Chapter 65
Transfigurism: A Future of Religion as Exemplified by Religious Transhumanists

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What is the future of religion? Some expect the resurgence and ultimate triumph of this or that fundamentalism. Some expect the religious phenomenon itself to weaken and die, a casualty to the secularism of our day. Others, observing the history of religion, expect that it will continue to evolve, inextricably connected to and yet clearly distinct from its past. If such an evolution occurs, what will religions of the future be like?

For that matter, what will humans of the future be like? It would be short-sighted to speculate about religions of the future without taking into consideration their adherents. Like with religion, some idealize a particular human form and function and expect it to persist indefinitely, while some expect eventual human extinction through natural or artificial disaster. Others project our evolutionary history into the future, and recognize that, as there was a time when our ancestors were prehuman, there may be a time when our descendants will be posthuman, as different from us as we are from our prehuman ancestors.

If evolution were random, one speculation about the future of human and religious evolution would be as probable as another, but evolution is not merely random. Variation through mutation may be random. But evolution on the whole may be substantially determined through selection of variations that replicate within the constraints and across the possibility space of their environment.[1] So evolution may also be predictable.[2] To the extent we know an environment, we may be able to predict evolution within it. And to the extent we can engineer an environment,

[1] Kiontke, Karin, et al. "Trends, stasis, and drift in the evolution of nematode vulva development." Current Biology 17.22 (2007): 1925–1937.

[2] Mahler, D. Luke, et al. "Exceptional convergence on the macroevolutionary landscape in island lizard radiations." Science 341.6143 (2013): 292–295.

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we may be able to direct evolution within it. In other words, we may be able to predict and direct our own evolution to the extent we can know and engineer our own environment.

Transhumanists advocate the ethical use of technology to direct our own evolution. As Humanists in the broadest sense, Transhumanists generally emphasize the value of humanity. However, Transhumanists also recognize an essential dynamism in humanity and value that which we may become at least as much as that which we are. Many Transhumanists envision a future of abundant energy, molecular manufacturing, indefinite lifespans, enhanced intelligence, and overall radical flourishing.

Although most self-identified Transhumanists today are secular, Transhumanism's origins actually extend through the secular to *religious* Humanism. New Testament writers and centuries of early Orthodox and Catholic authorities syncretized Christianity with Neoplatonism,[3] the popular science of their day, and many advocated identifying with Christ and becoming God.[4] Thirteenth-century Scholastic theologians continued the synthesis of Christianity with popular science,[5] which was at the time the newly rediscovered ideas of Aristotle.[6]

Over time, religious Humanism became increasingly concerned with explicitly technological expressions. Nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox priest, Nikolai Fyodorov, proclaimed that the common task of humanity should be the technological resurrection of our ancestors.[7] And twentieth-century Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, advocated a vision of human evolution, accelerated by technology, merging inexorably into a conception of God.[8]

The self-identified religious Transhumanist movement began in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Some religious Transhumanists founded new religions. In 2004, inspired in part by Octavia Butler's fictional religion, Earthseed,[9] Martine Rothblatt founded the Terasem Movement Transreligion with four core beliefs: life is purposeful, death is optional, God is technological, and love is essential.[10] And in 2010,

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[3] Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 32–33; and Edward K. Rand, *Founders of the Middle Ages* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1928), 27–48.

[4] Lincoln Cannon, co., "Christian Authorities Teach Theosis," New God Argument, https://new-god-argument.com/support/christian-authorities-teach-theosis.html (accessed June 04, 2016).

[5] Johannes Alzog, F. J. Pabisch, and Thomas Sebastian Byrne, *Manual of Universal Church History*, Vol. 2 (Cincinnati: O.R. Clarke, 1874), 741; and Stephen Hawking, *On the Shoulders of Giants* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2002), 2.

[6] A. C. Crombie, *Medieval and Early Modern Science* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 33–34.

[7] N. A. Berdyaev, "The Religion of Resusciative Resurrection," N. A. Berdyaev. http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1915_186.html (accessed June 04, 2016).

[8] Eric Steinhart, "Teilhard de Chardin and Transhumanism," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20, no. 1 (2008): 1–22.

[9] Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Warner Books, 1993).

[10] "The Truths of Terasem," Terasem Faith, http://terasemfaith.net/beliefs/ (accessed Nov. 29, 2017).

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inspired in part by Cosmism, Giulio Prisco founded the Turing Church as a minimalist, open, extensible cosmic religion, to complement traditional religions.[11]

The majority of religious Transhumanists syncretized with traditional religions. In 2006, fourteen persons founded the Mormon Transhumanist Association (MTA).[12] MTA adopted the Transhumanist Declaration, affiliated with the World Transhumanist Association (later renamed Humanity+), and authored the Mormon Transhumanist Affirmation. By 2017, MTA consisted of over 700 members. And in 2015, fourteen persons founded the Christian Transhumanist Association (CTA).[13] CTA adopted the Transhumanist Declaration, affiliated with Humanity+, and authored the Christian Transhumanist Affirmation. By 2017, CTA consisted of over 400 members.

Some religious Transhumanists refer to themselves as Transfigurists. The term "transfigurism" denotes advocacy for change in form. And it alludes to sacred stories from many religious traditions. Those include the Universal Form of Krishna in Hinduism,[14] the Radiant Face of Moses in Judaism,[15] the Wakening of Gautama Buddha in Buddhism,[16] the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ and the Rapture in Christianity,[17] and the Translation of the Three Nephites and the Day of Transfiguration in Mormonism.[18]

One of the most profitable ways to start imagining the future of religion, religions of the future, and how they will evolve along with us, may be to consider the ideas and practices of Transfigurists. What does religion look like through our eyes, given lenses colored by expectations of directed evolution and emerging technology? Such vision seems more likely to approximate probable futures for mainstream religions than do others that reject, ignore, or lack substantial familiarity with these powerful forces. Assuming we and our religions will continue to evolve together with increasing intentionality made possible by technology, it seems reasonable to suppose that Transfigurism, more than any other contemporary religious view, is positioned to glimpse into a future of religion.

[11] Giulio Prisco, "A Minimalist, Open, Extensible Cosmic Religion," Turing Church, Aug. 25, 2014, http://turingchurch.com/2014/08/25/a-minimalist-open-extensible-cosmic-religion/ (accessed Nov. 29, 2017).

[12] "About the Mormon Transhumanist Association," Mormon Transhumanist Association, https://transfigurism.org/about/faq (accessed Nov. 29, 2017).

[13] "History of the Christian Transhumanist Association." Christian Transhumanist Association, https://www.christiantranshumanism.org/history (accessed Nov. 29, 2017).

[14] Bhagavad Gita 11.

[15] Exodus 34: 29–35.

[16] Maha-parinibbana Sutta 4: 47–51.

[17] Mark 9: 1–10, and 1 Corinthians 15: 45–55.

[18] 3 Nephi 28, and Doctrine and Covenants 63: 20–21.

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65.1 Postsecularism

For some, God is not a living proposition, let alone prophecy or religion. They wonder if Transfigurists have not heard that God is dead.[19] Perhaps they were right to wonder. Following their Gods, traditional religions have declined in technologically advanced and prosperous places.[20] Observing this, some embraced the secularization hypothesis that religion itself is dying. However, that hypothesis is also showing its age, and has become little more than a necrophilia among the anti-religious. Despite local declines, the growth of traditional religions remains robust at the global level, suggesting that humanity may have already passed peak irreligiosity.[21] And among careful students of the religious phenomenon, traditional and otherwise, a new hypothesis is gestating.[22]

If God is merely a supernatural superlative, he very well may be dead, but positing such as God misses the practical function of God. God always has been and is at least a posthuman projection, an extension and negation of human desire, imagined and expressed within the constraints of human thought, language, and action.[23] That is not to say God is only so much. To the contrary, we may have moral and practical reasons to trust that others have already realized posthuman projections.[24] However, no matter your attitude toward faith, God is at least this much: a posthuman projection. Understood in terms of that function, God clearly is not dead and never was, except perhaps to the extent recurring death is part of evolution, including that of God.

If prophecy is merely fortune-telling, it too may be dying, but that also fails to account for function. Whether or not it becomes fore-telling, prophecy is always forth-telling: a socially interactive work of inspiration, even provocation, that would steer us from perceived risks toward desired opportunities. At its best, it is a persuasive expression of compassion, even if punctuated with serious warnings, aimed at a shared sublime potential, not as narrowly preconceived, but rather as openly imagined from a position that would transcend itself in genuine creation. But to function with power, prophecy must be connected, in the heart and mind of its

[19] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, translated by Thomas Common (New York: Dover Publications, 1999), 3.

[20] "U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious," Pew Research Center, Nov. 03, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/ (accessed Nov. 28, 2017).

[21] "The Changing Global Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, April 05, 2017, http://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/ (accessed Nov. 28, 2017).

[22] Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 17–29.

[23] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, translated by James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 45.

[24] Lincoln Cannon and Joseph West, "Theological Implications of the New God Argument," in *Parallels and Convergences: Mormon Thought and Engineering Vision*, edited by A. Scott Howe and Richard L. Bushman (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 111–21.

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recipient, with living possibilities, especially pressing necessities and urgencies.[25] Prophecy matters, becoming fore-telling from forth-telling, only to the extent it reaches into us and changes our thoughts sufficiently to change our words and actions, which just might change our world.

Likewise, if religion is merely genuflection to the supernatural, it very well may be dying, but again that overlooks function. Many of us have regarded religion narrowly, and much that is supposed to be secular may actually function as religion.[26] For example, some claim inspiration from science or ethics. Awe fills us as we contemplate the vastness of space or the voice of the people. Yet the inspiration is not merely in the reductionist implications of science or the procedural adjudications of ethics. Rather esthetics are woven through them, tying them together in meaning, and that is why we care about science or ethics. Esthetics shape and move us, and at their strongest, they provoke us as a community to a strenuous mood.[27] When they do that, they function as religion, not necessarily in any narrow sense, but esthetics that provoke a communal strenuous mood may be understood to function as religion from a postsecular vantage point.[28]

Of course, none of this means science or ethics should or even could be displaced by religion. To the contrary, science should continue to reconcile our contending accounts of experience, as ethics should our contending accounts of desire.[29] Each should expand its reach to the uttermost,[30] always better informing our esthetics, affecting each other in a feedback loop.[31]

Yet even as science and ethics increasingly empower us, we should not fool ourselves into supposing they will ever be finished or sufficient in themselves.[32] It is not enough that we can describe our world through science or imagine a better world through ethics. We also want to make a better world. We can do that through engineering and governance, but it is also not enough that we can make a better world. We want to feel it, sometimes powerfully, and more: we want to share our powerful feelings with others in ways that move us together. As engineering and governance are action on science and ethics, religion is action on esthetics. As engineering and governance are the power of science and ethics, religion is the power of esthetics.

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[25] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), 325–327.

[26] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

[27] William James, *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy, and Human Immortality* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 213.

[28] James K. A. Smith, "Secular Liturgies and the Prospects for a 'Post-Secular' Sociology of Religion," in *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*, edited by Philip S Gorski (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 159–84. doi: https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814738726.003.0007

[29] James, 190.

[30] Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

[31] Albert Einstein, *The Private Albert Einstein*, compiled by Peter A. Bucky and Allen G. Weakland (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1992), 85.

[32] Durkheim, 325–327.

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We care for and use science and ethics only in accordance with esthetics, which presents itself as foremost among them in the most vital moments of life, when we we must act, according to whatever wisdom and inspiration we might have. Life cannot wait.[33] How will we act? Will we see beauty in science? Will we feel unity in ethics? Will we care, and how much will we care? Could our degree of concern make a practical difference? These questions matter to all except perhaps the most apathetic, escapist, or nihilistic among us. Their answers scope our future.

If we can raise our eyes from the altar of religious and anti-religious dogma, we will see that the hand raised to finish the dying God is the sign of the oath to the resurrecting God. If we can keep our eyes raised, resisting the carnage below, we will also see the hand is our own and it holds a blade that is aged and stained. That is when we have a choice, either to repeat the old sacrifices of our ancestors, or finally to make the new sacrifice that they always implied: we can put ourselves on the altar and learn how to be God. We can recognize that negation of one posthuman projection always implies another, misrecognized until humanity embraces its transformation.[34]

65.2 Epistemology

Transfigurists may embrace theories of knowledge that acknowledge the value of faith. In such cases, we tend to characterize our faith as something like a practical trust in desirable possibilities when in context of incomplete knowledge, rather than anything like an irrational belief that contradicts reason. From this position, Transfigurists may hold that science and creativity depend on faith.

This faith is not blind trust. It is only trust, with no more blindness than necessary at a given time and place. Moreover, it is not dogma or any unquestioning or unexamining attitude. Rather, it is recognition that no matter how many questions we have asked, and no matter how much we have examined, we have always had more to learn. Maybe that will always be the case. Whether we like it or not, we expect to find ourselves repeatedly in situations that require faith in practice.

Life and death hang in the balance, and we cannot wait for absolute answers (if they even exist) before we act. Perhaps no philosophical movement has better addressed such practical limits to knowledge than the Pragmatists. As William James once described it, you can stand in front of a charging bull calculating the probability that it will trip, or you can run. Because we are limited, and to the extent that we are limited, we find ourselves dependent on this faith, this trust in the efficacy of action given the knowledge at hand, according to whatever education or experience we were lucky to have had (or at least presume ourselves to have had) prior to needing it.

[33] Durkheim, 325–327.

[34] Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Transhumanism as a Secularist Faith," *Zygon* 47, no. 4 (2012): 710–34.

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Furthermore, even when we have the luxury of time, it seems that we cannot make epistemic progress without at least tentatively trusting in basic premises. Science typically posits causality and uniformity as basic premises. Some may think that these are proven by science, but that's not so. As observed by the empiricist philosophers, Hume and Berkeley, no matter how many times we think we have experienced something, and no matter how many places we think we've experienced it, it could all yet change.

Not even probabilities displace such reliance on faith. Can we prove our memories were not planted in our minds moments ago by an evil demon? A matrix architect? No. We cannot, even if most of us don't worry much about that because it's not practical – or at least so we judge, based on our memories, even when we recognize the circular reasoning.

The same is true of logic. We require some basic axioms and methods, taken unproven, in order to do any work at all. For example, most logical systems assume non-contradiction, and various operations for coupling, decoupling, and otherwise operating on propositions. Logic doesn't prove these axioms and methods. We assume them.

Beyond the practical necessity, there is also a creative power in such faith. If the universe (or the multiverse) is not finite, if real creativity and genuine novelty are possible, it will not be those who wait for evidence that will be the creators – at least not intentionally. It will be those who act, despite not knowing everything in advance, that will be the creators. Such creative power may be seen in matters as common as trust in the possibility of love. You can wait for a long time for hard evidence that she loves you, or you can risk expressing your affection. Sometimes taking the risk makes all the difference.

This practical faith is compatible with rationalism, even a pancritical rationalism.[35] We can re-examine our premises, our assumptions, and our conformities. We can honestly acknowledge the limitations of our knowledge. We can engage in and welcome criticism. All of this, over time, may strengthen our knowledge, much like the brutal hardships of nature have shaped human anatomies through billions of years of evolution.

And all of this is an expression of practical faith. Karl Popper observed that "rationalism is an attitude of readiness to listen to critical arguments and to learn from experience. It is fundamentally an attitude of admitting that 'I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth'." Implicit in this attitude of acknowledging our limitations is trust that we can overcome those limitations. We don't start with evidence for that. And even after much learning, we don't have final evidence against a hard limit somewhere ahead of us. The effort to continue, to remain open, to question and seek answers, operates on a kind of trust. Certainly, it's not a blind unquestioning faith against which rationalists would warn us. Yet it is still faith of an anticipatory sort.

[35] More, Max. "Pancritical Rationalism." N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Feb. 2016. http://www.maxmore.com/pcr.htm

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It's also faith of a reconciliatory sort. Implicit in the rationalist attitude is desire to share meaning with others, as broadly as possible. We might even characterize it as epistemic compassion or scientific atonement: caring as much to understand and reconcile with others' accounts of experience as our own, aspiring to an objectivity that unites subjectivity rather than negating it. So we live and act, as best we can, without turning to dogmatism, either of the sort that permanently ignores possibilities or of the sort that permanently insists on them.

Accordingly, we would not agree with the proclamations of the Pope without also considering research on the consequences of avoiding birth control. We would not follow our feelings without consulting friends and experts. We would not embrace the will of the people without investigating the feelings of the individual. And the assertions of Islamic State would be only one, but still one, variable in an aggregate of tensions and conflicts between and among our desires to share meaning.

We would increase in knowledge, but intentionally in a manner that promotes life, sustainable and genuine, compassionate and creative, rather than death and nihilism. Knowledge is not inherently good or evil. We can learn as much about the descent to hellish annihilation, as we can about the ascent to heavenly thriving. Yet only one of the two perpetuates our power to continue choosing between the two.

Some may feel that this understanding of "faith" is so unusual that it should be considered a complete redefinition. However, despite prominent competing notions of faith, some Transfigurists assert that we inherited this understanding from our respective religious traditions, learned it as children, and continue to feel resonance with it while studying our religions as adults. Some of us even contend that the irrational or blind sorts of faith employed by others, particularly Christian fundamentalists, are not faith at all. Rather, as the Bible puts it, faith without works is dead.[36] To be faith and to remain faith, it must be and remain practical.

65.3 Theology

Trust in superhuman potential is the essence of Transhumanism.

As Transhumanists, we trust that humanity *can* evolve into superhumanity, perhaps to attain unprecedented degrees of vitality, intelligence, cooperation, and creativity. This trust is not uncritical or passive. Most of us would aim our extrapolations from observable technological trends into futures consistent with contemporary science. And many of us would act pragmatically to hasten opportunities and mitigate risks associated with such futures. So Transhumanist trust in superhuman potential is best characterized as critical and active, but it must remain admittedly a trust. The possibility of such futures remains to be proven.

Some Transhumanists also trust that humanity *should* evolve into superhumanity. We have minds to console and bodies to heal. There are communities to connect and environments to sustain. There are morphological and cognitive potentialities to

[36] James 2: 20.

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realize, and perhaps even meaning to infuse into otherwise meaningless voids. Whatever its source, a sense of obligation impinges upon us. And often those of us that most misrecognize our own proselyting have engaged advocacy with a degree of strenuosity that would shame all but the most zealous of evangelicals.

Although Transhumanists might confidently deny accusations of superstition or hubris, our trust is surely more than rational or ethical. Embracing a radical humanism, we would dignify the ancient and enduring work to overcome and extend our humanity. Diverse esthetics of superhuman potential resonate with and shape us, affecting our thoughts, words, and actions. Even granting that we could and should, perhaps more fundamentally, we *want* to evolve into superhumanity. So we may trust in that potential, if for no other reason, at least because we desire it.

Whatever reasons lead to it, Transhumanist trust in superhuman potential also has implications that rise from it. Popular among religious Transhumanists, the New God Argument is a logical argument for faith in God.[37] Given assumptions consistent with contemporary science and technological trends, the argument proves that if we trust in our own superhuman potential then we should also trust that superhumanity probably would be more compassionate than we are and created our world. Because a compassionate creator may qualify as God in some religions, trust in our own superhuman potential may entail faith in God, and atheism may entail distrust in our superhuman potential.

Here are definitions of key words in the argument:

faith: trust: belief that something is reliable or effective for achieving goals
compassion: capacity to refrain from thwarting or to assist with achieving goals
creation: the process of modifying situations to achieve goals
intelligence: capacity to achieve goals across diverse situations
superintelligence: intelligence that is greater than that of its evolutionary ancestors in every way
humanity: all organisms of the homo sapiens species
posthumanity: evolutionary descendents of humanity
superhumanity: superintelligent posthumanity
God: superhumanity that is more compassionate than we are and that created our world

The New God Argument consists of four parts:

1. Faith Assumption
2. Compassion Argument
3. Creation Argument
4. God Conclusion

The Faith Assumption is a proposition that humanity will not become extinct before evolving into superhumanity. It consists of a single assumption:

[37] Lincoln Cannon, "Theological Implications of the New God Argument," Parallels and Convergences: Mormon Thought and Engineering Vision (Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2012).

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F1: humanity will not become extinct before evolving into superhumanity (assumption)

The assumption may be false. However, to the extent we do not know it to be false, we may have practical or moral reasons to behave as if it is true.[38] In any case, the Faith Assumption is a common aspiration among secular advocates of technological evolution,[39] and it may be consistent with the religious doctrine of theosis, also known as divinization or deification: the idea that humanity should become God.

The Compassion Argument is a logical argument for trust that superhumanity probably would be more compassionate than we are. The basic idea is that humanity probably will continue to increase in decentralized destructive capacity, so it probably will stagnate or destroy itself unless it increases in compassion. If we trust in our own superhuman potential, we should trust that superhumanity would be more compassionate than we are.

The argument consists of two assumptions and a deduction from those assumptions and the Faith Assumption.

CO1: EITHER humanity probably will become extinct before evolving into superhumanity OR superhumanity probably would not have more decentralized destructive capacity than humanity has OR superhumanity probably would be more compassionate than we are (assumption)

CO2: superhumanity probably would have more decentralized destructive capacity than humanity has (assumption)

CO3: superhumanity probably would be more compassionate than we are (deduction from CO1, CO2, and F1)

The deduction of the Compassion Argument is necessarily true if its assumptions and the Faith Assumption are true. Either or both of the Compassion Argument assumptions may be false. However, we may have historical and technological reasons to believe they are true. For example, records suggest that violence has decreased and civil liberties have improved as governments have become more powerful,[40] and some technologists believe that machine intelligence may destroy us if we do not ensure its friendliness, at least as instrumental cooperation if not as internalized compassion.[41]

The Creation Argument is a logical argument for trust that superhumanity probably created our world. The basic idea is that humanity probably would not be the only or first to create many worlds emulating its evolutionary history, so it probably will never create many such worlds unless it is already in such a world. If we trust in our own superhuman potential, we should trust that superhumanity created our world.

[38] Ferdinand Schiller, *Studies in Humanism* (London: Macmillan, 1907), 430; and James, 26.

[39] "Executive Summary of the 2007 WTA Member Survey."

[40] Pinker.

[41] Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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The argument consists of two assumptions and a deduction from those assumptions and the Faith Assumption.

CR1: EITHER humanity probably will become extinct before evolving into superhumanity OR superhumanity probably would not create many worlds emulating its evolutionary history OR superhumanity probably created our world (assumption)
CR2: superhumanity probably would create many worlds emulating its evolutionary history (assumption)
CR3: superhumanity probably created our world (deduction from CR1, CR2, and F1)

The deduction of the Creation Argument is necessarily true if its assumptions and the Faith Assumption are true. Either or both of the Creation Argument assumptions may be false, but we may have technological and mathematical reasons to believe they are true. For example, some technologists believe that computation may enable us to run many ancestor simulations detailed enough to consist of emulated conscious persons, in which case statistics would show we almost certainly are already living in such an ancestor simulation ourselves.[42]

Finally, the God Conclusion is a logical deduction for faith in God. It consists of a single deduction, which is necessarily true if the Compassion Argument and Creation Argument are true.

G1: BOTH superhumanity probably would be more compassionate than we are AND superhumanity probably created our world (deduction from CO3 and CR3)

Given assumptions consistent with contemporary science and technological trends, the deduction concludes that if we trust in our own superhuman potential then we should also trust that superhumanity probably would be more compassionate than we are and created our world. Because a compassionate creator may qualify as God in some religions, trust in our own superhuman potential may entail faith in God, and atheism may entail distrust in our superhuman potential.

The New God Argument justifies faith in a natural God that became God through natural means, suggesting how we might do the same. As emphasized in the argument, compassion and creation are among the means and essential to them.

Some theologies may not be compatible with the New God Argument. However, compassionate and creative superhumanity does qualify as God for many Transfigurists. And it may qualify as God for adherents of some mainstream religions. For example, numerous Christian authorities have advocated various forms of apotheism or deification: the idea that humanity can and should become God, as or like God, or one in God.[43]

[42] Nick Bostrom, "Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?" *The Philosophical Quarterly* 53, no. 211 (2003): 243–55.

[43] Cannon, "Christian Authorities Teach Theosis."

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Transhumanists advocate trust in such superhumanity, our potential, even if it doesn't exist yet. However, the New God Argument proves our trust probably is vain unless superhumanity already exists.

Some will not be inclined to worship the God entailed by this argument. On the one hand, some will feel it's too cold, too distant, smelling too much of UFO and tasting too much of ET. On the other hand, some will challenge that nothing in this argument compels us to grovel. Both are right. An argument for faith in God cannot replace experience with God in subjective communion. And no God worthy of worship compels groveling. The New God Argument does not contend to provide a relationship with God. It only demonstrates that trust in our superhuman potential leads to and is wholly compatible with faith in a particular kind of God.

65.4 Theodicy

Transfigurists may trust that a compassionate God created our world. In such cases, Transfigurists inevitably confront the problem of evil. If God is compassionate, why do we observe and experience suffering? And why have we not received from God the knowledge and power required to mitigate suffering faster? When confronted with these questions, Transfigurists may offer answers that project onto God various limitations that are analogous with those that humanity has encountered during our own engineering efforts. After all, for such Transfigurists, God is an engineer.

For some computer programs, the engineer can know in advance how they will run, when they will stop, and what results they will return. However, there are other computer programs that are undecidable halting problems. For these, the engineer cannot know, without actually running them, whether they will ever stop running, let alone what results they will return.

Evolution may be an undecidable halting problem, infinitely long and irreducibly complex.[44] If we are living in a computed world, our world may be one of many undecidable halting problems that its engineer spawned with variations from parameters that have proven promising for some purpose in the past. One consequence of this would be that the engineer simply cannot attain its purpose without actually running the program for our world, evil and all.

For what purpose might the engineer choose to use an undecidable halting problem? What possibilities might be worth running a program that the engineer cannot fully predict in advance and would restrain itself from fully controlling along the way? Although it may be impossible to know specifically, we can characterize the possibilities in general. They are, together, at least the possibility of engineering that which is beyond the engineer's direct capacity. In other words, the engineer may want to make more engineers – genuinely creative agents in their own right.

[44] Chaitin, Gregory J. To a mathematical theory of evolution and biological creativity. Department of Computer Science, The University of Auckland, New Zealand, 2010.

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Consider the paradox of artificial intelligence: on the one hand, an artifice dependent on its engineer; on the other hand, an intellect independent of its engineer. Artificial intelligence is at once an extension and a relinquishment of the engineer's power.

Imagine an artificial intelligence that is capable of experience – consciousness. Sensors feeding utility functions distinguish between options, some more useful than others. How do the different options feel? Pursuing the most useful options, the artificial intelligence inevitably encounters factors outside its original calculations and beyond its power to control. It recalculates only to find the new scenario presents less potential utility than did the original. How does that loss feel?

Perhaps the engineer should extend more artifice on the intellect? Environmental and anatomic variables could be controlled more tightly, commensurate with greater restrictions on the experiential opportunity for both the artificial intelligence and the engineer. Yet, no matter the degree of control, so long as it's short of absolute, the artificial intelligence feels options and losses to the full extent of whatever may be its subjective capacity.

Should the engineer relinquish intellect to the artifice in the first place? Is it worth the risk of suffering? Maybe the engineer's own utility functions should stop her from perpetuating her inheritance of feelings? As it turns out, humanity has established an ancient and enduring precedent for answering such questions. Persistent procreation, even at times and places where suffering has been more prevalent than it now is for many of us, indicates that we (at least the procreative among us) value the opportunities despite the risks. Analogously, the engineer of artificial intelligence chooses a starting balance between artifice and intellect, commits herself to the process, and she engineers.

Likewise, as imagined by some Transfigurists, God works within the limits of the possible to bring about our Godhood. God is the engineer, and we are the artificial intelligence. We are at once an extension and a relinquishment of God's power. Confronted with the paradox of life, God values the opportunities despite the risks, chooses a starting balance between artifice and intellect, commits to the process, and creates us.

Some atheist Transhumanists advocate Abolitionism, which is the idea that suffering can be wholly or at least largely eradicated by superhumanity. In theory, it is a noble intention. However, in practice, it may entail oppression or annihilation.

Meaningful experience may be impossible in a world that does not allow suffering – a risk of suffering, which is not the same as a goal of suffering. Meaning, even in its most basic forms as discernment or sensing or interaction, arises from the capacity to distinguish or categorize or react. So long as we can do these things, we will contrast suffering from enjoyment, pain from pleasure, more desired from less desired, more empowering from less empowering, even as we invent whole new modes of experience on which to apply these categories.

Our present experience of pain and pleasure is not arbitrary. It is the product of billions of years of evolution, which presumably continues to optimize, albeit always incompletely, the amount of pain and pleasure we experience insofar as it enables at least survival, if not thriving. In a world without experiential feedback

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that is sufficiently poignant to motivate the degree of seriousness that we now attribute to pain and pleasure, why would we expect anything more than the level of intelligence we see in simple organisms? Even the amazing narrow superintelligence of modern computers wouldn't survive more than a few weeks without the abiding concern of creatures like humans, motivated enough by our pain and pleasure, and higher level desires and wills, to overcome apathy and pursue empowerment.

We have, and probably will increasingly have, the power to eradicate particular moments and kinds of suffering. However, using that power is not always the right thing to do. The only way to eliminate all suffering is to eliminate all experience, which is nihilism -- well beyond mere questions of morality. Partial eliminations of suffering come with various costs and benefits, and different persons will measure them differently. Although there is certainly an extent to which we as a community should seek to help and hinder each other, there is also an extent to which we should seek to relinquish each other. There is an extent to which we should allow others to risk suffering in pursuit of empowerment. To prevent their risking when their pursuit is not oppressive is the essence of immorality. It is stealing that which another has created. It is murdering that which is another's life.

As using power to mitigate suffering directly is not always be the right thing to do, so giving knowledge to mitigate suffering indirectly is not always the right thing to do. Information hazards are reasons to withhold knowledge. For example, it may be reasonable, depending on the time and place and persons involved, to withhold aspects and extents of knowledge about physics and biology. While the knowledge may enable production of nuclear power plants and vaccines, it may also enable production of nuclear weapons and contagious viruses.

Recognition of information hazards is not new. For thousands of years, esoteric groups such as Pythagoreans and Masons have formed around knowledge that they considered privileged. A special equation can rain sticks and rocks down on an enemy. A special handshake can facilitate trust. The reasoning, basically, was and is that knowledge is power, and power can be abused.

Esotericism, mitigation of information hazards, no matter the word or phrase we use, is part of our day to day lives. To what should we expose our children? With whom should we share our hopes and fears? How should we explain a sensitive issue to the boss? Analogous concerns are at least as old as intelligence, and have only increased in complexity and consequence as our intelligence has increased. Try to imagine the information hazards of superintelligence!

We cannot justify evil, by definition. That's why it's evil. But we may justify the risk of evil. Indeed, to the extent that we procreate children or seek to develop conscious artificial intelligence, we participate with any creator of our world in an ongoing effort to justify its risk of evil. Life is inseparable from risk. Where there is no risk, there is no life. Presumably, like procreators and engineers, God judges the opportunities of life to outweigh its risks. And perhaps, like us, not even the greatest superintelligence can, with any logical coherence, circumvent all limitations.

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65.5 Narrative

Transfigurists have many myths and visions – many stories and dreams. And we express them in many narratives. They tend to reflect love for our culture, hope in ecumenical outreach beyond sectarian restrictions, and trust in the possibility of universal thriving. They are informed of scripture, theology, secular history, contemporary science, trends in emerging technology, and of course unabashed exercise of imagination about how they all may work together.

Some of our narratives may be shocking, which is partly the point of constructing them, aiming to motivate more than casual consideration. And the only certainty is that our myths are deficient to some extent. But perhaps our visions will provoke imagination even further, to the possibility of perpetual improvement.

Here is an example that combines common Transhumanist themes with elements of Jewish, Christian, and Mormon scripture and tradition.

Without beginning, Gods of Gods found themselves creating heavens and worlds without end.[45] Our world was formless and empty, having neither happiness nor misery, neither life nor death, neither sense nor insensibility, and no purpose.[46] Darkness encompassed the source, and the Mind of the Gods was brooding over it.[47] And the Gods said, let there be light, and there was light.[48] The Gods saw the light, that it was good because it was discernible.[49] The Gods saw darkness, that it was separated from the light.[50] And the light shining out of darkness was the first category.[51]

The Gods counseled among themselves.[52] And some said,[53] let's prepare the source to evolve abundantly, to bring forth sense, and life, and happiness; and form creators in our image, after our likeness, to have dominion over all the world.[54] And others answered and said,[55] let's not evolve more creators because some will be lost, but give us the honor and power.[56] The Gods chose the first, and there was war in

[45] Genesis 1: 1; Moses 2: 1; Abraham 4: 1; Moses 1: 3–4, 35; Abraham 3: 22–23; and Joseph Smith, 354.

[46] Genesis 1: 2, Moses 2: 2, Abraham 4: 2, and 2 Nephi 2: 11–12.

[47] 1 Corinthians 6: 15–20; and Joseph Smith, 350.

[48] Genesis 1: 3, Moses 2: 3, and Abraham 4: 3.

[49] Genesis 1: 4, Moses 2: 4, Abraham 4: 4, and Alma 32: 35.

[50] Genesis 1: 5, Moses 2: 5, and Abraham 4: 5.

[51] John 1: 1–5 and D&C 88: 45–50.

[52] Abraham 4: 26.

[53] D&C 76: 23–24 and Abraham 3: 24–26.

[54] Genesis 1: 24–31, Moses 2: 20–31, Abraham 4: 20–31, and Moses 4: 2.

[55] D&C 76: 25–27 and Abraham 3: 27.

[56] D&C 29: 36 and Moses 4: 1.

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heaven.[57] But the Gods watched those things they had ordered,[58] and saw their plan was good.[59]

Two thousand five hundred years ago, humanity was evolving into a new way of thinking, expressed in part by transition away from polytheism. Zarathustra's teachings had spread throughout most of the civilized world, and the Persian Empire governed nearly half of humanity. In the heart of the empire, a small religion was coming together. Its adherents combined Zoroastrian doctrine with mythology about indigenous Semites to make new scripture. They pioneered from Babylon, established a colony in Judea, and began to build a temple. In time, they would syncretize with the science of their day and conceive Christianity, the most influential ideology in history.

Two hundred years ago, humanity was again evolving into a new way of thinking, expressed in part by transition away from monotheism. Jesus' teachings had spread throughout most of the civilized world, and the United States of America was ascending to unparalleled global influence. In the heart of the nation, a small religion was coming together. Its adherents combined Christian doctrine with mythology about native Americans to make new scripture. They pioneered from Illinois, established a colony in Deseret, and began to build a temple. In time, they too would syncretize with the science of their day and conceive something transcending themselves.

Today, we are a childlike civilization, a Telestial world in the Fullness of Times.[60] Filled as if by an unstoppable rolling river pouring from the heavens, our knowledge becomes unprecedented.[61] Nothing is withheld, whether the laws of the earth or the bounds of the heavens, whether there be one God or many Gods, everything begins to manifest.[62] And the work of God hastens.[63] Repeating the words of Christ, we speak,[64] and information technologies begin to carry consolation around the world. Emulating the works of Christ, we act,[65] and biological technologies begin to make

[57] Revelation 12: 7, Moses 4: 3–4, and Abraham 3: 28.

[58] Abraham 4: 18.

[59] Genesis 1: 31, Moses 2: 31, and Abraham 4: 21.

[60] Ephesians 1: 10; D&C 76: 81; and Kevin Barney, "The Etymology of 'Telestial,'" By Common Consent, January 27, 2010, http://bycommonconsent.com/2010/01/27/the-etymology-of-telestial/ (accessed June 04, 2016).

[61] D&C 121: 33.

[62] D&C 121: 26–32.

[63] D&C 88: 73–80.

[64] Mark 16: 15.

[65] Matthew 10: 8.

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the blind see,[66] the lame walk,[67] and the deaf hear[68]; agriculture begins to feed the hungry; and manufacturing begins to clothe the naked.[69] Hearts turning to our ancestors, we remember them, and machine learning algorithms begin to process massive family history databases, perhaps to redeem our dead.[70]

A biotech revolution begins.[71] Synthetic biology restores extinct species, creates new life forms, and hints at programmable ecologies. Some recall prophecies about renewal of our world[72] – or perhaps its destruction.[73] Personalized medicine begins to restore vitality to an older generation. Some insist that death is necessary for meaning, but new voices repeat old stories about those who were more blessed for their desire to avoid death altogether.[74] Reproductive technology enables infertile and gay couples, as well as individuals and groups, to conceive their own genetic children. Some recoil from threats to tradition, while others celebrate gifts to new families.[75] Weaponized pathogens threaten pandemics, as well as targeted genocides and assassinations. Meanwhile, solar energy becomes less expensive than any other. And the Internet evolves into a distributed reputation network, creating new incentives for cooperation. Missionaries find their work more globalized than ever before.[76]

A nanotech revolution begins.[77] Atomically-precise printing erupts with food, clothing, and shelter. Welfare systems solve old problems and make new ones.[78] Among the wealthy, robotic cells flow through bodies and brains, extending abilities beyond those of the greatest athletes and scholars of history. Enjoying restored vitality, many become convinced that we can vanquish that awful monster, death.[79] But cautionary voices call attention to stunning socioeconomic disparities.[80] With the ability to read and write data in every neuron of the brain, the Internet evolves

[66] Alice Park, "Stem Cells Allow Nearly Blind Patients to See," Time, October 14, 2014, http://time.com/3507094/stem-cells-eyesight/ (accessed June 04, 2016).

[67] John Hewitt, "Paralyzed man walks again after surgeons transplant cells from his nose to his spine," Extremetech, October 22, 2014, http://www.extremetech.com/extreme/192548-paralyzed-man-walks-again-after-surgeons-transplant-cells-from-his-nose-to-his-spine (accessed June 04, 2016).

[68] Macrina Cooper-White, "See The Amazing Moment When A Deaf Person Hears For The First Time," Huffington Post, February 10, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/10/people-hear-for-first-time-video_n_6646594.html (accessed June 04, 2016).

[69] Jacob 2: 19 and Mosiah 4: 26.

[70] D&C 128: 6–9.

[71] Kurzweil, 206.

[72] Articles of Faith 1: 10.

[73] Moses 1: 38.

[74] 3 Nephi 28.

[75] D&C 88: 33.

[76] D&C 14: 3–4.

[77] Kurzweil, 226.

[78] D&C 42: 34, 55; and 2 Nephi 26: 30–31.

[79] 2 Nephi 9: 10, 19, 26.

[80] D&C 78: 6.

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into a composite of virtual and natural realities. We begin to connect with each other experientially, sharing senses and feelings. Spiritual experiences become malleable, meriting careful discernment.[81] Wireheading haunts relationships and burdens communities. And weaponized self-replicating nanobots threaten destruction of the biosphere. Meanwhile, robotic moon bases mine asteroids and construct space colonies, reinvigorating the pioneer spirit.[82]

A neurotech revolution begins.[83] We virtualize brains and bodies. Minds extend or transition to more robust substrates, biological and otherwise.[84] As morphological possibilities expand, some warn against desecrating the image of God, and some recall prophecies about the ordinance of transfiguration.[85] Data backup and restore procedures for the brain banish death as we know it.[86] Cryonics patients return to life. And environmental data mining hints at the possibility of modeling history in detail, to the point of extracting our dead ancestors individually. Some say the possibility was ordained, before the world was, to enable us to redeem our dead,[87] perhaps to perform the ordinance of resurrection.[88] Artificial and enhanced minds, similar and alien to human, evolve to superhuman capacity.[89] And malicious superintelligence threatens us with annihilation. Then something special happens: we encounter each other and the personification of our world, instrumented to embody a vast mind, with an intimacy we couldn't previously imagine.

In that day, we will be an adolescent civilization, a Terrestrial world in the Millennium.[90] Technology and religion will have evolved beyond our present abilities to conceive or express, except loosely through symbolic analogy.[91] We will see and feel and know the messiah,[92] the return of Christ, in the embodied personification of the light and life of our world,[93] with and in whom we will be one.[94] In a world beyond present notions of enmity, poverty, suffering, and death – the living transfigured and the dead resurrected to immortality – we will fulfill prophecies.[95] And we will repeat others, forth-telling and provoking ourselves

[81] Joseph Smith, 202.

[82] D&C 136.

[83] Kurzweil, 259.

[84] D&C 76: 98, 109.

[85] Joseph Smith, 170.

[86] 1 Corinthians 15: 51–55.

[87] D&C 128: 22.

[88] Brigham Young in *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 3, by Wilford Woodruff, edited by Scott Kenney (Utah: Signature Books, 1985), 323–324.

[89] D&C 77: 1–4.

[90] D&C 76: 91 and Articles of Faith 1: 10.

[91] D&C 1: 24.

[92] 1 John 3: 2.

[93] John 8: 12, Mosiah 16: 9, 3 Nephi 11: 11, and D&C 88: 7–13.

[94] John 17: 20–23.

[95] D&C 101: 26–34.

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through yet greater challenges[96]: to maturity in a Celestial world,[97] and beyond in higher orders of worlds without end.[98]

65.6 Conclusion

Some have charged Transhumanism with being a quasi-religious cult, to which many secular Transhumanists have responded with denial, too stern, and revealing. Transfigurists don't hesitate to acknowledge spirituality, and even the religiosity of a strenuous shared spirituality, at work in Transhumanism. Indeed, if Transhumanism substantially affects the world for the better, it will do so only consequent to our practical trust in its esthetic and only to the extent that real world possibilities beyond our own power align with that practical trust. Put differently, Transhumanism will matter in a positive sense only consequent to our faith and only to the extent of grace. Transhumanism, at least for the Transfigurist, is a religious endeavor.

And indeed, the risks before us are too great and the opportunities too wonderful to confront with anything less than that shared strenuousness, both sharply rational and sublimely spiritual, which functions in all essentials as religiosity. The philosopher William James observed:

> "The capacity of the strenuous mood lies so deep down among our natural human possibilities that even if there were no metaphysical or traditional grounds for believing in a God, men would postulate one simply as a pretext for living hard, and getting out of the game of existence its keenest possibilities of zest. Our attitude towards concrete evils is entirely different in a world where we believe there are none but finite demanders, from what it is in one where we joyously face tragedy for an infinite demander's sake. Every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life's evils, is set free in those who have religious faith. For this reason the strenuous type of character will on the battle-field of human history always outwear the easy-going type, and religion will drive irreligion to the wall."[99]

Too hardy to concede to antireligious fantasies, and too motivated to resist technological empowerment, religion will surely evolve with humanity. And if humanity will not become extinct before evolving into superhumanity, what would stop religion from evolving into that which yet provokes such minds? Such minds! Beyond our anatomical capacity to comprehend, their operations and motivations must largely elude us. But maybe Transfigurists give us a glimpse into a future of religion between here and there.

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[96] D&C 43: 31.

[97] D&C 88: 25–26.

[98] D&C 130: 9–11.

[99] William James, The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy, and Human Immortality, 213.

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