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AI, Our New Salvation

In a way, we're all very similar. Despite our differences, we're all insatiably curious. We can't escape it, it's part of who we are. We've been asking the big questions since the dawn of history; where do we come from and where are we heading? The importance is obvious. Our answer to our origin shapes our concepts of who we are, and our answer to our destiny gives the goals we live for. Taken together, our responses to these questions help frame our worldview, the narrative that gives our lives meaning.

So what does the future hold?

There has been a recent upsurge in the belief that the future of humanity lies somewhere with AI. The growing interest in developments of artificial intelligence (AI) is particularly focused on the attempt to build computer technology that can do, and even exceed, the kind of things a human mind can do - in short, people are getting keen on the idea of producing an *imitation mind*. Billions are being invested in the development of AI. The most powerful AI systems are known as artificial general intelligence (AGI). Some believe AGIs will soon surpass human intelligence so that in the future, it won't be the mind of humans, but the minds of "machines", that will most fully understand the cosmos and the world around us.

What is AI?

Before we get onto AI, think about robots. The word robot is derived from the Czech word "robota", meaning "forced worker". A robot is a machine designed and programmed to fulfil a task that would normally require a human. The term AI was defined by John McCarthy who said, "*AI is the science and engineering of making intelligent machines.*" Classical machines cannot question, sense and assimilate new information intelligently as they go and come up with creative new solutions. Robots follow their pre-programmed patterns, whereas AIs are a revolutionary step beyond this - they create new patterns, even new ideas.

Part of giving machines "intelligence" is building them with the ability to learn things, and key to the current learning process of machines (such as 'machine learning' or 'deep learning') is the idea of an algorithm. An algorithm is a "*precisely defined set of mathematical or logical operations for the performance of a particular task.*" It's not really a new idea, the concept can be traced to ancient Babylonia in 1800-1600 BC. Eminent computer scientist Donald Knuth of Stanford University published some of these early algorithms and concluded, "*The calculations described in Babylonian tablets are not merely the solutions to specific individual problems; they are actually general procedures for solving a whole class of problems.*" And that is the key feature of an algorithm: once you know how something works, you can solve not only one problem but a whole class of problems.

In a typical contemporary AI system, the relevant algorithms are embedded in computer software that sorts, filters, and selects various pieces of data that are presented to it. In general terms, such a system can use training data to “learn” to recognise, identify, and interpret digital patterns such as images, sound, speech, text, or other data. In short, a machine learning system takes in information about the past and makes decisions or predictions when it is presented with new information. In a lot of early work in AI, humans explicitly devised an algorithm to solve a particular problem. But in more recent AI, they have gone one step ahead: Instead, they devise a *general learning* algorithm, which then “learns” a solution to a problem on its own.

Of course, a general learning algorithm has nothing close to the full capacities of human intelligence. Professor Crookes stresses the need for realism when it comes to AI:

“We are still a long, long way from creating real human-like intelligence. People have been fooled by the impact of data-driven computing into thinking that we are approaching the level of human intelligence. But we are nowhere near it... I see two fundamental problems yet to be cracked: (1) Even if we follow the rules of human reasoning, how do we abstract from a physical situation to a more abstract formulation so that we can apply the general rules of reasoning? (2) How can a computer build up and hold an internal mental model of the real world? Think of how a blind person visualises the world and reasons about it. Humans have the general-purpose ability to visualise things and to reason about scenarios of objects and processes that exist only in our minds. This general-purpose capability, which all humans have, is phenomenal; it is a key requirement for real intelligence, but it is fundamentally lacking in AI systems.”

Despite the speculation, for many, the development of AI still remains the future evolution of humanity. The eventual development of a new species, a fusion of two “species”, humans and AI, biological life with technology. The inventor and futurist Ray Kurzweil believes that within the foreseeable future, AI empowered robots will overtake humans in their intelligence and capabilities. He postulates that the human species, along with the computational technology it creates, will be able to solve age-old problems, changing the nature of mortality in a postbiological future, eliminating ageing and dramatically enhancing our physical and psychological capabilities.

Beyond human or inhuman?

This quest to *enhance humans* is what is often called the **transhumanism project**.

It is this kind of transhumanist prediction that makes some people anxious at the possibility that robots will, perhaps sooner than we might imagine, become more intelligent than us. There are great fears they will replace us in many jobs or even worse, eventually rebel against us and destroy us as inferiors of no further value. Elon Musk says with AI we are “summoning the demon.” Stephen Hawking warned, *“I fear the consequences of creating something that can match or surpass humans. Humans, who are limited by slow biological evolution, couldn’t compete and would be superseded... A super-intelligent AI will be extremely good at accomplishing its goals, and if those goals aren’t aligned with ours we’re in trouble.”* Others, however, such as Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg are more relaxed and take the view that all such developments are to be welcomed as they have already led to obvious benefits, thus building a world that is better for all.

On top of this, there are those who think this is all just “talk”. Some neuroscientists such as Jean Mariani and Daniele Trietsch are very sceptical: *“let’s face it, all of this is pure fantasy... All of the predictions trumpeted by the transhumanists are at the very least, false... Many have suggested that human intelligence may soon be outstripped by artificial intelligence. But this fear betrays a deep misunderstanding of what human intelligence really is.”*

Opinion, therefore, is deeply divided. In any case, we must ask what these developments might mean for what we might become. In this connection the quest for *AGI* needs to be distinguished from the parallel quest to *upgrade human beings*:

- The objective of AGI is decoupling intelligence from biology and constructing *artificial intelligence* based on some other substrate like silicon. When people talk of making artificial intelligence, they generally mean construction from inorganic materials.
- Upgrading humanity, on the other hand, means starting with human life and modifying/enhancing it organically and/or adding technology to it so that what is eventually produced is therefore only partly artificial.

Both 'AGI' and 'upgrading humanity' are aimed at producing a superhuman superintelligence. Whether they will ever do so is another matter entirely. One of the dangers of introducing speculative scenarios in which humans are gradually merged with technology is that the impression is given that mass implementation of human-level AI is just around the corner. **It's not.** Yann LeCun, Chief AI scientist says: "*Whether we'll be able to use new methods to create human-level intelligence, well, there's probably another 50 mountains to climb, including ones we can't see yet. We've only climbed the first mountain. Maybe the second.*" We therefore need to carefully separate reality from fantasy and get our feet back onto the ground by thinking some more about narrow AI and what it has actually achieved (Narrow AI is a term used to describe artificial intelligence systems that are designed to handle a specified and limited task).

Of course, experience tells us that most technological developments will probably have an upside and a downside. A knife can be used for surgery or as a murder weapon, a car can be used to take you to work or as a getaway vehicle after a crime and it is the same with AI. Narrow AI is already proving to add value, for example, assistants like Siri and Alexa. If we consider medicine, AI can be used in the development of new drugs, the automation of medical treatments such as remote robotic operations and as an aid to increase the efficiency of healthcare. We are also told that autonomous vehicles will supposedly make the roads safer by having AI systems that make faster and better decisions than human drivers. Other benefits to narrow AI can be seen in the development of language translators; advertising, by suggesting what you see advertised based on your online activity; industry, within the planning and decision-making stages...

But perhaps the future is not so bright after all. Consider job recruitment and the threat of job losses by developing AI. Surveillance capitalism is a big risk. One of the big fears is whether "big data" will lead to Big Brother. Once big data systems know me better than I know myself, the authority will shift from humans to algorithms and big data could then empower Big Brother. We have already seen that the harvesting of data has become immensely profitable for business, and this has had subtle and often hidden ramifications for the rest of us. We see on the rise a new kind of economic order that collects the reams of data about us and exploits it as a raw material for the purpose of making money in ways that are less than obvious to most of us. These activities will intensify the risk of this kind of surveillance society and the two together will threaten the stability and freedoms that are currently enjoyed in at least some parts of the world. Surveillance communism is something we are seeing already as China is already using AI to strengthen its control of society.

Surveillance at the levels intended brings with it immense power. Unsurprisingly, there is a great deal of literature that addresses the question of whether eventual world domination will be won by those who develop AGI, or even by an AGI system itself. Apart from this, just imagine military use of AI such as autonomous weapons. If these fell into the wrong hands, who could stop them? Overall, it's pretty clear the potential future of AI may come with both great benefits and terrifying threats.

Upgrading humans

It is said that AI began with an ancient wish to forge the gods. From ancient times, the practice of medicine has been devoted to caring for the sick. Yet in relatively recent times, a new direction has emerged – medicine that is devoted to enhancing the healthy. That is, medicine is no longer simply a matter of healthcare but of life enhancement geared to make people fitter, more beautiful, more intelligent, less disease-prone, and less likely to die young, or maybe not at all. Historian Yuval Harari thinks that physical death has been reduced to a mere technical problem that is ready for a solution from medical science. In other words, he thinks that within the not too distant future, although we may die, we shall not have to die. A “cure” for death will be found. As if death were a disease – but is it?

Many people are fascinated by Yuval Harari’s notions, which he couches in explicitly atheistic terms, a worldview conviction that forms the background to his and many others’ thinking about the future. *“Humans don’t die... because God deemed it, or because mortality is an essential part of some great cosmic plan. Humans always die due to some technical glitch... Every technical problem has a technical solution. We don’t need to wait for the Second Coming in order to overcome death.”* Of course, this is all pure assertion without evidence and raises the question of whether Harari really expects us to be so naive as to accept it on the basis of his authority.

Yet as so many of us desire to avoid death it’s easy to buy into this idea; and in light of this, Harari claims that the first major agenda item in the twenty-first century is going to be a serious bid for human immortality that will be given irresistible momentum by the fear of death ingrained in most humans. That fear is reflected in the decision some wealthy people have made to have themselves frozen after death (cryogenics) in the hope that they can be brought back to life when scientists discover how to reboot a frozen brain. Philosopher Nikolai Fedorov said that humanity could intervene in their own evolution and so direct it towards physical immortality and even resurrection: *“This day will be divine, but not miraculous, for resurrection will be a task not of miracle but of knowledge and common labor.”*

Fedorov and Harari sound similar. Harari goes on to say that to fulfil this desire, *“it will be necessary to change our biochemistry and re-engineer our bodies and minds... Having raised humanity above the beastly level of survival struggles, we will now aim to upgrade humans into gods, and **turn homo-sapiens into Homo-deus.**”* Harari thinks this will happen gradually, starting with our voluntary ceding of control of our lives to the smartphone and over time changing ourselves by re-engineering, drugs, etc, until we are no longer recognisably human. This is the transhumanist project whose visionary aims are summed up by Mark O’Connell. *“It is their belief that we can eradicate ageing as a cause of death; that we can and should use technology to augment our bodies and our minds; that we can and should merge with machines, remaking ourselves, finally, in the image of our higher ideals.”* David Pearce, the co-founder of the World Transhumanist Association, similarly argues that transhumanism involves increasing the capacity for pleasure and the radical extension of life in order to enjoy this pleasure indefinitely. Pearce suggests that over the next thousand years, *“the biological substrates of suffering will be eradicated completely... (and) Post-human states of magical joy will be biologically refined, multiplied and intensified indefinitely.”*

To me, this development sounds like a resurgence of Gnosticism – an ancient heresy that regarded humans as spirits trapped in an evil body from which they need to be liberated – instead, this time around we will do it with technology. Philosopher John Gray suggests that transhumanism is essentially techno-monotheism, the idea that science or technology can somehow deliver us from the sort of questions that have driven some to God – ultimately, questions about mortality.

With all this transhumanist talk, I wonder if the quest to intervene in our own evolution will be innocent? Or like many things could it rather be seen as a quest for mastery and power, as it has been in the past. Nazi Germany imagined they could create a superhuman by what they called “scientific breeding,” which involved the mass murder of people-groups they regarded as disposable as they were mentally or physically “substandard,” “unfit” or “racially impure.” Hitler essentially adopted the idea of “survival of the fittest” and applied it to human beings in a quest for the *Übermensch* (superhuman). That led to the extermination of millions of Jews, Poles, and other “undesirables” in the most depraved violence the world has ever seen. Such a horrific example supports the prediction that the likely outcome of all such attempts to re-engineer humanity “in the image of our higher ideals” will be the extinction of humanity. After all, in this project, he who determines the ideals controls the future of humanity, and by extension our entire planet. If there are any imperfections in these founding ideals, well then maybe we’re done for good.

AGI

Vladimir Putin said *“Artificial intelligence is the future not only for Russia but for all mankind. It comes with colossal opportunities, but also threats are difficult to predict. Whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world.”* Environmental expert James Lovelock suggests in a provocative way, that humans may have had their time and should make way for something new. Physicist and cosmologist Max Tegmark made this rather grandiose statement: *“In creating AI, we’re birthing a new form of life with unlimited potential for good or ill.”* How much science lies behind the statement is another matter since, to date, all AI and machine learning algorithms are, to quote the neat phrase Rosalind Picard: *“no more alive than Microsoft Word.”*

It would, however, make more sense to compare AI with nuclear energy. Research into nuclear energy led to nuclear power stations, but it also led to a nuclear arms race that almost led (and maybe will) the world to the brink of extinction. AI creates problems of similar or even greater magnitude. The question of whether scientists simply follow mathematics and physics without regard to the consequences of what they are developing or whether they should have moral qualms about it is vital.

There is also the question of what worldview is driving all of this? What assumptions are being made? Are they really in the interest of us all or simply of an elite few who wish to dominate for their own purposes? There is nothing more irresistible than our own will. The answers given to these questions will depend on the worldview of the participants in AI research and application.

As you would expect, the predominant worldview in this project is that of atheism. The theoretical physicist Sean Carroll has said *“we humans are blobs of organized mud, which through the impersonal workings of nature’s patterns have developed the capacity to contemplate and cherish and engage with the intimidating complexity of the world around us.”* Such reductionist physicalism holds that our cognitive abilities have emerged naturally from the biosphere (which I highly and reasonably doubt) and therefore sees no reason why the same kind of thing can’t happen again. Nick Bostrom said, *“blind evolutionary processes can produce human-level general intelligence... so genetic programs designed and guided by an intelligent human programmer should be able to achieve a similar outcome with far greater efficiency.”*

What I struggle with here is the impression that the human mind is no more than a computer. It is one thing to say that the brain functions in certain ways like a computer, but it is entirely different to claim it is nothing but a computer. *Simulation is not duplication.* We must not mistake a computer simulation for the real thing. After all, no one would mistake a computer simulation of the weather for the weather.

Distinguished Oxford mathematician Roger Penrose goes even further in arguing that the brain must be more than a computer since it can do things no computer can even do in theory. Software architect Brendan Dixon said, *“Computers do not play games like humans play games... Computers, at their most fundamental level, do not even solve computational problems like humans solve computational problems.”* Roger Epstein said that *“computers operate on symbolic representations of the world. They store and retrieve. They process. They really are guided in everything they do, without exception, by algorithms. Humans, on the other hand, do not – never did, never will. Given this reality, why do so many scientists talk about our mental life as if we were computers?”*

So one of the vast differences between computers and the human mind is that a computer is not a conscious entity. As AI expert Margaret Boden writes: *“Computers don’t have goals of their own. The fact that a computer is following any goals at all can always be explained with reference to the goals of some human agent... An AI program’s ‘goals,’ ‘priorities’ and ‘values’ don’t matter to the system... It makes no sense to imagine that future AI might have needs. They don’t need sociality or respect in order to work well. A program either works, or it doesn’t. For needs are intrinsic to, and their satisfaction is necessary for, autonomously existing systems – that is, living organisms.”* The hype in this area is intensified by the fact that terms like “neural networks,” “deep learning,” and “machine learning” seem to imply the presence of human-like intelligence when these terms essentially refer to statistical methods used to extract probable patterns from huge datasets.

The human brain is not a warm, wet nanotech computer.

AI and ethics

It’s dangerous for us to get carried away by the idea that “if it can be done, it should be done” without carefully thinking through potential ethical problems. I think it’s pretty obvious that some very smart ethics need to be developed to cope with the increasing potential threats involved in developing AGIs and upgrading humanity before it’s too late. For example, general ethical concerns regarding AI have led to the formulation of the so-called *Asilomar AI principles*, developed at a conference in Asilomar, California, in 2017, which have been subscribed to by more than 1000 AI research workers. The main thrust to these principles is to ensure that research in AI is ethically structured in such a way that the resultant systems are safe, secure and designed in alignment with commonly held human values so that they lead to the flourishing of as many people as possible. Much of the issue with this type of thinking is that commonly held human values can change, and society is deeply divided over what “flourishing” looks like.

The question then is how can we ensure that such a superintelligence will safeguard human interest and not threaten human existence? Putting this another way, we might ask **what worldview will a superintelligence or AGI have?** This is an important question since that worldview will have to be embedded by the human constructors and software programmers. What might that worldview be and on what values will it be based?

But long before we get to AGI or superintelligence, if we ever do, it is worth noting the all too human irony of seeming to want as much choice as possible yet abdicating and delegating our choice to machines that are usually programmed by others and therefore embody their decisions and biases. Philosopher J. Budziszewski of the University of Texas has something to say on this:

“To abolish and remake human nature is to play God... You say you want man to be to himself what God has been to us. But what God has been to man is man’s absolute superior, and man cannot be his own superior. A thing can be equal to itself, but it cannot be greater than itself. So (what you really mean) is that you want some men to be the absolute superior to others. I assume that you want to be in the former group and not in the latter... You say you want to change the human design.

But in that case there must be two groups: Those who cause the change, and those who result from it. And the former holds all the cards."

Human morality has been *classically* defined in terms of obedience or disobedience to divine ideals. The Biblical book of Genesis suggests that ethics is not relativistic, as many claim, but rather it was transcendent in its origin. Human value is likewise founded in divine nature. When it comes to the ultimate value of a human, our approach will greatly vary according to whether we believe that human life has transcendent value through being "made in the image of God", or whether we think it is just sophisticated mud, agreeing with Richard Dawkins when he says that we live in a world in which there is no justice, "*no purpose, no good or evil, just blind pitiless indifference,*" a world in which "*DNA just is and we dance to its music.*" At this level, ethics turns out to be worldview-dependent. Which worldview do you think will be behind AI, one that inherently respects the value of humanity or one of blind, pitiless indifference? That's where the fear lies.

However, we should not let scary scenarios distract us from the fact that they are mostly speculation. Nor should we let them make us forget to be thankful for good technological progress. I am deeply thankful for developments that bring hope to people in a damaged world who would otherwise have none - giving hearing to the deaf, sight to the impaired, limbs to the limbless and eradicating killer diseases. We benefit from a host of other magnificent technological innovations that reflect the spirit of a Creator who has made humans in His image, able to be creative in like manner. Fear of AGI should not prevent believers from making contributions to the positive aspects of narrow AI to the benefit of all.

Superintelligence already exists

Do you see the irony in all of this? We are earnestly seeking to make a superintelligence, to become godlike, but fail to acknowledge that a superintelligence already exists.

The beginning of John's Gospel echoes the opening words of Genesis with the majestic statement that "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him.*" The statement will be familiar to Christians but it may not be familiar to everyone, and, in any case, many may not have grasped its profound implications. The ancient Greek Stoic philosophers who predated the writer John used the term "Word" (Logos, in Greek) to express the rational organising principle that is the foundation of the natural world. John elevates the term even higher, using it to describe God himself as the rational Creator who is responsible for the existence of the universe and all it contains. This is a profound assertion about existence, "*In the beginning was the Word*" - that is, that Word already was. The Word exists eternally. John goes on to say "*All things were made through him.*" The universe, however, is not eternal. In other words, it was not the universe that produced intelligence; it was the intelligence of God, the Word, that produced the universe.

These statements about the Word correspond to the account in the first chapters of Genesis which tells us that creation occurs in a series of speech acts by an intelligent God, "*And God said, let there be... and so it was.*" Do you see the irony here? Those who are seeking to create a superintelligence do not realise that there is good evidence that a superintelligence, The Superintelligence, already exists: God. For example, science now considers the natural world to consist of information at its root, although information is not physical. It is therefore surely fair to argue that the information aspect of the universe, life, and consciousness ultimately point to, and are consistent with, the existence of a non-physical source for these things - the Mind of God. Data without conscious intent is just noise, not information. According to the account of Genesis 1, you do not get from inorganic to organic without an external input of information from the creator "And God said...." You do not, in

spite of what naturalism asserts, get from animals to humans without an external input of information, "And God said..."

We are told that the source of life is the breath of God, a divine intervention, apparently distinct from material creation. This raises the question: Will humans ever be able, analogously, to breathe the breath of life into any material artefact that they have constructed? For example, suppose one day we build a human body, chemically, molecule by molecule, so that it lay before us on a table. Could we now give it its own life? If not, why not? What exactly is life? How does consciousness connect to the body? We don't really know. Although much research has been done on the neural correlates of consciousness – the way in which parts of the brain "light up" when we are doing a particularly conscious activity – no one knows what consciousness really is. AI has made considerable progress in image "recognition," but this tends to be sophisticated pattern-matching and *does not* give rise in any sense to the kind of awareness that would imply conscious mental recognition.

Understanding the relationship between the conscious mind and the body is acknowledged by all to be incredibly difficult. The Hebrew word *nephesh* used in Genesis is variously translated as "soul," "person", or "self." But what is it more precisely? Distinguished philosophers Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, and J.P. Moreland argue that we shall make no real progress in understanding until we are prepared to recognise that there is a non-physical aspect of human beings, a soul. Even philosopher David Chalmers, who specialises in this area, though he is strongly inclined to materialism, nevertheless argues: "*Reductive explanation of consciousness is impossible and I even argue for a kind of dualism.*" The case for dualism is strengthened when we take on board the biblical teaching that matter is not primary but derivative. Spirit is primary. Matter does not generate spirit. It is God, who is Spirit, who generates matter.

It is clearly one thing to try to build AI systems that seek to mimic aspects of what the human mind can do: it is an entirely different thing to try to recreate what it feels like to be a human. *Consciousness bars the way.* Human curiosity is inextricably linked with human consciousness, and so the way seems barred to making AI systems that reflect this. People researching AI do not concern themselves with consciousness for the simple reason that their AI systems are allowing them to create simulated intelligence that is not conscious – and that is sufficient for their purpose. For example, if I need surgery, a conscious being and a non-conscious robotic AI system could both do the job and the element of consciousness is irrelevant to fulfil the task.

Genesis tells us that when God created humans in his image, He linked intelligence and consciousness together in one being, for He is himself like that – a conscious intelligent being. However, God, who is Spirit, combines consciousness and intelligence in a non-material being. The fact that God is Spirit shows that neither consciousness nor intelligence necessarily arises from a material substrate – another reason to think that humans will never be able to make a material machine conscious.

But then again, what really is the purpose of creating a conscious material machine? Do we think that through it we will be able to create some sort of utopia? Is that the reason? Utopian thinking has usually led not to a promised paradise on earth but to indescribable violence, war, and the death of millions. As a result, the twentieth century was the bloodiest in history. This is because promises of utopia are inevitably doomed if they are made without any realistic programme for dealing with the sinfulness of human nature and without pointing people to a source of inner power to help them navigate the complexities of life. The fact is that human nature is seriously flawed as a result of the entry of sin and alienation into the world through what is called "the fall". *Visionaries tend to forget that humans need saving much more than they need upgrading.* Utopian visionaries think becoming more powerful will be our salvation, but if humans remain alienated from the divine power capable

of changing us morally we will merely become more capable devils.

The fact is, regardless of what you think, we need saving from our sins, our immoral natures, much more than we need political freedom or upgrading. Programmes of education and technological or medical upgrades will never adequately deal with moral failure because the root of that failure is fundamental alienation from God. Christ offers to deal with that alienation by offering us salvation based on his death on the cross for our sins and on his resurrection. The future: eternal life, but not simply an infinite amount of life but a new infinite quality of life, morally superior to life as we know it, as it's sourced in the eternal definition of goodness, God Himself.

As just mentioned, the momentous event, often called "the fall", happened when we began to think of ourselves as more than an image of God and desired to be god: "you will be like God." That is, to not be homo-sapiens but to be homo-deus. After all, transhumanism really is an attempt at human self-deification.

The quest to upgrade humans, creating superintelligence and godhood, is very ancient and, in its contemporary form - dressed up in the language of advanced computer technology which all sounds very alluring. *Yet at its heart, it delivers a flawed narrative that is out of step with reality.* Superintelligence and godhood are not the end products of the history of human ingenuity. If there is a God who created and upholds the universe and who made us in His image, then a superintelligence, God himself, has always existed. He is not an end product. He is the producer.

The fact is, there appears to be as yet little if any evidence or even consensus of belief that AGI will ever be reached. In contrast, there is a great deal of evidence and a widespread conviction that Jesus Christ is both man and God (Homo + Deus). This is, of course, a staggering claim, but is in fact the central claim of Christianity. The uncertain quest to enable humans to become gods pales into insignificance with the true narrative that flows in the exact opposite direction, the staggering fact that God has already become a man.

Jesus Christ, who simultaneously was the seed of women (truly human) and the Son of God (truly God) is the true Homo Deus, not a combination of human biological life and technology (another human creation), but something in a different category altogether - deity embodied in man, the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Secularists are jumping to the faith that AI will one day eradicate the boundary of death, but the Christian message is that physical death has already been vanquished in the sense that Jesus rose from the dead. His resurrection was not a result of advanced medical technology or biological engineering, but of the direct action of God's divine power. I can well understand a sceptical reader baulking at the very idea of a resurrection, although I find it odd that some who do so seem to have no difficulty in believing that death will one day be overcome by technology. Be that as it may, it is important to acknowledge that Christians make the claim that Jesus rose physically from the dead because it is backed up by strong evidence - both objective in terms of history and subjective in terms of experience.

Yet the resurrection of Christ also has a major implication for us in the present - that we one day share in his resurrected life. This is a vastly bigger thing than a human upgrade involving AI.

The return of God

With Jesus' death and resurrection, God's great project for the redemption of the world took an immense step forward. But this was only really the beginning. In Acts 3, Peter tells how Jesus has gone to the Father in heaven and would remain there until the next great step in God's program -

the restoration that will be triggered by his glorious and powerful return. Sadly, the public face of Christianity has become so watered down that the vibrant central hope of the 'return of Christ' has been all but lost. The warning of C.S. Lewis is ignored: *"Do not attempt to water Christianity down. There must be no pretence that you can have it with the Supernatural left out. So far as I can see Christianity is precisely the one religion from which the miraculous cannot be separated. You must frankly argue for supernaturalism from the very outset."*

Yuval Harai said that 'Homo deus' will resemble the Greek gods and concludes: *"Humans may well use science to turn themselves into something like gods as they have imagined them to be. But no Supreme Being will appear on the scene. Instead, there will be many different gods, each of them a parody of human beings that once existed."* But according to the Biblical narrative, history is leading up to the revelation of a Supreme Being, one who has already been here and who, when he was here, promised to return. This is fundamental to the teaching of Christianity.

If you are a Christian, do not be embarrassed at the return of Christ since he himself made it a central plank to his teaching. He not only taught his disciples in private that he would return, but he also made it a key point at his trial when questioned about his identity. *"Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' Jesus said, 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.' The high priest tore his clothes." The priests were angry and condemned Jesus as worthy of death. The high priest regarded Jesus' reply as blasphemous because he and all the court understood that Jesus was citing a famous passage from the book of the prophet Daniel that referred to a divine Son of Man who would come on the clouds of heaven and be given universal authority and power to reign forever: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."* It is evident from what occurred at Jesus' trial that he was crucified precisely because he claimed to be the Son of Man who, according to the prophet Daniel, would one day come to take up universal rule.

God will eventually deal with physical death but not by solving it by technological means. Firstly, by the raising of Jesus from the dead, God has demonstrated that physical death is not insuperable. The New Testament says that God *"has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"* (2 Timothy 1:10 NIV).

Christians still die. This passage is not claiming that those who trust Christ will not experience fear or the onset of illness, severe pain, and the physical anguish of the process of dying. Fear of these things is natural. But Christ's death and physical resurrection combine both to deliver believers from the fears of uncertainty about what happens after death and also the fear of a final judgement. *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."* (John 11:25-26). Death will not have the final word.

What's more, just as Christ has killed the power of our sins through his death, he has also brought us back to life through his resurrection. Through faith, we can participate in the power flowing from this cosmic act as God gives us eternal life beyond, despite and through earthly death. This is the secret of the courage of Christian martyrs throughout the centuries who have preferred to die rather than deny Christ.

With regards to AI, no matter what the promises might be, the central claim of Christianity is that the future is far greater than anything AI or AGI could promise since something infinitely bigger than either of them has already happened on our planet: God, who is responsible for the existence of

the universe and its laws and the architecture of the human mind, who was in the beginning, has coded himself into humanity. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This is not artificial intelligence; this is Real intelligence - way beyond anything conceivable, let alone constructible by humans.

Those of us who receive Christ will one day at his return be gloriously "upgraded", resurrected to be like him and share in the marvels of the eternal world to come. If the Christian teaching is true, the race to conquer death as a technical problem will prove to be vanity, although the technology developed along the way may help ease old age and solve many outstanding medical problems. However, humans were not made to live indefinitely on this planet.

It would seem that at every turn humanity's efforts to achieve divinity has been associated with an overweening arrogance and a sense of superiority that, far from achieving something superhuman, has produced something terrifyingly subhuman and bestial. The more we try to elevate ourselves, the more we sink into a morass of violence and tyranny, as was horrifically demonstrated in the twentieth century. Hannah Arendt, who wrote one of the first books on totalitarianism in 1951, was convinced that totalitarianism was rooted in utopianism based on the rejection of God and the deification of man. She wrote perceptively: *"What binds these men together is a firm and sincere belief in human omnipotence. Their moral cynicism, their belief that everything is permitted, rests on the solid conviction that everything is possible... In trying to create a perverse heaven on earth, totalitarian systems acknowledge no limit on either their conduct or their aspirations. They take Dstoyevsky's chilling warning that 'If God does not exist, everything is permitted' and institutionalise it in the Party. From there it is but a short distance to the mass killing and terror endemic to totalitarianism - from Nazi Germany's Auschwitz and Treblinka, to the Soviet Union's Lubyanka prison and Perm-36 gulag, to Communist China's Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution... The concentration and extermination camps of totalitarian regimes serve as the laboratories in which the fundamental belief of totalitarianism that everything is possible is being verified."* It's a mouthful, but according to St. Paul, the same dark shadow looms over the future of humanity.

We should pay close attention to such trends in history. *They are not innocent.* They will lead inexorably to the greatest state-orchestrated hostility to God that the world has ever seen. Genesis tells us that the war against God started a long time ago, before the very dawn of human history. But in the western world, we have lived to see a ramping-up of open hostility not only to God but also to public expression of belief in him. I am certain, the attempt to eliminate God will eventually lead not to freedom but to intense oppression. Atheists like Friedrich Nietzsche saw this clearly: the "death" of God would not lead to human freedom but to nihilism and the loss of everything, including meaning.

The way the world is going, I don't consider it impossible that power (maybe even gained through AI) will be concentrated into the hands of fewer and fewer people so that we could well imagine the existence of a world-state in the future that is controlled by a single person with extraordinary authority - a singular homo deus whose powers of rule and deception are derived from the most sinister of all superhuman intelligences - the devil himself. When we look in the final book of the Bible, Revelation, chapter 13 and 17 seem to depict what is envisaged as nothing less than a world government. It would appear that the drive toward the deification of human beings inevitably leads to the eventual concentration of power in the hands of one "superhuman" who effectively enslaves the rest.

Playing God has always been a temptation for powerful leaders. As we have seen, Paul points out in his day that *"the mystery of lawlessness is already at work"* (2 Thessalonians 2:7). Paul was referring to spiritual lawlessness, the defiance of God that characterized the Roman Emperors (and many before them), who thought of themselves as gods and demanded worship.

The consistent message of Scripture is that there is another world from which the true Homo Deus - Jesus Christ the Son of Man, who is the Son of God - will one day come. There will be a judgement, where righteous justice will be clearly carried out. The final ferocious expression of hostility towards God and his people will be destroyed and those who have clung to God in spite of overwhelming odds, even martyrdom, will receive the kingdom.

Summary

We have seen that the merely human *Homo deus* projects we have considered originate in human pride - the desire not only to be better than others but to be like God. Paul condemns this attitude by pointing out the real Homo Deus, Jesus Christ, whose lack of pride is demonstrated in that though he was always God and never ceased to be God, he "*did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.*" This is a clear allusion to Genesis 3, the source of all Homo Deus fantasies. Grasping or snatching at godhood is what the early humans did by eating the forbidden fruit. Snatching at godhood is characteristic of transhumanist projects. But the true Homo Deus did not snatch. He did not insist on being treated as God, though God, the eternal Word, he ever was. Rather, he "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." Not only that, but he became "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross". In so doing, he made a way back to God from the darkness and rebellion of human sin.

The attempt to make a superintelligent Homo Deus will neither lead back to God nor lead to God, but rather to the greatest rejection of God the world has ever seen. There is no way to a glorious future that bypasses the problem of human sin, and the only one who has offered a viable solution to that problem is Jesus Christ, who faced it head-on on the cross. The wonder is that we can, if we desire, if you truly believe, become part of this unending story and live in eternal fellowship with the infinitely intelligent and compassionate Saviour, Jesus Christ the Lord. Nothing artificial can or will compare with that reality, nothing.

This essay contains reference to '2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity' by John Lennox