Transhumanism-Christianity Diplomacy:
To Transform Science-Religion Relations

David C Winyard Sr.

Ph.D., Virginia Tech, Science & Technology Studies (STS), 2016

Mount Vernon Nazarene University (MVNU), Chair, Engineering Department

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Abstract

Progress in science and technology raises the possibility that essential elements of human life could be transformed and enhanced by applications of science and technology. Transhumanism is a philosophical and social movement that believes that such transformations are both possible and desirable.

In several respects, transhumanism's goals overlap with the hopes of Christians, who long for a Second Coming of Christ and the subsequent elimination of sin, suffering, and death for all eternity. Based on Bruno Latour's work, I analyze the superficial similarities between transhumanism and Christianity to argue that diplomacy between Christians and transhumanists is both possible and potentially beneficial.

In developing this argument, I examine a new Christian Transhumanist Association, its leaders, and their diplomatic strategy of "theological minimalism." I argue that this strategy is flawed because it does not apply the rich insights of orthodox, biblical theology to the most vexing problem of transhumanism development: the threat that an artificial superintelligence could be hostile to human life.

My Journey:

- Engineering co-op to retirement, 1975-2012.
- Virginia Tech STS interests, 1991 & 2010+.
- MVNU Engineering, 2014-2018?.
- Transhumanism presentations, ASA 2013-2015.
- Dissertation defense, October 2016.

ASA 2017: The Results!

The Question:

- The "5 – 5 – 5" challenge – making sense of:
  - Five convergent fields of S&T – *transhumanism*.
  - Five transhumanist views of spirituality.
  - Five Christian views of culture, including S&T.
- Solution: Bruno Latour's *Modes of Existence*:
  - Category mistakes highlight different modes.
  - Transhumanists and Christians have superficially similar conceptions of God and human destiny.

Can/should Christians engage with transhumanism?

What is Transhumanism?

- A philosophical and social movement that seeks fundamental transformations of human life through science and technology.

- Transhumanism anticipates a convergence in this century of five "technosciences":
  - Biotechnology
  - Nanotechnology
  - Information & Communication Technology
  - Neuroscience
  - Robotics

Transhumanism & Spirituality

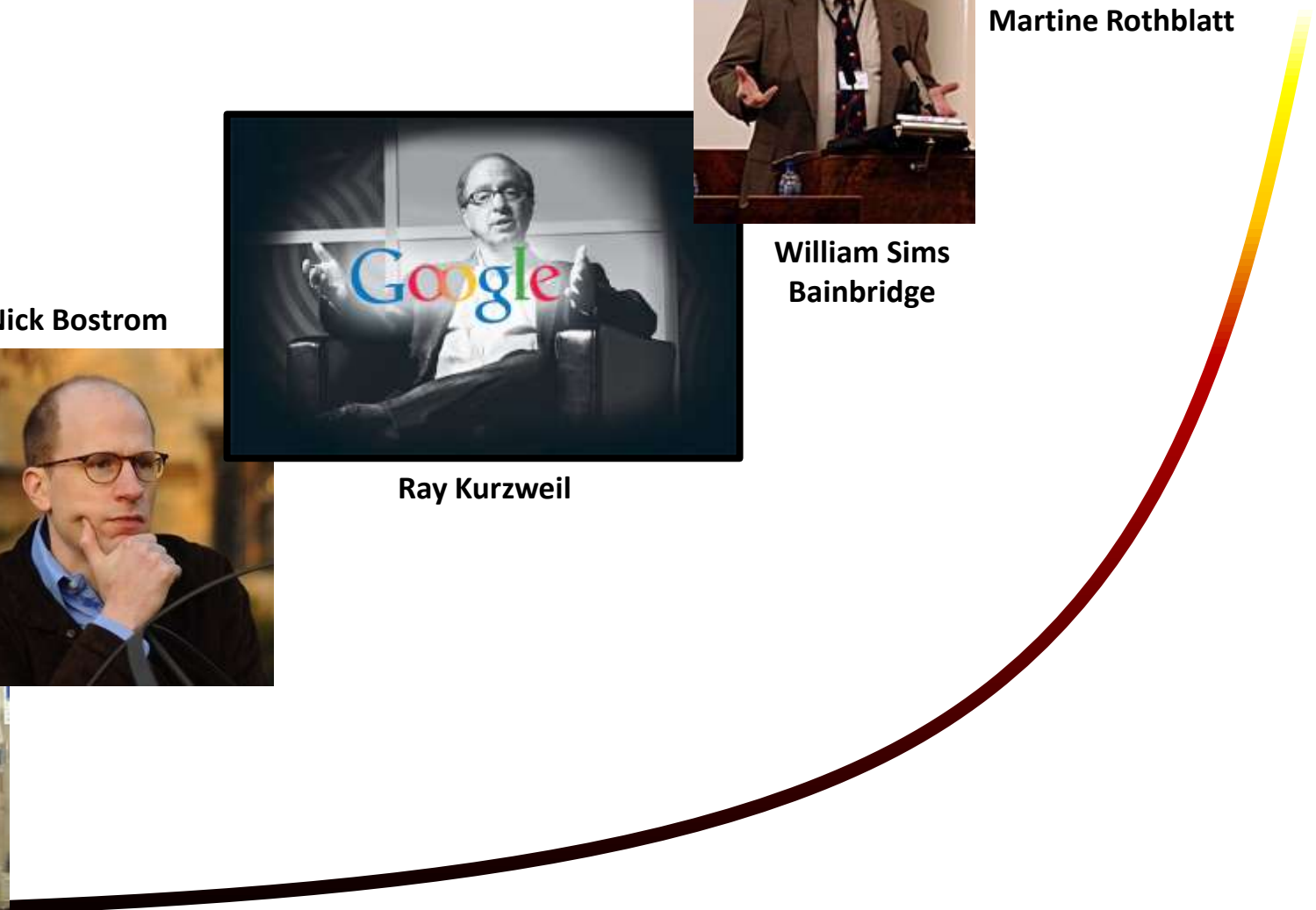Martine Rothblatt
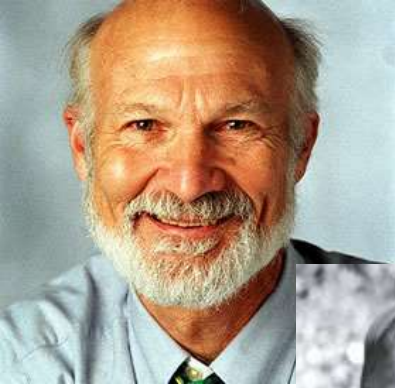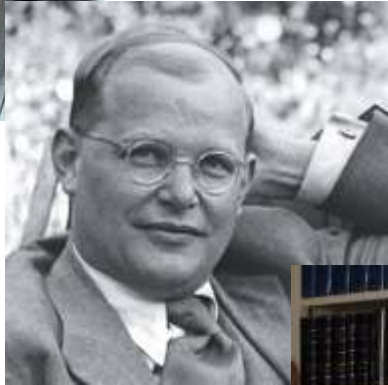
William Sims Bainbridge

Ray Kurzweil

Nick Bostrom

Max More

Christianity & Postmodernity

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Stanley Hauerwas

N.T. Wright

John Milbank

Harvey Cox

CHRIST & CULTURE

H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

As members of the Christian Transhumanist Association:

1. **We believe that God's mission involves the transformation and renewal of creation**, including humanity, and that we are called by Christ to participate in that mission: working against illness, hunger, oppression, injustice, and death.

2. **We seek growth and progress along every dimension of our humanity**: spiritual, physical, emotional, mental—and at all levels: individual, community, society, world.

3. **We recognize science and technology as tangible expressions of our God-given impulse to explore and discover**, and as a natural outgrowth of being created in the image of God.

4. **We are guided by Jesus' greatest commands** to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength…and love your neighbor as yourself."

5. **We believe that the intentional use of technology, coupled with following Christ, will empower us to become more human** across the scope of what it means to be creatures in the image of God.

In this way we are Christian Transhumanists.

Techno-Theology Syncretism?

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Bill Gates says we SHOULD fear a robot uprising: Microsoft co-founder says he 'agrees with Elon Musk' on dangers of AI
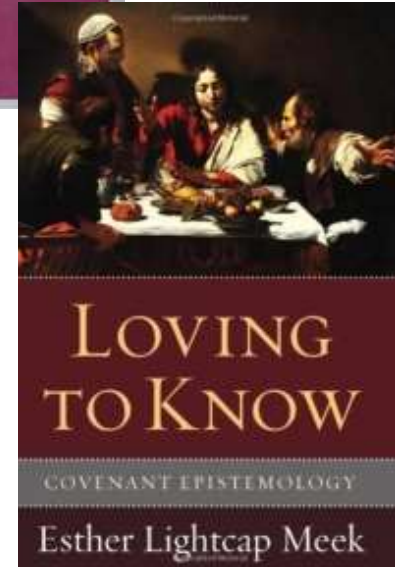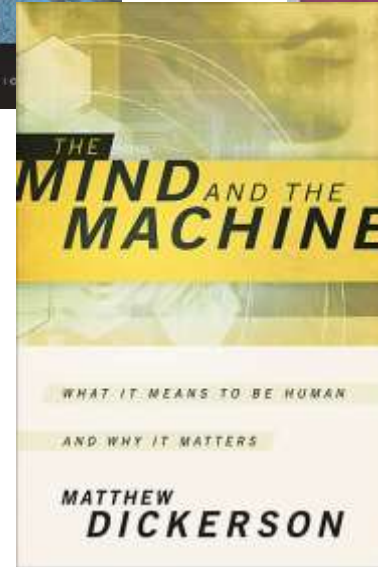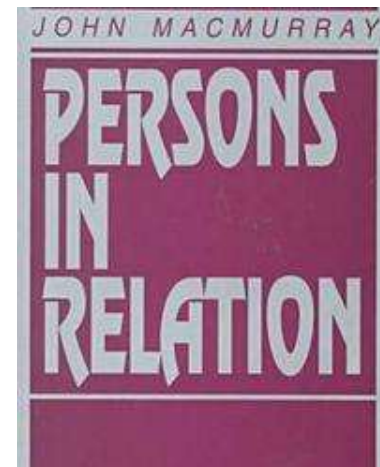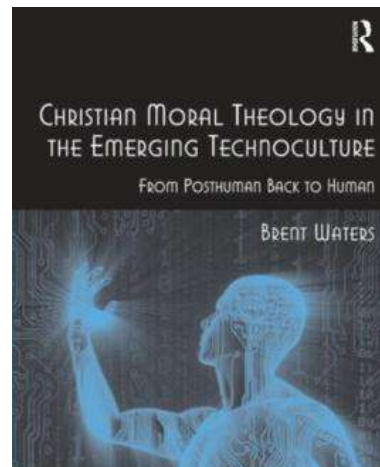
- Bill Gates has joined Elon Musk and Stephen Hawking in warning that AI poses a threat to humanity
- In an AMA on Reddit he said he is 'concerned about super intelligence'
- And he said he doesn't understand why some people are not concerned
- He also revealed Microsoft was working on a virtual 'Personal Agent'
- And he said if Microsoft hadn't worked, he would have gone into AI

By JONATHAN O'CALLAGHAN FOR MAILONLINE

Christianity & Artificial Intelligence

CHRISTIAN MORAL THEOLOGY IN THE EMERGING TECHNOCULTURE
FROM POSTHUMAN BACK TO HUMAN
BRENT WATERS
SCIENCE AND RELIGION

JOHN MACMURRAY
PERSONS IN RELATION

The Presence of the **KINGDOM**
"IF WE LET OURSELVES DRIFT ALONG THE STREAM OF HISTORY, WITHOUT KNOWING IT, WE SHALL HAVE CHO-SEN THE POWER OF SUICIDE, WHICH IS AT THE HEART OF THE WORLD... IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE WORLD, IT IS ACTUALLY NECESSARY THAT A GENUINE REVOLUTION SHOULD TAKE PLACE."
JACQUES ELLUL

THE **MIND** AND THE **MACHINE**
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN
AND WHY IT MATTERS
MATTHEW DICKERSON

LOVING TO KNOW
COVENANT EPISTEMOLOGY
Esther Lightcap Meek

Superintelligence issues have been studied by Christians for millennia (e.g., creator-creature relationships).

Conclusions

- Transhumanism and Christianity *appear* to be competing worldviews on a collision course.

- In fact, some Christians view transhumanism as a means to bring about the eschaton.

- The Christian Transhumanist Association has a strategy of "theological minimalism," but…

- Christian theology offers tools to resolve the threats of artificial superintelligence.

Dissertation available at:

https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/73484