, success, obviousness, ascent.[8] He reasons from what is seen to what is supposed to be. He calls the world's ladder "spiritual." He expects God to behave like an improved human being: larger, louder, more victorious.

A "theologian of the cross," however, calls the thing what it actually is.[9] He looks for God where God has bound Himself to be found: in the suffering and the cross of Christ. He reasons not from human visibility to divine invisibility, but from God's self-revelation to a proper judgment of what counts as power, wisdom, and righteousness.[10] He learns to speak about God under the form of the opposite—*sub contrario*—because that is how God has chosen to act for sinners: "He deserves to be called a theologian… who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross."[11]

This is not an aesthetic preference for darkness. It is a confession about the way God saves: not by flattering our desire to climb but by killing our desire to climb without Him. The cross is God's "No" to the human attempt at self-justification, and God's "Yes" to sinners through the alien righteousness of Christ.[12]

If transhumanism is, as some of its prophets suggest, a program for human self-overcoming—an ascent into engineered glory—then the theology of the cross will not merely raise ethical questions about safety. It will raise theological questions about salvation.

Because the real rivalry is not between church and technology. The real rivalry is between two gospels:

- A gospel of self-salvation by optimization, and
- A gospel of God's salvation by crucified love.[13]

4. Disability Accommodation: Mercy with Bolts and Hinges

Let us say this plainly and early: physical accommodation for disabled persons is not transhumanist glory. It is often neighbor-love made structural. It is mercy given a handle.

A ramp is an architectural confession. It proclaims that the body that moves differently is not a theological embarrassment but a neighbor to be welcomed. Cap-

tioning is a liturgy of attention. A screen reader is hospitality translated into code. A prosthetic limb is not necessarily a denial of creatureliness; it may be a witness that creatureliness is not disposable.

Here the theology of the cross becomes tender and practical. The crucified Christ is not ashamed to be found in bodies that ache, in nerves that misfire, in joints that swell, in minds that do not keep time with the world's demands. God is not repelled by vulnerability; God enters it. The church should therefore be the one place on earth where no one must be improved in order to belong.[14]

4.1 Disability as Truth-Telling Against the Idol of "Normal"

Disability theology has insisted—correctly—that "normal" is a fragile idol. The so-called "able" body is not the standard human; it is a temporarily fortunate human. Human life is contingency from the first breath to the last. The disabled body does not introduce vulnerability into the human condition; it reveals the vulnerability that was always there.[15]

And so accommodation is not about erasing difference to appease an imagined standard. It is about removing unnecessary barriers so that persons may participate in goods that belong to them as persons: learning, friendship, worship, work, beauty, play, love.[16]

This distinction matters. A wheelchair is not a bid for superiority; it is a tool of access. Insulin is not an attempt to outrun humanity; it is a means of living inside it. A hearing aid is not a metaphysical revolt; it is neighbor-love refusing to let silence become exile.

The theology of the cross, with its suspicion of glory, does not therefore require a suspicion of medicine. Luther could call medicine a gift and still resist the idol of self-salvation.[17] The question is not whether we use tools but what story we tell about them.

4.2 Restoration, Not Erasure; Participation, Not Performance

There are, of course, hard questions at the edges. Some interventions are experienced by particular communities as cultural loss rather than liberation. The church must learn to listen before it presumes it knows what counts as "fixing."[18]

But in general, disability accommodation aims at participation rather than performance. It does not say, "Become more than human." It says, "Come into the room. Come to the table. Come to the font. Come to the bread and wine. Come as you are and let us build the path together."

That is not a theology of glory. That is cruciform hospitality.

5. Trans-Gender Accommodations: When the Mirror Becomes an Altar (Pastoral Nearness without Anthropological Panic)

Here the air tightens. Here language sweats. Here we are tempted—almost immediately—to enlist the suffering of real people as ammunition for our preferred certainties. But the theologian of the cross is not permitted to practice theology as a distance weapon. The cross forbids contempt, and it forbids haste. It pulls our chairs close to the hospital bed. It makes us speak softly in rooms where souls are tender.

We must begin with a simple pastoral confession: persons experiencing gender dysphoria are not abstractions. They are neighbors. They are often afraid. Many have been mocked, rejected, or harmed—sometimes by strangers, sometimes by family, sometimes by the church's own careless tongue. A church that follows a crucified Lord cannot treat the suffering of the neighbor as a political prop,[19] nor as a problem to be solved loudly. The crucified Christ is not found in our slogans. He is found in the one who is trembling.

And yet—at the same time—the church cannot pretend that embodiment is merely a grammatical question. Christianity is stubbornly bodily: creation's dust, incarnation's flesh, baptism's water, the Supper's bread and wine, resurrection's scars. The body is not a costume draped over a "real self." It is part of the self's givenness and calling[20]—mysterious, meaningful, and not finally self-invented. If we speak here, we must speak like those who know the body is neither god nor garbage.

But now we must add a further confession—one that John M. G. Barclay's patient labor on Paul's theology of gift (in his work *Paul and the Gift*) forces back into the center of the room:

> A gift is not an object you possess in isolation. A gift is a relation that claims you. In the ancient moral worlds Paul inhabited, gift was not a sterilized donation dropped through a slot; it was a bond. To receive a gift was to be drawn into a social and moral gravity—a "fit" response, a return that did not purchase the gift but honored the giver and sustained the relationship. Reciprocity did not cancel gift; it named gift's intended trajectory: from giver to receiver and back again in thanksgiving, loyalty, praise, or embodied devotion.[21]

This matters here because the body—sexed, finite, given—is not merely *matter*. It is gift. And gift, if Barclay is right, is never merely "free from conditions" in the modern sense of being immune to response. It can be unconditioned in its bestowal—given without regard to worthiness—and still summon a fitting return: not repayment, but honor; not purchase, but praise; not self-authorship, but gratitude.[22]

So the question is not only, *How do we reduce harm?* It is also, *How do we help the neighbor receive creaturehood as gift in a way that honors the Giver—especially when the mirror feels like an accusation?*

5.1 A Cruciform Distinction: Accommodation vs. Apotheosis (Mercy without Metaphysical Shortcuts)

One of the most important—and most neglected—distinctions in this domain is between:

- Practical accommodations intended to reduce immediate harm and stabilize the neighbor (protection from harassment, pastoral care that refuses mockery, prudential forms of address in certain contexts), and
- Ontological claims about what the body means, what sex and gender are, and how identity is constituted.

Institutions often make accommodations for prudential reasons—care, safety, harm reduction—without thereby settling metaphysics. A theology of the cross can support mercy in practice while continuing to deliberate carefully about anthropology.[23] This is not cowardice. It is the refusal to crucify the neighbor in order to win the argument faster.

But Barclay's grammar of gift presses the distinction deeper, into the spiritual grain. There is a difference between receiving help as mercy and remaking the self as a project of glory. The church can, at times, make room—clear the thorns from the path, quiet the mob, bind wounds—without pretending that every inward ache is an infallible oracle about what the body *is*.[24]

Because there is another temptation, quieter and more liturgical, that hides inside compassion-talk like a splinter:

There is a difference between seeking relief and seeking sovereignty.

The theologian of the cross knows that human beings do not only want to stop hurting. We also want to be author, artifact, and audience—to craft ourselves into something that finally compels our own approval. And when the self becomes both sculptor and stone, the mirror can become an altar. The question is no longer only, *How can I live?* It becomes, *How can I become—at last—my own finished masterpiece?*

Barclay helps us name what is at stake: gift received without return becomes, not freedom, but theft. Not because the recipient "pays God back" (God is not a creditor), but because refusing the fitting response severs the relation the gift was meant to create. In Paul's world, and in Paul's gospel, grace creates a new community and a new habitus; it pulls the receiver into a life that *answers* the gift—not by earning it, but by living in a way that publicly honors the Giver.[25]

So the cross interrupts the mirror-altar promise—not by mocking anguish, but by exposing the ladder hidden inside it. It says: *You are not saved by self-interpretation. You are not secured by self-remaking. You are not justified by the*

clarity of your own reflection. The Gospel does not hand you a chisel and command you to carve a self that can finally be worshiped. It hands you Christ—crucified gift—and calls forth the only "return" that does not corrupt grace: thanksgiving that becomes obedience, praise that becomes love, honor that becomes patience with creaturehood.

5.2 Suffering, Dysphoria, and the Church's Refusal to Weaponize Pain (The Gift Is Not a Bludgeon)

The theology of the cross takes suffering seriously. Dysphoria, when present, is not a punchline and not a mere confusion to be ridiculed. It is often experienced as distress that reaches into mirror, memory, family, and future. The cross teaches the church to approach suffering with reverence, because the suffering neighbor is precisely where Christ has promised to meet us.[26]

But the cross also warns us against a subtle trap: the belief that the relief of suffering automatically validates every interpretation of the self. Christians know that suffering can be alleviated in ways that are locally effective while still raising broader questions about meaning, telos, and truth.[27] The removal of pain is a real good. It is not, by itself, a final theology.

Here Barclay's gift-logic steadies the church's hands.

In a world trained to equate "gift" with "no strings," it sounds merciful to declare: *You owe nothing. You answer to nothing. You are accountable to no giveness but your own desire*. Yet Barclay reminds us that this modern fantasy of the "pure gift" is not the only way gift has been understood—and it is not the way gift commonly functioned in antiquity. Gifts, precisely as gifts, were meant to generate bonds and responses. A return—often gratitude—was not an insult to generosity but the honoring of it.

So, the church must hold together two obligations that modern discourse loves to tear apart:

- Reduce harm—because the neighbor is not a thought experiment.
- Pursue truth—because the neighbor is not served by a lie, even a soothing one.

This is where the theology of glory becomes especially dangerous: it offers a quick, shining resolution. It tempts us to believe that if we can just achieve a seamless self, if we can eliminate dissonance by technique, we will have purchased peace. But seamlessness is not the Gospel. And the demand for seamlessness—whether imposed by traditionalists or progressives—can become its own cruelty.

The cross tells a stranger story: not "*Become seamless,*" but "*You may be held even while you are torn*." Not "*Win coherence by mastery*," but "*Receive identity as*

gift—first in Christ, and then, slowly, in the ordinary vocations of creaturely life." And—now with Barclay's clarity—receive gift in the only way gift can be received: with a return that honors the Giver.

Pastoral care here therefore must be cruciform: close enough to hear the shaking breath, humble enough to admit complexity, steady enough to resist the liturgy of immediacy that demands instant decisions and permanent declarations. The church must become a place where no one is mocked into silence, and no one is rushed into irreversible paths by fear, fashion, or faction.

5.3 The Body as Gift (And the "Return" of Creaturely Honor)

Christian tradition has never treated the body as irrelevant matter. Nor has it treated the body as ultimate. The body is meaningful gift, but not deity. It is creaturely given, yet destined for transformation—not by our engineering, but by God's resurrection power.[28] The final future of the body is not self-designed radiance. It is received glory—glory that comes through death and out the other side by promise, not by self-authoring.

And here Barclay helps us speak with sharper tenderness.

If the body is gift, then the question is not simply: *What can I do with it?* The question is also: *How do I honor the One who gave it?* In the economy of grace, honoring the Giver is not barter; it is the fitting echo of the gift. It is the return of thanksgiving, worship, and a life oriented away from the self's altar and toward God's communion. Reciprocity is not a price tag attached to grace; it is grace's intended fruit.

This is where the mirror becomes spiritually perilous.

Because the mirror can become an altar in two opposite ways:

- By despising the gift—treating the body as a prison, a mistake, an enemy to be escaped.
- By deifying the gift—treating the body as an instrument of self-glory, clay for the sovereign will.

The cross refuses both.

It refuses the contempt that says the body is nothing but betrayal. And it refuses the pride that says the body is nothing but material. The cross teaches a third posture: tragic realism with worship. In a fallen world, there are situations where every available option carries loss. Pastoral discernment cannot be replaced by a meme, and ecclesial faithfulness cannot be outsourced to the loudest voices in the room.

So, a cruciform pastoral ethic, at minimum, must include:

- Refusal of contempt: no jokes, no sneers, no reduction of persons to categories.
- Commitment to accompaniment: the church stays near even when answers are incomplete.
- Honest speech: the church does not lie about its convictions, but speaks them as confession rather than as cudgel.
- Protection of the vulnerable: especially the young, the mentally fragile, the socially isolated, the economically constrained—those most susceptible to coercion and shame.[29]
- Patience with complexity: careful discernment, competent medical and mental health counsel, community support, attention to long-term consequences.[30]

But now we must also name the spiritual center with Barclay's help:

The church must not only say, "Your body is gift." The church must also teach the grammar of receiving: that gift received rightly becomes gift returned as honor.

Not honor as self-hatred. Not honor as denial of distress. Not honor as pretending the mirror never hurts. But honor as the slow, communal schooling of the heart into creaturely gratitude: learning to say, even through tears, *I am given. I am not self-made. I am not my own god. I belong to Another*.

And it names the central danger with precision and pity:

When the human project becomes self-remaking into self-chosen glory, the body is no longer received as gift; it is recruited as raw material for a private apocalypse. The self becomes a little creator, demanding light from its own word—*Let it be so*—and the flesh is commanded to obey.

But the Gospel does not say, "Make yourself."

The Gospel says, "You are made—by Another. And you are redeemed—by a Crucified One."

And if Barclay is right about gift, then the Gospel also says: "Receive—and let your receiving become return: thanksgiving, worship, love of neighbor, a life that honors the Giver."

And your final glory will not be your own invention. It will be God's gift, and even then—astonishingly—your wounds will not be erased as though they were shame. They will be gathered into a resurrection that tells the truth.

And so, the mirror's demand for a finished masterpiece becomes the first lesson in transhumanism's wider catechism: not merely accommodation, not simply therapy, but the surpassing of creaturely limits—the old *theologia gloriae* that would rather shed "the human" like larval skin than wait for wounds to be transfigured.

6. Super-Human Adaptation: The Old *Theologia Gloriae* Wearing New Skin

Now we come to the bright heart of transhumanism proper: not accommodation, not therapy, but enhancement—the project of surpassing species-typical human capacities and eventually leaving "the human" behind as a larval stage.[31]

If disability accommodation says, "Let us remove barriers so you can enter the room," enhancement says, "Let us replace the room with a sky—and then replace the sky with a server."

It is here that Heidelberg's knife goes deep. For enhancement is frequently not merely a set of technologies; it is a secular soteriology—a doctrine of salvation by means of mastery.

6.1 The Spiritual Logic of Enhancement: Salvation as Control

Enhancement is often narrated as liberation: freedom from limitation, freedom from finitude, freedom from dependence. But Christian theology sees that dependence is not merely a defect; it is part of love's architecture.

To be human is to receive life, not to originate oneself. We are born, not manufactured. We are taught, not downloaded. We are forgiven, not self-justified. We belong to one another before we belong to ourselves.[32]

Transhumanism, in many of its influential articulations, imagines salvation as control. If we can control biology, control desire, control aging, control death, then the human problem is solved. But the theology of the cross names the deeper problem: the human problem is not finally lack of control. It is sin—curved-inwardness, the refusal to trust God, the insistence that we will author ourselves into glory.[33]

This is why transhumanist rhetoric so often echoes the old Edenic whisper: "You will be like God." Not like God in love, but like God in sovereignty. Not like God in holiness, but like God in autonomy.

The cross stands in the garden like a flaming sword. It says: you cannot climb into divinity by the ladder of technique. God has come down to you.

6.2 Enhancement as Eschatology: A Future Without Resurrection

Transhumanism offers an eschatology: a story of the end, a promise of what the future is for. Its horizon is not resurrection but replacement—replacement of bodies, replacement of biology, replacement of vulnerability with engineered invulnerability.[34]

But Christian eschatology is not an exit from the body; it is the body's redemption. Resurrection is not the soul's escape from flesh; it is God's "Yes" to creation.[35] And the risen Christ, astonishingly, retains His wounds—not as defects, but as identity.[36] True glory does not erase scars; it transfigures them.

Here the theology of the cross offers a fierce criterion: any future that requires the abolition of vulnerability as such is not the Kingdom of God. God's reign is not a sterilized showroom of invincible beings. It is communion—reconciled creatures whose power is for service, whose life is gift, whose love remains love because it can be wounded.

6.3 Enhancement and the Market: The New Sacraments of Inequality

One need not be a prophet to see where enhancement technologies will flow first: toward those who can pay. The liturgy of upgrade will not be administered equally. It will amplify inequality and create tiers of access to cognition, longevity, beauty, advantage.[37]

The theology of the cross is allergic to salvations that require the poor to remain "unimproved." Christ is found among the last, not among those who purchase first place.[38] A church that blesses enhancement without critique risks becoming chaplain to a new aristocracy of engineered advantage.

Even if enhancement were widely distributed, another problem remains: the moral meaning of the practice. If the driving story is that the unenhanced are obsolete, then the gospel's proclamation—that every person bears dignity as creature and neighbor—begins to rot. In such a world, old age becomes shame. Disability becomes failure. Ordinary bodies become "legacy hardware."

But God did not become "legacy hardware." God became flesh.[39]

6.4 The Idol of Invulnerability (Or: When "More" Means Loving Less)

At the deepest level, enhancement is often about invulnerability. It is the attempt to build a self that cannot be broken.

But love requires vulnerability. To love is to risk grief. To be human is to be exposable—to time, to loss, to sickness, to betrayal, to death. The cross does not eliminate vulnerability; it reveals that God enters vulnerability, not as tourist but as participant.[40]

Therefore the most spiritually dangerous possibility is not that we will build machines too smart for us. It is that we will build selves too proud to kneel.

The theologian of glory wants a crown without a cross. The transhumanist dream is frequently a crown built from circuitry: shining, expensive, and hollow.

7. Sorting the Moral Goods: A Cruciform Discernment Framework

The church does not need a single sentence to solve every question. It needs a faithful grammar—a way to test spirits without crushing neighbors. What follows is not a verdict-machine but a cruciform framework.

7.1 Telos: What Is This For?

Ask first: *What is the purpose?*

- Accommodation seeks access to shared goods.
- Therapy seeks healing toward ordinary flourishing.
- Enhancement seeks advantage, superiority, or transcendence.

Purpose matters. The same technology (say, a neural implant) may serve mercy or domination depending on its telos.[41]

7.2 Anthropology: What Does This Assume a Human Being Is?

Does the intervention assume:

- the body is disposable raw material?
- the self is sovereign and unbounded?
- identity is a product of will alone?
- worth is measured by performance?

The theology of the cross answers with a different anthropology: the body is meaningful gift; the self is relational creature; freedom is for love; worth is bestowed by God.[42]

7.3 Solidarity: Who Bears the Cost?

Who is pressured to participate? Who is left behind? Who profits? Technologies are never only tools; they are social forces. Enhancement especially can become coercive: "Upgrade or become irrelevant." The cross interrupts coercion by centering those who cannot compete.[43]

7.4 The Hidden God: Does This Bypass the Cross?

Does the practice embody the logic of the cross—patience, humility, care for the weak—or the logic of glory—speed, conquest, contempt for limits?

> The question is not "Is it powerful?" but "What kind of power is it practicing?"[44]

7.5 Eschatology: What Future Does This Imply?

Does it imply that salvation is technological, that death is finally defeated by engineering? Christianity agrees death is an enemy—but insists death is defeated by Christ, not by our upgrades.[45] A cruciform eschatology can celebrate medicine and resist idolatry at the same time.

8. A Cruciform Affirmation: Vocation, Medicine, and the Artisan Mercy of God

The theology of the cross does not demand passivity. Christians are not called to romanticize suffering or refuse healing. Christ healed. The early church cared for the sick. Christian hospitals were not accidents; they were doctrine made visible.[46]

Luther's theology of vocation is helpful here. God serves the world through creaturely means—through farmers and bakers, through parents and magistrates, through physicians and nurses.[47] The hand that lifts the fallen neighbor may be the hand of God hidden in a human calling. That hiddenness does not reduce the calling; it dignifies it.

So there is a kind of technological work deeply consonant with the cross: the slow, unglamorous labor of care. It does not seek to make the strong stronger. It seeks to keep the vulnerable from being crushed. It does not dream of becoming gods. It stoops to wash feet.

In that sense, a wheelchair, a pacemaker, insulin, a hearing aid, a screen reader, a ramp—these can be secular sacraments of mercy: outward and visible signs of an inward commitment to make room for one another.

The church should be the first to build such rooms.

9. A Cruciform Warning: When Our Tools Start Preaching Another Gospel

Yet we must also be honest: tools teach. They catechize. They train the imagination. And certain technologies—especially enhancement technologies—begin to preach a rival gospel: you can be justified by performance, secured by control, saved by upgrade.

The theology of the cross answers: no. You are justified by grace, secured by promise, saved by Christ.

Here the Lutheran distinction between Law and Gospel becomes pastoral gold.[48] The Law always demands: become, achieve, ascend, optimize. The Gospel gives: forgiven, loved, raised, received. If enhancement becomes a new Law—an endless demand to overcome limitation—then it will crush souls and sort bodies into winners and waste.

And if enhancement becomes a new Gospel—promising immortality, transcendence, salvation—then it becomes idolatry.

The cross is God's judgment on all self-salvation. And it is God's mercy for those exhausted by the demand to be more or other than they are.

10. Epilogue: The Tree That Refuses to Become a Ladder

Transhumanism imagines salvation as ascent. The cross is a tree that refuses to become a ladder.

It is fixed in the ground of creaturely life—wood, blood, breath. It does not offer a route around suffering. It offers God within suffering, and beyond it. It does not promise we will never be weak. It promises that weakness will not be wasted when carried in love, and that death will not win.

So, we must be careful and we must be bold:

- We can affirm disability accommodations as tangible neighbor-love, the church's architecture of welcome, mercy made accessible.
- We can approach trans-gender accommodations with cruciform pastoral care: refusing contempt, resisting slogans, protecting the vulnerable, speaking truth with humility while continuing the church's long work of naming embodiment faithfully.
- We must critique super-human adaptations whenever they function as a new *theologia gloriae*: salvation by upgrade, eschatology by optimization, a dream of invulnerability that would leave the crucified Christ behind as an embarrassment.

In the end, the question is not whether technology can change us. It already has. The question is whether, in changing, we will become more capable of love—or merely more capable.

The crucified God does not ask us to become angels. He makes us saints: forgiven, embodied, finite, beloved—and destined not for upload but for resurrection.

And resurrection—this matters—does not come as a product release. It comes as a gift.

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Notes

1. Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation" (1518), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 53.
2. 1 Corinthians 1:18–25; 2 Corinthians 12:9.
3. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:40–42 (Theses 19–21).
4. 1 John 4:1.
5. John Swinton, *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 1–10; Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethic*s (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 17–28.
6. For clinical and pastoral complexity as distinct from ideological simplifications, see discussions in moral theology and pastoral care literature; for a broad theological frame on embodiment, see Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 13–30.
7. Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 1–25; Max More and Natasha Vita-More, eds., *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 1–6.
8. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:40–41 (Thesis 21).
9. Ibid., LW 31:40 (Thesis 21).
10. Ibid., LW 31:39–41 (Theses 19–21).
11. Ibid., LW 31:40 (Thesis 20).
12. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520), in LW 31:327-377; see also the language of "alien righteousness" in Luther's early writings.
13. Compare the anthropology implied in enhancement narratives with the Pauline contrast between boasting and grace in Romans 3–5.
14. Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 99–105; Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 171–189.
15. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 31–57; Swinton, *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 11–20.
16. Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, 13–35.
17. Luther's positive appraisal of ordinary means and callings is woven throughout his vocational writings; see Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 1–18.

18. On the moral importance of listening to disabled communities and resisting a purely "fixing" narrative, see Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 75–100.

19. Matthew 25:31–46; Luther's insistence that God is found "in suffering" reorients how the church treats those in distress (Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:40).

20. Genesis 1–2; John 1:14; 1 Corinthians 15. For theological ethics rooted in resurrection and embodiment, see O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 31–58.

21. John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), on gift as a relational practice in antiquity and the expectation of a fitting response (reciprocity), including gratitude and honor; see also discussion that reciprocity does not negate gift.

22. Barclay's critique of modern "pure gift" assumptions and his insistence that Greco-Roman gift-giving commonly entailed obligation/return (without thereby ceasing to be gift).

23. For the difference between prudential policies and metaphysical claims, compare O'Donovan's account of moral reasoning under the horizon of resurrection (ibid., 59–92).

24. Barclay's taxonomy of the "perfections" of grace/gift (including "non-circularity" as one possible "perfection," and the warning against assuming it is intrinsic to gift).

25. Barclay's reading of Paul as emphasizing *incongruity* (gift to the unworthy) while still portraying grace as *circular*/*reciprocal* in the sense that it generates a fitting, communal response that honors God.

26. Matthew 25:40; Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:40.

27. On the complexity of suffering and meaning, see John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 47–76.

28. 1 Corinthians 15:35–58; O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 13–30.

29. On vulnerability, coercion, and the moral stakes of medical/technological interventions, see Brent Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 109–140.

30. For caution regarding technological "solutions" to human identity and suffering, see Ronald Cole-Turner, ed., *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 1–18.

31. Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," 1–25; More and Vita-More, *Transhumanist Reader*, 1–6.

32. Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 19–35; Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," LW 31:327–377.

33. Augustine's classic description of disordered love and the inward curve of sin stands behind much Western theological anthropology; see Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. bk. 2; compare Luther's own accounts of sin and bondage in Martin Luther, "The Bondage of the Will" (1525), in LW 33:3–295.

34. Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005), 7–30.

35. 1 Corinthians 15; O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 93–120.

36. John 20:24–29.

37. Waters, *From Human to Posthuman*, 141–170; Ted Peters, *Playing God? Genetic Determinism and Human Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2002), 135–162.

38. Luke 1:46–55; Matthew 20:16.

39. John 1:14.

40. Philippians 2:5–11; 2 Corinthians 8:9.

41. Peters, *Playing God?*, 17–40; Cole-Turner, *Transhumanism and Transcendence*, 19–34.

42. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:39–42; Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 1–18.

43. Waters, *From Human to Posthuman*, 171–201.

44. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:40–41 (Theses 20–21).

45. 1 Corinthians 15:26; Romans 6:23.

46. Gary B. Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 1–25.

47. Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 36–62.

48. For classic Lutheran framing, see C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), 1–40.

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Lutherans For Life
Position Statement on Transhumanism

WHEREAS, Scripture clearly states that the Lord God Almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, created and still preserves all human life (Job 10:12); and

WHEREAS, God has authoritatively and intricately knit each as He wills, in the mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-16); and

WHEREAS, Human life, even though marred by the Fall and resulting in sin and death, has a unique and valued place in God's creation (Genesis 9:6; Psalm 8:5); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Christ sanctified human life by His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension; and

WHEREAS, God, through His Word and His Spirit, uses even things that the world sees as limitations for His glory and for the good of our neighbor (Romans 8:28; I Corinthians 12:22); and

WHEREAS, God may heal certain diseases or conditions through medicine and technology to ameliorate incapacity and suffering (Jeremiah 8:22; Ecclesiastes 3:3); and

WHEREAS, God has provided His Word to reveal the Christ, to tell us how He gives faith, to give us hope, and to enable us to live lives pleasing to Him (John 5:39; Ephesians 2:8; Hebrews 11:1; I Thessalonians 4:1; I Peter 3:15); and

WHEREAS, God has given those baptized into Christ His Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth and comfort them in life and in death (John 16:13; John 14:16); and

WHEREAS, Transhumanism is a mindset and movement that attempts to achieve immortality through human efforts; and

WHEREAS, Transhumanism endeavors to enhance human nature beyond the abilities and function given by God; and

WHEREAS, Transhumanism embodies the Darwinist idea that humans, having evolved from lower forms of life, are therefore capable of evolving into a "master race" with the help of technology and psychology; and

WHEREAS, Transhumanism is based on a subjective view of reality that teaches that humans can be whatever they visualize themselves as being (Genesis 3:5; Genesis 11:4); and

WHEREAS, Transhumanism, as an ideology and a pursuit, represents a faith and doctrine that is incompatible with Christianity; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That all in Christ should give thanks to God for all that He provides for our good as ones created, redeemed, and called to be His own; and be it further

RESOLVED, That Lutherans For Life recognizes technology as a divine blessing to be used in faith toward Him and love toward the neighbor (examples include the Roman roads that were used to spread the Gospel and the printing press that was used to spread the Reformation); and be it further

RESOLVED, That all in Christ should be wise in the use of all technology so as not give any opportunity to Satan to tempt those in Christ or further his efforts to deceive by imitation of works of God; and be it further

RESOLVED, That Lutherans For Life opposes Transhumanism as defined above, as contrary to God's will and encourages all to remain aware of its nature and evil effects, most notably the rejection of the glory and promises of God in Christ; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That all in Christ should not attempt to transcend our God-given human nature and functions, but rather seek to fulfill our God-created purpose.

Updated July 27, 2026

Lutherans For Life

Talking about Life in the Public Square

A Review of Podcasts: Transhumanism

Eric Brinkert

Welcome to our new essay series about life in the public square. *Verba Vitae* seeks to inform and transform the conversation about life and its significance through rigorous, thoughtful, academic theological research. We must acknowledge, however, that that conversation is already occurring, and so it is important that we understand and address what is being discussed in the public square. *Verba Vitae* does this already through its articles and book reviews, but is only able to offer a sampling of what is fully being discussed publicly. It is important to note that this discussion is not confined merely to the pages of academic publications; in the myriad of perspectives in the public square, implications for how society thinks about life and its significance run far and wide. This new essay series seeks to engage with the conversation about life in the public square by exploring the medium of podcast. Long form podcasts allow for serious conversation between experts and the public that is both timely and immediately accessible. The essays in *Verba Vitae* always explore and critique the conversations about the theme of the issue in which they appear, and so in this series we will provide references to other *Verba Vitae* articles on a variety of topics that will help the reader more seriously and critically engage in this conversation about life in the public square.

In the modern-day public square—the medium of the podcast—Christian conversation about transhumanism is a bit muted. Many conversations occur in this medium, including Christian conversations, about topics related to transhumanism, like Artificial Intelligence, but far fewer are willing to take on transhumanism directly. This may be because a thorough examination of transhumanism requires the Christian to ask critical, introspective questions. These questions include not only the anthropological question of what does it mean to be human, but also the question of what does it mean for the human to adopt technologies. The adoption of technologies invariably changes the human experience, transforming the human body in direct and indirect ways. This is the key question in the transhumanism

conversation: what does it mean for the human to adopt technologies that transform the human experience?

For the most part, human beings—and especially Christians in the global north—use some sort of transformative technology. Eyeglasses, insulin pumps, hearing aids, pacemakers, smartwatches and smart glasses are all technologies that have been widely adopted and, in their own way, transform the human body and the human experience. This fact indicates to some degree a minimum assumption that many Christians are bringing to the conversation about transhumanism, albeit perhaps only tacitly. If this is the case, the assumption presupposes that these transformations are in the direction of some standard that currently exceeds the human experience. What that is then demands a standard for what is considered to be "good" for any human being.

These are the hard questions and challenging assumptions with which the Christian must wrestle, especially if one is to enter the conversation in the public square. Fortunately, many other Christian thinkers are engaging in this conversation publicly. To that end, this essay will explore five Christian thinkers who are participating in this conversation in the public square, that is, podcasts: the Rev. Dr. John Pless on *Lead Time*, Professor Steven Jensen on the *Thomistic Institute Podcast*, Dr. Marc Cortez on *Thinking Christian*, Dr. Anna Puzio on *The Dissenter*, and Micah Redding on the *AI & Faith Podcast*. These thinkers span the Christian spectrum from conservative professional academics in seminary study to a lay computer scientist and public advocate, but they are all engaging in the conversation on transhumanism from a Christian perspective.

Professor Jensen, speaking to the Thomistic Institute, a Roman Catholic organization, introduces the listener to the classical, conservative Christian approach to distinguishing what is good, or what is the standard by which the Christian can apply technology to transform the human experience. This is the distinction between treatment and enhancements, or between technologies that restore human function and technologies that augment human performance. Jensen also frames this within the distinction between transformations of the human body that are natural versus unnatural. This distinction is a widely accepted standard within Christian thought, but just because it is accepted does not mean that it is without problems. Even in the cases of treatment, or curative applications of technology, the assumption is made that something is considered undesirable and therefore needs to be transformed instead into something considered desirable.

Dr. Puzio cautions that such distinctions are inherently discriminatory. She argues that what are considered desirable characteristics assume some standard that inherently rejects other standards. As a result, characteristics associated with women, disabilities, and aging are often considered undesirable and subject to

improvement or transformation. This is where medical technologies, including genetic screenings and genetic engineering, demand critical analysis, as is discussed by both Micah Redding and Professor Jensen. For example, Iceland reports that it has almost eliminated Down Syndrome in its population through the use of genetic screening and elective abortion.[1] Such uses of technology assume that Down Syndrome is an undesirable human characteristic in need of transformation or elimination. This basic assumption casts doubt on the validity of any prescriptive measure that follows. Bracketing that critique, the methods that Icelanders followed to achieve this result was a combination of two technologies: genetic screening and abortion are a form of what Jensen calls "liberal eugenics." In liberal eugenics enhancements are offered, not forced, but can be adopted at such a scale as to transform the human characteristics of a population, as seen in Iceland. Puzio shares this concern that transhumanism is rebranded eugenics. Furthermore, she makes the compelling argument that while transhumanism is presented as scientific, good/bad distinctions are, by their very nature, non-scientific. That is, no scientific measure can determine that aging is either good or bad, or that a disability is either good or bad. Those are subjective assessments. Such an inconsistency indicates that significant flaws in the treatment/enhancement distinction exist in the attempt to clearly distinguish what is medicine and what is transhumanism.

If the convention used to make the distinction between treatment and enhancement is insufficient, a new standard is needed. Dr. Cortez and Mr. Redding are two voices who are expressing that need for a new standard in adopting technologies that promise to transform the human experience. Dr. Cortez recognizes that the promise of the resurrection naturally draws the Christian mind to the idea of the transformed human body. However, he stresses that this promise pushes back against the need to transform the human body *now*. Rather, he argues that we need to slow down and consider setting boundaries for adopting technologies that might, at first glance, appear to be "good." As an example, he cites David laying down King Saul's armor in 1 Samuel 17 as an example. Redding offers a more tangible recommendation, suggesting that the standard for adopting technologies should not focus so much on how the body will be transformed, but rather that it should focus on how that transformation will either build up human relationships or break down human relationships. He argues for a relational standard for adopting technologies. He applies this both to medical technologies such as genetic engineering as well as to other forms of technology like Artificial Intelligence and social media.

Redding is arguing from a Christian transhumanist perspective and is in fact an advocate of transhumanism. He largely sees the development of technologies as inevitable and part of the created nature of human beings. He argues from Genesis 1 that human beings were created to be creators, and creating new technologies is part of what it is to be human. Furthermore, he also argues that human beings are

created to be adaptive, both physically and mentally. When he combines these two premises, he concludes that human beings are designed such that they will create new technologies that will transform both the human mind and body. Thus, Redding is not critical of transhumanism *per se*. But where he differs from transhumanism as an ideology, as Puzio would present it, or through its incarnations in radical humanism, radical individualism, or radical environmentalism, all of which Redding himself critiques, is that he does not desire to transform the body to escape the limitations of the body. Rather he wants to optimize the human body toward the *telos* of relationship.

Redding offers a unique perspective on Christian transhumanism, one which itself is flawed and subject to theological critique, but he makes an interesting contribution to the public forum on transhumanism. The focus on relationality as central to the human experience takes us from one end of the spectrum of the conversation to another, highlighting Dr. Pless' interpretation of the *imago Dei* and Christian anthropology to turn one's attention to the *telos* of the gifted body. He argues, like Redding, that "recognizing your embodiment focuses you on what your body is for: serving others." The liberal Redding and the conservative Pless both take the Christian to the same place in their analysis of transhumanism, that the body is a gift given for service (or relationship, or love) for the neighbor. In these conversations in the public square, we find a common standard that the Christian can access when thinking about what it is to be human and what it means for the human to adopt technologies: that to be human, whether one's characteristics are judged by the world to be good or bad, is to be an embodied gift given in love to those with whom you are in relationship.

As is the case in any public conversation (and, of course, recognizing that these thinkers were not directly in conversation with each other), much can be both admired and critiqued. To fully critique one of these conversations, let alone all five, is beyond the limitations of this essay. But it is vital that Christians are engaging in this conversation. As Redding notes, if the Christian does not engage in this conversation, they forgo the opportunity to shape the conversation and risk instead being shaped by the conversation.

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Note

1. See Sarah Klucznik and Holly Slepian, "Iceland's Abortion Policy concerning Children with Down Syndrome: An Ethical Analysis," *The Journal of Healthcare Ethics and Administration* 4, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018): 45-48, https://doi.org/10.22461/jhea.10.7164. See also the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe story "Declining birth rates of children with Downs Syndrome in the Nordic countries," at https://unric.org/en/declining-birth-rates-of-children-with-downs-syndrome-in-the-nordic-countries/.

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Book Redux

Gene Edward Veith, Jr. and Trevor Sutton. *Authentic Christianity: How Lutheran Theology Speaks to a Postmodern World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 232 pp. $15.99

Reviewed by M. Anthony Seel

To a world of "relativists," "subjectivists" (12), burned-out and disaffected believers, and spiritual secularists, who are also identified as the "spiritual but not religious" (29), authors Veith and Sutton offer Lutheranism as the most authentic form of Christian faith.

Veith and Sutton open with a history lesson that takes the reader through the premodern and modern worlds and into the contemporary situation of postmodernism. In doing so, they utilize Wesleyan theologian Thomas Oden as a tour guide (13-14). Oden dates the beginning of the modern era to the fall of the Bastille on July 14, 1789. The French Revolution ushered in this new period by murdering the French royalty, eviscerating ancient traditions, and using a new calendar to restart history. The Age of Reason was thereby born, and rationality replaced Christianity, which was seen as a vestige of the old worldview replete with revelation and miracles. The "empirical rationalism of the scientific revolution" flourished in the nineteenth century as an extension of the Enlightenment period of the previous century. From this came "progressive politics" expressed in various ideologies: "populism, socialism, social democracy, communism, and more" (14). As a result, society created "modern art, modern poetry, modern architecture, modern design, and, most important, modern theology" (14).

Oden dates the end of the modern era as the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. That gives the modern era 200 years of duration. Postmodernism effectively started in the 1960s as a response to the Vietnam War and "technocratic society" (17). The authors observe that "objective rationalism gave way to subjective irrationalism…. A new awareness of various cultures, prompted by a rise in immigration and American diversity, manifested itself in multiculturalism and then cultural relativism" (17). A burgeoning outcome of postmodernist thinking came in the form of virtual reality, which entered through "personal computers, the internet, smartphones, and video games" and led to "virtual identities, virtual social networks, and virtual relationships" (17).

Intellectuals like Jacques Derrida posited deconstructionism, which Michel Foucault developed into a way of understanding that reduces culture, including "literature, history, philosophy, law, the social sciences, education, [and] theology," to "power politics" whereby oppressors use the power they have to control others (17). Oden identifies postmodernism as "hypermodernism" and sees its antidote as "rediscovering historic orthodox Christianity" (20). Just as postmoderns borrowed elements from the past in architecture, film, urban planning, and environmentalism, Christians can do so as well by drawing from the best of our tradition and bringing it into our lives today. Lutheranism, as it transitioned from the Renaissance to the Reformation, can point the way by providing plausible responses to the issues raised by postmodernism.

The authors begin their Lutheran response to postmodernism with a look at a person whom Kierkegaard and Goethe held in the highest esteem, Johann Georg Hamann. Hamann, a neighbor of Immanuel Kant, strongly critiqued Kant's work. He argued for the relevance of revelation in an age that, in the name of reason, had turned away from revelation. Theologian John Betz ranks Hamann against Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida as one who leads us forward rather than into the dead end of nihilism offered by the other three. Betz states:

> Anticipating the collapse of secular reason, Hamann thus brings us to a decidedly postmodern crossroads, at which point one can take the road of faith, which, as an inspired tradition attests, leads to ever greater enlightenment; or one can take the road of postmodern unbelief, which leads to nihilism. Simply put, the alternative is one between Hamann and postmodernity (27).

Professor Ted Kinnaman of George Mason University further references some of the scholarly engagement with Hamann. Kinnaman calls Hamann "the philosophically most sophisticated thinker of the German Counter-enlightenment" (28). However, Veith and Sutton describe Hamann's work as "little more than ordinary Lutheranism" (28). They contend that "Hamann's critique of Enlightenment rationalism differs little from Luther's critique of Christian rationalism" (28).

Luther combatted medieval scholasticism on the same grounds that Hamann critiqued Enlightenment rationalism—he recognized the limits to human reason and elevated God's Word and Christian faith as providing the answers to human questions and dilemmas. From this perspective, Veith and Sutton drill down into worldviews: "Contemporary culture consists largely of people who believe truth is relative, that they can choose their own morality, that life has no particular meaning" (29). There are still "modernists who believe that the material world is all there is and that the only reality is what science can prove" (29). There are also the postmodernists who are "spiritual but not religious" (29). Both positions are "essentially godless" (29).

> It may be that Lutheranism is an articulation of Christianity that can reach relativists, secularists, the spiritual but not religious, those who cannot so much as conceive of God, those who try to turn themselves into God, and other products and casualties of contemporary culture (31).

The authors suggest that what may be needed is "another Reformation" (33). They observe that "Contemporary churches seem adrift, confused, and dysfunctional, ill-equipped for the challenges of secularism, postmodernism, and cultural change" (33). In 2024, *Christianity Today* published "The Six Way Fracturing of Evangelicalism" on their blog, *Mere Orthodoxy*.[1] In that article, writer Michael Graham highlights some of the ways that evangelicalism has been torn apart by events that have revealed divisions within American evangelicalism based on socioeconomic, political, and cultural forces that in practice supersede theological differences. This is a result of the drift, confusion, and dysfunction highlighted by Veith and Sutton.

Graham returned to this topic a year later in the pages of *Christianity Today* with co-author Skylar Flowers. Their article "A Splintered Generation" demonstrates the ways that evangelicalism has fractured along sociological, political, and cultural differences. One divide is by gender. They write that "Regardless of the underlying causes, the widening gaps between young men and young women in politics, religious belief, and religious attendance will play a significant role in the contours of the fracturing of evangelicalism."[2]

How can the evangelical church restore some semblance of unity, clarity, and faithfulness to the God who is the Word and who gave us the revelation contained in Scriptures? As the authors recognize, the American church has tried the "seeker-sensitive" approach that grew out of the Church Growth Movement with some success, alongside highly apparent weaknesses. They cite three book-length critiques of this approach and look at the Emerging Church approach, note its successes, and point to its deficiencies. Their thesis maintains that "We need a different framework. We need a better framework. We need a framework that … can engage the thirty-three million people who are spiritual but not religious" (40).

Veith and Sutton "Imagine a Christianity of Christianities … that is markedly better than the Church Growth or Emerging Church Movements" (41-42). That approach is Lutheran Christianity as a bridge between the sacramental Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches and biblical and evangelical Protestant churches. In its confessional form, Lutheranism is sacramental while also being biblical and evangelical. As they show, the Lutheran bridge is much different than the Anglican bridge that accommodates a wide range of beliefs. The Lutheran Book of Concord anchors the Lutheran understanding of the Bible in ways that the Anglican Articles of Religion do not. As Veith and Sutton say, there is a precision to Lutheran theology that is lacking in Anglicanism.

This leads to the question of how Lutheran Christianity might "spark a Reformation for the twenty-first century as it did five hundred years ago" (50). Veith and Sutton explain that they will consider the "major issues facing the contemporary church" and demonstrate how "Lutheran Christianity addresses them" (56). Beginning with "partial truths human beings are able to grasp by themselves" about God, the authors see two tendencies in American secular society. While 89% of Americans say that they believe in God, according to a Gallup poll in 2016, the God they believe in is either transcendent, distant from us like the Deism of our founding fathers, or immanent, within each of us, not both transcendent and immanent. The authors compare this version of Deism to "a cup of weak decaf coffee that only arouses the desire for something stronger, bolder, and fully caffeinated" (66). The "God within" is not any better. This view of God is traced back to the pietism of John Wesley's Methodism. There are also the non-Christian versions like Hinduism that has morphed into the New Age Movement.

The world in which Martin Luther lived leaned heavily toward the distant God who lives in heaven "in his incomprehensible power, wisdom, and majesty" (73). For Luther, God brings Himself to us in His Son so that "He might present Himself to our sight" (74). Luther says, "Take hold of Him; cling to Him with all your heart, and spurn all speculation about the Divine Majesty..." (75). The emphasis in Lutheran theology on the Word of God, the sacraments, and the church, sees God as actively present in this world, which brings us to the central doctrine of Lutheran theology, justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

Veith and Sutton note that while the theological work of justification may be lost to secular society, justification in other senses is certainly not. Secularists seek to justify themselves through politics and ideologies. The authors assert that there is a human obsession with justification. It is not hard to show that

> even the most hardened secularists, those who reject the very possibility of moral truth, are constantly making moral judgments: they demand social justice, denounce political evils, demonstrate for human rights, call for ethical approaches to the environment, and criticize bad behavior wherever they see it (84).

As contemporary German Lutheran theologian Oswald Bayer has aptly shown, evil and suffering have not exited our world along with the God whom the secularists deny exists. Without God or justification, "life is meaningless, absurd, pointless, and (in a tragic number of cases) not worth living" (87). Faith in Jesus Christ gives life meaning and makes it worth living by giving us a justification that makes sense as it deals with sin, evil, and the sufferings of this world. Jesus Christ answers the deepest needs of humanity (89). In this, the authors point to Luther as "anticipating—and repudiating—the mindset of both the modernist and postmodernist" (91).

The modernist responds, "I can't believe this. It's incomprehensible to reason." The postmodernist responds, "I can't believe this. I didn't construct this by the strength of my will" (92). To modernists and postmodernists, Luther says that the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel and enlightens us with His gifts (contra modernists and postmodernists) (92).

Considering the source of our justification, Jesus Christ and the cross on which He died, Veith and Sutton take dead aim at the pop psychology of Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller, which has morphed into the prosperity gospel of Joel Osteen and Word of Faith Pentecostalism. Lutheran theology stands opposed to all theologies of glory. The theology of the cross meets the critique of Christianity leveled by postmodernists that it is "nothing more than a manifestation of power" (110). Almighty God allows suffering, but He also participates in suffering on the cross.

The authors accuse modernists and postmodernists of offering this world theologies of glory. For the modernist, science and technology give us a path of progress toward better lives. Postmodernism gives everyone the authority to construct their own moralities and realities. "The theology of the cross—the message that God comes not in power but in weakness to human beings not in their strength but in their weakness—overturns both modernism and postmodernism" (121).

The question remains how to get beyond the pretensions of the modernists and postmodernists so that they too can embrace the cross of Christ. While Lutheran theology answers questions that non-believers of different stripes are asking, the question remains how to enter into conversation with them. This is the work of evangelism and pre-evangelism, which the authors do not take up. Their next move is to the real presence of God in this world through Jesus Christ in His incarnation and now through the Word of God and the Sacraments. Accordingly, "both in its sacramental theology and elsewhere, Lutheranism offers a theology of presence" (127). This flies in the face of the modernists and postmodernists who "often assume that the physical world is all there is" (127). Many issues come into play because of this:

> Today, the religious, the spiritual but not religious, and even the materialists who believe the physical realm is all there is, are often alienated from the real tangible world and from their own bodies. This is only intensified by our information technology, with its virtual realities, virtual identities, and virtual environments. Our "body issues," as they say, are at the root of our other troubles over sex (including the disembodied sex of internet pornography), reproduction (abortion vs. giving birth), and our fear of aging (which we try to reverse with plastic surgery, expensive creams and lotions, and perpetual adolescence) (130).

To this, we can add the body issues of gender identity, so with all this, "the outside reality impinges on our consciousness" (131). We experience suffering that we

cannot control and sometimes joy that points to something beyond ourselves and this world. We cannot live in a value-free world and it is not intellectually honest to dismiss questions about where our values come from in what Lutheran pastor and theologian Michael Lockwood describes as our disenchanted world. Lockwood traces the disenchantment of our world back to a Reformed theology that predated the Enlightenment. They did so through a hermeneutic of transcendence "which 'drew sharp boundaries between matter and spirit and stressed to a high degree God's transcendence over all finite earthly things'" (139). Lockwood points out that:

> Luther's willingness to acknowledge that God has bound himself to created means does not mean he was any less convinced of God's transcendence than the Reformed. Quite the opposite. It was his belief in God's almighty power that led him to assert that if the Creator chooses to join himself to part of his creation, and to unite the infinite with the finite by becoming incarnate, he is able to do so (139).

From Genesis into the New Testament, God is with His people. In Holy Communion, God is still with His people through the presence of Jesus Christ in the sacrament. However, "many people" exclude or evade Him (140). Even some Christians have allowed their views of God to be shaped by scientific discoveries. For them, God fills the gaps that science cannot explain. Long before the scientific age, Lutheran theologian Martin Chemnitz addressed this view of God when he states, "now Scripture explicitly says that God is not absent or far away but close at hand and present, that He fills heaven and earth with His being, His presence, His power, His creative and preserving ability, and His unique rule" (147).

In a culture that is more connected digitally but less so physically than before, with a God who is close at hand and fully involved in His creation and who offers His full attention, focus, and presence to a world that is far too experienced in absences, there is a fuller dimension of life available than a God of the gaps can give.

After a short critique of the millennial generation, Veith and Sutton offer a compliment, saying "this generation has accurately diagnosed a serious problem in modern society: the lack of work-life integration" (152). Here, the authors highlight the compartmentalizing of life before focusing on the Reformation teaching on vocation, which they argue "has been gradually lost" (153). What has been specifically lost is the early Reformation doctrine that "gave practical guidance to Christians in their marriage, parenthood, economic activity, and their role as citizens" (153). When vocation is reduced to occupation, Christians are given far less guidance on how to live in the other spheres of life.

The authors believe that recovering the Reformation understanding of vocation "would revitalize contemporary Christianity and show Christians how they can once again be the world's salt and light" (153). After reviewing how vocation is treated

in the Bible and by Luther, the authors explore "the Christians multiple vocations" (158). In the estates of church, household, and state, and the fourth estate to which Luther appeals—the "common order of Christian love"—we exercise our vocation by serving others. As Luther said, "God does not need our good works ... but our neighbor does" (165). Veith and Sutton recognize that:

> Vocation is where sanctification happens as Christians grow spiritually in faith and good works. Vocation is where evangelism happens as Christians teach their children and proclaim the Good News of Jesus to neighbors. Vocation is where cultural influence happens as Christians take their places and live out their faith in every niche of society (171).

After addressing several misconceptions of the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms, the authors set out a proper understanding. The Augsburg Confession teaches that "lawful civil regulations are good works of God" (180). As such, they are done in service to others in vocation and basic citizenship. God reigns in secular society through "His law, His Creation, and vocation" (181). God's law is the foundation for human laws. The laws of nature are given by God to govern His creation in its natural and material form. Vocation is how we serve others in society. That which opposes God's rule on earth must be opposed by Christians, including "cultures, ideologies, and practices" (181). Given this, the authors state:

> Because God's temporal kingdom is governed by His law, ideologies and practices that deny the reality of moral law—such as moral relativism, utilitarianism, permissiveness, and the notion that morality is nothing more than a social or personal construction—are not in accord with the doctrine of the two kingdoms (183).

Furthermore, "ideologies and practices that reject marriage, that undermine parenthood, that reduce economic activity to selfish greed, that repudiate all civil government, and that have no use for the church as an institution are not in accord with the doctrine of the two kingdoms" (188).

The temporal kingdom is joined to the spiritual kingdom in the Church, "a fellowship of faith and the Holy Spirit in hearts" (191). Both the temporal and spiritual kingdoms are under God, who is present in both, although His presence is not always evident. While God is hidden in the world, His presence in the Church is made evident in His Word and Sacraments. Moreover, Christians live in and through Christ with His presence within us so that we can love and serve others through our vocation, whether that be an occupation or in marriage, parenting, or in society.

Given all this, what makes Lutheranism—whether it is Lutheran theology, the Lutheran tradition, Lutheran spirituality, or Lutheran churches—relevant to our secular, postmodern world? As Veith and Sutton acknowledge, there is a sense of otherness to

traditional Lutheran worship. In the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, there is the *Lutheran Service Book*. In that book are rites for worship, hymns, prayers, and other resources that would be completely foreign to someone with no church background.

The authors assert that Lutheran worship "creates the awe, mystery, and beauty of holiness" (229) by proclaiming in word, music, and sacrament "the clear consistent message of Law and Gospel, Word and Sacrament, and the beautiful hiddenness of God in what may appear to be just ordinary life" (229). Veith and Sutton join others in a call for a new reformation equipped with the same theology that fueled the first reformation. They believe that Lutheran theology can draw postmodernists, secularists, "and those who are 'spiritual but not religious'" to Christ and His Church (231).

> The Church's next era should recover the authentic Christianity of the past and apply is fearlessly to whatever the future will bring. Christianity's continuing relevance can be made clear with the help of distinctly Lutheran insights: the nearness of God, the justifying peace of the cross, the mysterious hiddenness and presence of God in the Sacraments, and the divine purpose found in vocation (231).

The authors see the loss of influence that the church endured as it lived in an illusion created by a theology of glory as preparing the church for a new era when a theology of the cross prevails and leads into that new reformation that they long for. Of course, not every pastor, preacher, and theologian has received this memo. The "health and wealth" prosperity gospel still prevails in too many prominent churches. Still, there is the prospect that the church can embrace a theology of the cross with all that embrace entails. The insights of Lutheran theology can speak to the many and various individuals who have been misled by the prevailing ideologies of our day. The challenge from the Lutheran side of that encounter is to present the Gospel in all its fullness as the Holy Spirit prepares hearts and minds to receive it.

According to Veith and Sutton, there are 70 million or more Lutherans in the world today. There are over seven million Lutherans in America between the membership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and other Lutheran church bodies. Over three million of those Lutherans are confessional Lutherans, meaning that they subscribe to the Book of Concord as teaching what the Scriptures teach. How can three million Lutherans influence 343 million Americans? The only way is with the sure and certain confidence that the Gospel is the good news for everyone regardless of race, current beliefs, economic status, or any other factor that influences beliefs. Veith and Sutton have given us an outline of Lutheran beliefs and how they are ripe for bringing to our time and place in North America. Will the Lutheran Church take up this challenge? Veith and Sutton present not only this challenge but reasons for believing that Lutheranism offers a Christianity of Christianities that is up to this challenge.

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Notes

1. Michael Graham, "The Six Way Fracturing of Evangelicalism," *Mere Orthodoxy*, https://mereorthodoxy.com/six-way-fracturing-evangelicalism/

2. Skyler R. Flowers and Michael Graham, "A Splintered Generation," *Christianity Today* (May/June 2025): https://www.christianitytoday.com/2025/05/splintered-generation-fractured-evangelicals-graham-flowers/

Book Redux

Toby Ord. *The Precipice: Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity* (New York: Hatchet Books, 2020), x + 470 pp. $21.99

Reviewed by Nils I. Borquist

Toby Ord ultimately presents the argument that humans need to prepare for the dangers associated with potentially catastrophic existential threats. According to Ord, humanity precariously sits at the precipice of existential devastation where multiple known possibilities, and presumably just as many unknown ones, appear to possess the capability to cause tremendous damage. In order to build a defense, Ord believes that international human populations and the governments connected therewith should be vigilant and construct as many contingency plans as are possible to counter the threats that could lead to the near or even absolute extinction of both humanity and possibly all of the world's living organisms. While Ord's concerns certainly warrant consideration, the admirable notion of being attentive to perils often gives way to an undercurrent of fear and helplessness in the face of risks from cosmic phenomena down to microscopic entities as well as a possible overlooking of attainable contentment today.

Ord claims that the greatest overall challenge of the present generation, a challenge that will continue in perpetuity, comes from the difficulty of keeping humans protected so they can continue to progress in productive ways. Humans face several threats, however, with humans themselves serving as the greatest danger to continued survival due to a multitude of harmful and reckless actions and even the problem of inaction pertaining to problem solving and dealing with foreseeable potential issues. Such avoidance shows a possible lack of concern for current and future populations, especially when people possess the capabilities to heighten optimal conditions while simultaneously producing immense damage.

The rapid development of innovation that marks humanity's growth in power and knowledge over several millennia gets encapsulated in four separate periods: the Agricultural Revolution brought about the further development of communities in conjunction with widespread farming and economic growth; the Scientific Revolution delivered technological advancements due to mathematical understanding and application; the Industrial Revolution witnessed humans beginning to create

machines to assist in utilizing the Earth's energy resources; and the Nuclear Revolution arrived with unprecedented harnessing of enormous power. With these productive and largely positive leaps in human development, including morality and ethics as well as philanthropic pursuits, came the increasing ability to harm one another and the planet, which finally culminated in the construction of weapons of mass destruction that Ord believes exist as quite possibly the most pressing danger to continued global life.

Ord provides a detailed set of pressing risks, from those possibly approaching from beyond Earth to those emerging from microscopic environments. Ord's first list contains what he deems natural risks: asteroids, comets, exploding stars, another Ice Age, and pandemics. While he deems such threats statistically unlikely, the potential for immense global devastation from a natural risk demands human attention. The second set of risks, anthropogenic, includes nuclear war, artificial or manmade diseases, climate change catalysts, and overall environmental damage. Ord believes this set to contain the likeliest threats to humanity while simultaneously being the most controllable and, therefore, the most avoidable. Ord's final category lists future risks, which contains pandemics from biological labs, dystopias, and artificial intelligence concerns. For Ord, artificial intelligence's eventual capability to completely transform global economic networks, overtake control of city infrastructures, and manipulate humans into subservient roles, comes as a particularly prominent existential threat.

Considering the dire subject matter, the thread of pessimism understandably runs throughout the pages of Ord's book. The looming presence of cataclysmic events persists in an age of constant media coverage highlighting the worst of human acts and ideologies. In a form of paralysis by analysis, Ord claims that such warnings go largely ignored by substantial numbers of people, hubristically dismissed as a problem for tomorrow. However, Ord declares the dangers of overlooking not only extinction-level possibilities but those that may result in catastrophic losses to cultural heritage and the chance of continued international community development.

When assessing the threats delivered by Ord, one cannot help but feel somewhat overwhelmed. Certainly, nothing he presents seems utterly ridiculous nor overly farfetched. While some risks appear remote in possibility or are not fully understood, others should force immediate consideration, such as lab-made diseases and the possible effects of artificial intelligence. The latter definitely deserves focus. In the six years since Ord published *The Precipice*, the impact derived from advancements in A.I. capabilities in conjunction with the authority granted to such systems has given greater salience to his argument regarding the wide spectrum of potential benefits as well as potential for harm to the sustaining of life.

Even as people become more aware of the common beliefs, interests, and reasons to care about civilization on a global scale, a side effect emerges wherein people do not necessarily care less for others based on spatial relations but instead based on temporal relations. Essentially, a lack of concern for future generations comes easily simply because those people do not exist—for Ord, this negligence displays a moral decay of sorts, one wherein both past and future generations get abandoned for the sake of the present day's blissful ignorance and indulgences.

A valuable question emerges from Ord's text: can humans avoid risks entirely or even substantially? Those with a more optimistic outlook believe that with enough effort and investment into prevention, humans can significantly mitigate threats; however, others maintain that the answer was, is, and will remain a "no." Fortunately, though, minimizing certain threats through identification and commonsensical defensive strategies is possible and can bring the greatest potential for continuation of the human species and for most life on the planet.

One specific tactic Ord offers involves avoiding spreading out defenses or aiming at multiple risks simultaneously and instead targeting a single risk to resolve, beginning with the closest risk, the one deemed most likely to occur that also lies within humans' purview to alter or eliminate. Once that issue gets addressed, risk managers repeat the procedure to tackle a second concern as effectively as possible, and then the process continues in this manner. While this seems efficient, neglecting the multitude of problems to deal with one may result in manageable issues growing to levels of unmanageability.

Ord eventually provides a three-phase approach as a "grand strategy" (189) for the continuation of humanity. The first phase comes with attaining a stage of existential comfort or safety through preservation and protection of humanity, the second phase involves substantial reflection on long-term goals for humanity, and the third phase occurs when humanity reaches its full potential. Ord's strategies certainly aim for the overall safety of humankind and for the world at large, but such a plan likely extends into perpetuity with the cycle of achieving goals before reassessing and reestablishing new goals. Additionally, determining who is allowed to or expected to establish the markers for such potential remains undecided.

Fortunately, Ord recognizes possible pitfalls with his plan. The first considers problematic global alliances wherein imbalanced laws, rules, and biased safeguarding get instituted. Proper planning and restrictions could help with avoiding this challenge. A second concern comes via technological issues, be they those involving artificial intelligence as well as those with less nefarious undertones, such as a lack of effective progress. A third challenge points to misguided research leading scholars and scientists to unforeseen negative consequences. While research into

dubious methods definitely exists, sometimes even the most well-meaning studies produce the most damaging outcomes.

An ultimate solution Ord puts forth pertains to eventual migration altogether from the planet. Even with a one hundred percent success rate of safety measures for the foreseeable future, the Earth will be annihilated in a few billion years. As such, investing in galactic travel and research into living conditions in space for humans and other species must be undertaken. The research alone will require almost unfathomable amounts of money and time, and the inherent dangers appear nearly insurmountable, at least in the present. Perhaps, though, Ord and others who believe this to be the undeniable hope for the long-term survival of humans will prove correct. More so, perhaps such worries and such plans simply delay the inevitable.

An alternative outlook involves accepting the fact that the human species, like every other, emerges, progresses, thrives, deteriorates, then dies, thus allowing the next species to spring forth and prosper. Ord appears quite concerned with known existential risks, a feeling that is understandable. However, a singular focus on that which could destroy Earth often also means a lack of focus on those things that are beautiful, valuable, and fulfilling. Preparation to save humanity later should not come with a neglect of humanity now, yet the text's argument appears to produce such a tradeoff. With that mindset, a preoccupation on the question of potential risks might result in a life already in a state of non-existence, devoid of connections and care.

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