

Letters

beliefs, let alone an existential one. Chapter 3 (titled “Transhumanism, the Posthuman, and the Religions: Exploring Basic Concepts”) is only 24 pages long; five pages offer definitions of transhumanism and posthumanism, and the last page lists discussion questions. So, the authors attempt to characterize the world’s major monotheistic and karmic religions *in only 18 pages*. In-depth doctrinal arguments are needed, but they offer only thin and disappointing caricatures of belief systems that are held dear by most of the human race. Religion scholars may find this interesting, even compelling, but it will leave true believers cold.

Leaving undone the hard work of defining criteria by which the faithful in one tradition or another would judge technological enhancements, Mercer and Trothen speculate about the future using an ill-conceived conservative-to-liberal continuum. Where depth is needed, tautologies take center stage. In effect, they make the simplistic argument that some people will resist enhancement technologies because unspecified religious or political convictions make them resistant.

Religion and the Technological Future offers an intriguing view of the future, but it assumes that technoscientific progress will come with an oppressive loss of control. Yes, heartfelt faith traditions will, in one way or another, be changed by emerging technologies, but is it inevitable that believers will face an existential crisis? And if emergent technologies actually threaten what people truly value, will they not be rejected?

Consider nuclear weapons. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the accelerating arms race cast a dark shadow over civilization. Books and movies such as *Fail-Safe* and *On the Beach* left little room for hope. Then, in 1964, *Dr. Strangelove* flipped the narrative, presenting “The Bomb” as a ridiculous farce. People and societies adapted to the existence of nuclear weapons and moved on with life. Will they not also adapt to whatever the technological future brings?

In this century, advanced robots, computer systems, and who-knows-what will certainly emerge, but God is everlasting, and he promises that believers will have everlasting life. So, let his will be done, *on Earth as it is in heaven*, notwithstanding whatever dark shadows of change may come.

Reviewed by David C. Winyard Sr., Department of Engineering, Grace College and Seminary, Winona Lake, IN 46590. ◀

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Agriculture: An Industrial Paradigm or an Ecological Paradigm

I read with interest Terry Gray’s “Pronuclear Environmentalists: An Introduction to Ecomodernism” (*PSCF* 73, no. 4 [2021]: 195–201) and found the article very informative. Gray advocates for increased intensification of agriculture, arguing that this will free up other land for wild nature. However, the impacts of such intensification will not and cannot remain localized.

I grew up in Iowa, where the native tall grass prairie ecosystem was replaced by one of the most intensively industrial agricultural regions on the planet. Grassland flora and fauna are now among the most at risk on the continent. The deep prairie loam soils have been greatly reduced in depth and become compacted by heavy machinery. Fertility is largely maintained by inputs of fossil-fuel based synthetic fertilizers. Flooding impacts have intensified due to the loss of most of Iowa’s grasslands and wetlands. Water quality due to agricultural use is a major issue in Iowa and throughout the Mississippi River watershed.

Hope lies in the application of techniques (such as in-field prairie strips and wetland restoration) to soften these impacts. But more fundamentally, agriculture needs to move from an industrial paradigm that treats land as just an economic asset to an ecological paradigm which recognizes the land as a gift from the Creator and treated accordingly.

Lynn Braband
ASA member

Called to a God-Centered Garden or City?

Thank you to Lynn Braband for his response to my article (Terry Gray, “Pronuclear Environmentalists: An Introduction to Ecomodernism,” *PSCF* 73, no. 4 [2021]: 195–201). Admittedly, he was responding only to a near peripheral comment, but one that in some ways engages the heart of the article. I sense a “back to the Garden” spirit in his comments and especially in the last sentence. I will not deny the several problems with industrial agriculture that he points to, but the solutions to these are not to return to a de-industrialized agriculture. The productivity of modern agriculture is a necessary development and is fully consistent with a Christian stewardship view of creation which is not a mere preservation of God-created and wild nature. It includes development

and use for the good of humanity and creation and a subduing of Earth.

As I pointed out in my article, there does seem to be an arc from garden to city in the biblical story. The ills highlighted do not mandate a cessation of industrial agriculture, but rather, industrial solutions that correct the problems, such as nitrogen pollution, soil damage, and water management. Like it or not, the planet has already been terra-formed by human activity. Ecomodernists are fond of pointing out that intensification of the human impact in cities and industrial agriculture actually can lead to more “wilding,” restoring once-used agricultural areas to their former pre-agricultural state.

Terry Gray
ASA Fellow

On the Dilemma of Heavenly Freedom and the Historical Adam

In an interesting recent article (“Theodicy and the Historical Adam: Questioning a Central Assumption Motivating Historicist Readings,” *PSCF* 74, no. 1 [2022]: 39–53), Patrick Franklin raised questions about a traditional belief in the Fall by asking six similar questions, which are largely summarized by the first one:

If it is possible for us to be made fully free and yet totally incapable of sinning, as our future glorified state revealed in scripture suggests, then *why did God not create us in this state to begin with?*¹

This is surely an important question, well worthy of our attention. And by repeating a very similar question five more times, Franklin seems to be suggesting that God’s behavior is inexplicable. But perhaps we need to reexamine the premise that led to these seemingly inexplicable expectations. Perhaps scripture does not suggest that it is possible for us to be made “fully free and yet totally incapable of sinning” in the way that Franklin assumes. Indeed, this issue is well known in the theological-philosophical literature, where it has been extensively debated.² For example, James Sennett called it the “dilemma of heavenly freedom.”³

The Dilemma of Heavenly Freedom

From a philosophical point of view, the state of humans being completely sinless seems incompatible with their exercise of free will. Therefore, attempts to solve the dilemma of heavenly freedom generally involve some kind of limitation on being fully free or fully sinless. Of these alternatives, the least satisfactory seems to be a limitation on heavenly sinlessness,

which has been called the “strategy of concession.”⁴ The problem, as Franklin asserts, is that if the glorified redeemed are capable of sinning, “the pattern of fall and redemption could go on infinitely and Christ would have to be crucified and risen repeatedly.”⁵ However, the other alternatives require some limitation on heavenly freedom, which also seems problematical, based on the text quoted by Franklin:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Cor. 3:17)

The inference is that where God’s Spirit is completely revealed, there will be complete freedom. For example, Franklin argues that the capacity to sin limits freedom, and therefore the absence of sin is a *gain* in freedom. And something similar was proposed by Augustine:

Neither are we to suppose that because sin shall have no power to delight them, free will must be withdrawn. It will, on the contrary, be all the more truly free, because set free from delight in sinning to take unfailing delight in not sinning.⁶

Anselm of Canterbury made a similar claim:

I do not think free will is the power to sin or not to sin. Indeed if this were its definition, neither God nor the angels, who are unable to sin, would have free will, which it is impious to say.⁷

But Anselm qualifies this assertion later in his dialogue. Firstly, he recognizes that the free will of God is different from that of angels and of humans, since the former is intrinsic, whereas the latter is given by God. Secondly, he recognizes that the angels “did” have the free will to do evil, because the fallen angels exercised that freedom:

The apostate angel and the first man sinned through free will, because they sinned through a judgment that is so free that it cannot be coerced to sin by anything else.⁸

Anselm’s point is that while Lucifer and Adam had a free choice not to sin, no subsequent person except Jesus had a free choice not to sin. But having *not* sinned with Lucifer, the good angels preserve their free will not to sin for the rest of eternity:

Since the divine free will and that of the good angels cannot sin, to be able to sin does not belong in the definition of free will.⁹

In subsequent philosophical thinking, this affirmation has been called compatibilism.¹⁰ It avoids the dilemma of heavenly freedom by claiming that this free will is “deterministic,” as opposed to what most people think of free will, which is “libertarian”