Transhumanism and Christian Anthropology in Contemporary Africa

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Abstract
Transhumanism, the philosophical and technological movement that seeks to transcend the biological limits of the human condition through science, is increasingly present in African life through artificial intelligence, genetic technologies, and digital medicine, yet it has received little sustained attention from African Christian scholarship. This paper examines the encounter between transhumanist aspirations and Christian anthropology, with particular reference to the contemporary African context. The problem addressed is the philosophical and theological tension generated when technological self-enhancement is pursued alongside a Christian understanding of humanity as a creature dependent upon God for identity, dignity and destiny. The study sets out to examine the central claims of transhumanism, analyse the fundamental assumptions of Christian anthropology, identify areas of convergence and divergence between the two, explore what emerging technologies mean for African Christian understandings of personhood, and propose an appropriate Christian response. Employing a qualitative, philosophical, and theological method that draws on biblical, theological and interdisciplinary literature, the paper argues that Christian anthropology need not reject technology outright but supplies enduring boundaries for evaluating human enhancement, since it locates human worth in the imago Dei rather than in technological self-transcendence. The African context further demands attention to communal personhood, inequality, indigenous conceptions of life and death, and the risk of technological dependency. The paper concludes that African churches and theologians must engage transhumanism critically and constructively rather than ignore it.

Keywords: *Transhumanism; Christian Anthropology, Imago Dei; Human Enhancement: Africa*

Introduction

Human beings have never been entirely content with the limits that nature has placed upon them, and every generation has, in its own way, sought means of pushing those limits further back. In the present century, however, the scale and speed of this pursuit have changed dramatically through the rise of transhumanism, a movement that envisions the deliberate use of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and neuro-technology to overcome ageing, disease, cognitive limitation, and, ultimately, death itself (Bostrom, 2005; More, 2013). What was once confined to speculative fiction now shapes serious policy discussion, medical research agendas, and popular imagination across the world, and Africa, contrary to a lingering assumption that it stands outside such developments, is very much a participant. Mobile money platforms, artificial intelligence applications in agriculture and

health, gene-editing research, and an expanding digital economy have brought biotechnology and computation into ordinary African life in ways that were unimaginable a generation ago (Harari, 2016). Alongside this technological transformation, African societies remain deeply shaped by Christian faith, which carries its own settled convictions about who the human being is, where human dignity comes from, and what human destiny ultimately consists of. It is at the meeting point of these two forces, transhumanist ambition and Christian conviction, that the present study is located. The problem this paper addresses is that transhumanism's vision of the enhanced, potentially immortal human person stands in unresolved tension with a Christian anthropology that understands the human being as a finite, embodied creature made in the image of God and dependent upon divine grace rather than technological mastery for wholeness and hope. Questions about mortality, about how far human limitation ought to be tolerated rather than engineered away, and about whether the drive toward technological self-transcendence is compatible with a posture of dependence upon God remain largely unanswered in African theological literature, which has, until now, given the subject insufficient sustained attention from a distinctly African vantage point.

Accordingly, the paper pursues five interlocking objectives: to examine the meaning and major claims of transhumanism; to analyse the fundamental assumptions of Christian anthropology; to examine the areas of convergence and divergence between the two; to explore the implications of emerging technologies for African Christian understandings of humanity; and to propose an appropriate Christian response to transhumanist aspirations in the African setting. The significance of pursuing these objectives is considerable.

Philosophically, the paper contributes to the philosophy of religion by clarifying how a theistic account of personhood engages a naturalistic account of human enhancement; theologically, it enriches Christian anthropology by testing its categories against a genuinely contemporary challenge; and practically, it speaks to African theological discourse, to bioethics, and to the wider debate on human dignity in an age of accelerating technological development, a debate in which African voices have so far been conspicuously few (Kunhiyop, 2008). In terms of scope and method, the study confines itself to the philosophical and theological dimensions of the transhumanism debate, with particular but not exclusive attention to the African context, and it proceeds through a qualitative, philosophical, and theological analysis that draws on relevant biblical, theological, philosophical, and interdisciplinary literature rather than empirical fieldwork.

Conceptual Clarifications

Before the argument of the paper can proceed further, it is necessary to clarify the key concepts around which the discussion turns. Transhumanism refers to an intellectual and technological movement, with roots traceable to the humanist and Enlightenment confidence in reason and progress, which holds that the human condition can and should be fundamentally improved through the application of science and technology (Bostrom, 2005). Its major assumptions include the conviction that human biology is not a fixed given but a work in progress, that suffering, ageing and cognitive limitation are technical problems awaiting technical solutions, and that the pursuit of radically extended, even indefinite, life is a legitimate and worthy human goal (More, 2013). Human enhancement, the practical arm of this vision, spans several overlapping fields: genetic enhancement, which seeks to modify the human genome to eliminate disease or improve capacity; artificial intelligence, which extends and, in some conceptions, eventually surpasses human cognition; robotics and human-machine integration, exemplified by neural implants and prosthetic augmentation; and biotechnology aimed at slowing or reversing the aging process. Christian anthropology, by contrast, is that branch of Christian doctrine concerned with the nature, origin, condition, and destiny of the human person, and it is anchored above all in the conviction that humanity is

God's creation, made in his image, the imago Dei, and therefore possessed of a dignity that is given rather than achieved (Berkouwer, 1962; Grudem, 1994).

This doctrine holds together an account of human sinfulness, of redemption through Christ, and of a destiny that culminates not in technological transcendence but in bodily resurrection and eternal communion with God. A related but distinct concept is posthumanism, which, unlike transhumanism's confidence in an enhanced but still recognisably human future, often anticipates or even welcomes a successor species no longer meaningfully human at all; the two movements converge in their scepticism toward fixed human nature but diverge sharply on whether the human, as such, is worth preserving (Hayles, 1999). Finally, the discussion must be situated within contemporary Africa, a continent undergoing rapid technological transformation while retaining cultural understandings of personhood that are markedly communal rather than individualistic, in which a person is a person only through other persons, a principle captured in the Southern African notion of ubuntu and echoed widely across West African thought (Mbiti, 1969; Idowu, 1973). It is the Christian church's engagement, often ambivalent, with this technological modernity, mediated through a communal cultural lens, that gives the African context of this study its particular texture.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in a single theoretical framework: the Relational Theory of the Imago Dei, propounded by the Dutch Reformed theologian G. C. Berkouwer (1962) in his study *Man: The Image of God*. Berkouwer's theory departs from older substantive theories, which located the image of God in a fixed human faculty such as reason or the soul, and from functional theories, which located it chiefly in humanity's exercise of dominion over creation. Instead, Berkouwer argued that the image of God is best understood relationally: it consists not in some possession internal to the human being but in humanity's standing in a living, responsive relationship with God, with fellow human beings, and with the created order.

On this view, to be human is, before anything else, to exist in relationship, and human dignity is neither self-generated nor infinitely malleable but is continuously constituted by God's own address to, and claim upon, the human creature. This theory is directly relevant to the present study for several reasons. First, it allows the paper to evaluate transhumanist enhancement not by asking whether a particular technology adds to or subtracts from some fixed catalogue of human faculties, a question the substantive theory would force, but by asking whether a given technological intervention strengthens or damages the relationships with God, with neighbour, and with creation, in which human dignity actually consists; this is a more supple and theologically serious test than a simple inventory of enhanced capacities.

Second, the relational emphasis resonates strongly with the communal conception of personhood already present in African thought, allowing the paper to bring Christian anthropology and African cultural understanding into conversation on shared terms rather than treating them as merely juxtaposed traditions (Bediako, 1995). Third, because Berkouwer's theory insists that the image of God is sustained by grace and cannot be forfeited, diminished, or technologically improved upon in its essential dignity, it provides firm theological ground from which to assess transhumanism's promise of self-engineered transcendence: no degree of enhancement can add to a dignity that is already, and unconditionally, conferred by God, and no degree of unenhanced limitation can subtract from it. This relational lens is applied consistently through the remainder of the paper as the principal theoretical instrument for evaluating whether technological enhancement preserves, challenges, or attempts to reconstruct the Christian understanding of what it means to be human.

Transhumanism and Its Vision of the Future Human

Transhumanism's philosophical foundations lie in a confident, broadly secular humanism that regards the human being as an unfinished project rather than a completed design, a conviction traceable through Enlightenment rationalism and Darwinian evolutionary thought to its contemporary technological expression (Bostrom, 2005; Fukuyama, 2002). Central to this vision is the idea of human enhancement as technological self-transformation: the deliberate use of pharmacology, genetic editing, and cybernetic augmentation to raise human capacities beyond their current species-typical ceiling, so that enhancement becomes not merely therapeutic, restoring a person to normal function, but properly transformative, propelling the person beyond what unaided biology could ever achieve. Artificial intelligence occupies a particularly prominent place within this vision, both as a tool that might augment human cognition directly, through brain-computer interfaces, and as an independent form of intelligence whose continued advance raises unsettling questions about what, if anything, remains distinctive about human identity once thinking itself can be outsourced or exceeded by machines (Harari, 2016). Genetic engineering, for its part, promises an even more fundamental reordering of the future of human nature, since interventions at the level of the germline would not merely enhance an individual but could, in principle, alter the hereditary endowment of the species itself. Perhaps the most emotionally charged strand of transhumanist thought, however, is its pursuit of technological immortality and the conquest of death, whether through radical life-extension therapies, cryonic preservation, or the more speculative ambition of uploading human consciousness into digital substrates, an ambition that treats death not as a horizon to be accepted but as an engineering failure to be corrected (More, 2013). Underlying all of these strands is a particular understanding of freedom and autonomy, in which the highest human good is the removal of every biological constraint upon individual choice so that the body itself becomes raw material to be reshaped according to the free decisions of the self. This vision has not gone without serious philosophical criticism. Fukuyama (2002) has argued that the transhumanist project, in seeking to abolish the very limitations that give human nature its coherence, in fact threatens to dissolve the shared human essence upon which universal human rights and human equality ultimately depend, while other critics point to the movement's optimistic assumption that technological problems admit of technological solutions without remainder, an assumption that a great deal of human suffering, moral and spiritual as much as biological, stubbornly resists.

Christian Anthropology and the Transhumanist Challenge

Read through the lens of Berkouwer's (1962) relational theory of the imago Dei, transhumanism's central claims generate a series of sharp theological challenges for Christian anthropology, and it is worth tracing these challenges systematically. The doctrine of creation affirms that human existence, including its embodied particularity, is given by God and declared good, so that any programme of technological self-modification must reckon with the prior theological claim that the human creature does not own itself in the way transhumanist autonomy assumes but exists always already in a relationship of dependence upon its Creator. This has direct bearing on how the imago Dei is related to human enhancement: because, on the relational view, the divine image is constituted by relationship rather than by any particular biological or cognitive capacity, no enhancement of capacity can increase a person's standing in the image of God, and no impairment can diminish it, a conclusion that quietly but firmly relativises the entire transhumanist hierarchy of enhanced over unenhanced humanity. Christian anthropology further insists on human finitude as a theologically meaningful, not merely regrettable, feature of creaturely existence, so that the transhumanist quest for technological perfection, understood as the elimination of every limitation, sits uneasily beside a tradition that has long taught that finitude, rightly borne, is

the very condition under which creatures learn dependence, humility, and trust in God (Moltmann, 1985). The tension becomes most acute over death and its conquest: where transhumanism seeks to defeat death through biological or digital means, Christian hope answers death not with avoidance but with resurrection, the promise that the whole embodied person, not a preserved consciousness or an engineered substitute, will be raised to a transformed and everlasting life in Christ, a hope grounded not in human technique but in divine act (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). On the question of freedom, Christian anthropology does not deny human agency but locates true freedom within, rather than against, submission to divine sovereignty, so that the transhumanist equation of freedom with the removal of every constraint represents, from a Christian vantage, a misidentification of freedom with autonomy rather than with rightly ordered relationship. The human body, far from being incidental raw material awaiting technological reconstruction, is understood in Christian teaching as intrinsic to personhood, redeemed rather than discarded, which is why the doctrine of bodily resurrection, rather than disembodied survival, remains central to Christian eschatology. Taken together, these considerations do not require Christians to reject every form of technological enhancement, since therapeutic and restorative uses of medicine have long been welcomed within Christian practice, but they do require that enhancement be evaluated by its effect upon relationship and dignity rather than treated as an unqualified good in itself, and they ground human dignity and the ethics of enhancement firmly in what God has given rather than in what technology can add.

Transhumanism and Christian Anthropology in the African Context

When this discussion is brought into the African setting, several distinctive considerations come to the fore. African Christian conceptions of personhood have long emphasised that to be human is to be embedded within a web of relationships, a conviction expressed in Mbiti's (1969) often-cited formulation that the individual exists because the community exists and exists only in that community; personhood, in other words, is not a private possession but a relational achievement realised through birth, initiation, marriage, ancestry, and communal recognition (Idowu, 1973; Turaki, 1999). This African communal understanding of humanity resonates strongly with the relational theory of the imago Dei that anchors this study, since both traditions locate human worth in relationship rather than in isolated individual capacity, and this resonance offers African Christian theology a genuine indigenous resource with which to engage transhumanism rather than merely importing Western categories wholesale (Bediako, 1995). At the same time, Christian faith in Africa exists alongside, and is increasingly tested by, an accelerating technological modernity, visible in the rapid uptake of digital finance, telemedicine, artificial intelligence applications in agriculture and education, and a growing, if still uneven, presence of biotechnology research on the continent. African indigenous understandings of life and death, which typically regard death not as annihilation but as transition into ancestorhood and continued relationship with the living community, sit in an interesting, only partially overlapping relationship with the transhumanist ambition to defeat death technologically, since both refuse to treat death as simple extinction, yet they diverge sharply on the means and manner of continued existence they envisage (Kalu, 2008).

Human enhancement raises, in addition, an urgent question of socio-economic inequality that is felt with particular force in Africa: enhancement technologies are costly, and their availability along existing lines of wealth and power threatens to inscribe a new and starker biological stratification onto societies already marked by significant inequality, so that the poor risk becoming, quite literally, a technologically unenhanced underclass (Kunhiyop, 2008). Artificial intelligence and biotechnology likewise pose fresh ethical questions for African Christian ethics, which must now reckon with algorithmic decision-making, genomic data, and digital surveillance in addition to the more familiar terrain of sexuality, marriage,

and economic justice. A further danger, frequently noted in African theological writing on globalisation, is the risk of technological colonialism, whereby enhancement technologies developed, owned, and controlled in wealthy nations are imported into African contexts on terms that reproduce old patterns of dependency under a new technological guise (Ukah, 2008). In light of all this, African Christian theology is called toward the construction of an African Christian philosophy of technology, one that neither rejects technological development out of a defensive traditionalism nor embraces it uncritically but evaluates it, in keeping with the relational imago Dei framework, according to whether it strengthens or erodes the communal, God-oriented relationships in which African Christian personhood is properly understood to consist.

Critical Discussion

A fair assessment of the relationship between transhumanism and Christian anthropology must attend honestly to both convergence and divergence. Where transhumanism and Christianity converge is in several genuinely shared concerns: both traditions express a serious desire to overcome suffering, a concern for human flourishing, an intellectual pursuit of knowledge, and a practical concern for improving human conditions, so that it would be a mistake to caricature transhumanism as simply hostile to values Christians also hold dear (Bostrom, 2005). The fundamental points of divergence, however, are equally real and arguably more consequential: transhumanism ultimately rests human autonomy against Christian anthropology's insistence on divine sovereignty; it sets technological immortality against the specifically Christian hope of bodily resurrection; it privileges self-engineering over the doctrine of divine creation; and it tends toward an individualist logic of enhancement that stands in some tension with the communal responsibility so central to both Christian and African understandings of personhood. Faced with this mixture of overlap and tension, the paper asks whether technology can participate in human flourishing at all, and the relational theory of the imago Dei suggests a qualified affirmative: technology, like any other human activity, can serve flourishing precisely to the extent that it serves and strengthens right relationship with God, neighbour and creation, and it damages flourishing when it is pursued in a manner that treats the body as mere material, dissolves communal obligation into private optimisation, or substitutes technological achievement for dependence upon God.

This leads naturally to the further question of whether Christians can accept human enhancement without thereby embracing transhumanism as a total philosophy, and the paper's answer, again following the relational framework, is that they can, provided a clear distinction is maintained between therapeutic or restorative enhancement, which seeks to heal or support a life understood as a gift, and transformative enhancement pursued as an end in itself, which risks displacing dependence upon God with confidence in technique. On this basis, the paper argues for a responsible Christian philosophy of technological development, one that welcomes genuine advances in medicine, communication, and productivity while insisting that such advances remain answerable to theological and communal criteria rather than to market logic or technological possibility alone.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the encounter between transhumanism and Christian anthropology within the contemporary African context, and it has argued throughout, using Berkouwer's (1962) relational theory of the imago Dei as its guiding framework, that Christian faith need not respond to transhumanism with either uncritical enthusiasm or reflexive rejection. Human dignity, on the relational view, is neither augmented by technological enhancement nor threatened by its absence, because that dignity rests entirely

upon God's own gracious relationship with the human creature rather than upon any humanly achieved or humanly engineered capacity.

This theological conviction, read together with African understandings of communal personhood, equips African Christian theology with genuine resources for engaging biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and the broader transhumanist vision critically, constructively, and on its own terms, rather than through categories borrowed wholesale from elsewhere. The paper has shown that convergence exists between transhumanist and Christian concerns for flourishing and the alleviation of suffering, but that decisive divergence remains over the source of human worth, the meaning of freedom, and the shape of ultimate hope, divergence that African Christian scholarship is well placed and increasingly obliged to articulate for its own societies.

Recommendations

Arising from the discussion above, the paper offers the following recommendations for African churches, theological institutions, and Christian scholars concerned with the responsible reception of emerging technologies:

1. African churches and theological institutions should engage emerging technologies through serious, sustained philosophical and theological reflection rather than through silence or reflexive suspicion.
2. Christian approaches to biotechnology and artificial intelligence should place human dignity and communal responsibility, understood relationally rather than merely individually, at the centre of ethical evaluation.
3. African Christian scholars should contribute more actively and confidently to global debates on transhumanism, developing indigenous theological categories rather than simply adopting Western frameworks wholesale.
4. Technological development affecting African societies should be assessed for its impact on existing social realities, particularly inequality and unequal access, so that enhancement technologies do not entrench a new biological underclass.
5. Christian theology should maintain a clear and teachable distinction between legitimate therapeutic technological advancement and attempts to redefine humanity solely through technological power.

Areas for Further Research

Further research might usefully pursue empirical study of African Christian attitudes toward specific enhancement technologies, comparative analysis of how other African indigenous religious traditions besides Christianity are responding to transhumanism, and closer theological engagement with concrete emerging fields such as gene editing and artificial general intelligence as they take shape on the continent.

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