

Philip Hefner: *Human Becoming in an Age of Science, Technology, and Faith*. Jason P. Roberts, and Mladen Turk (eds.)

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Perhaps one of the most problematic questions one can encounter is: What does being “human” denote, especially in the present technologically charged milieu? The book *Human Becoming in an Age of Science, Technology, and Faith* is the culmination of the scholarship of the celebrated Christian theologian, Philip Hefner, on his seminal definition of human beings as “created co-creators,” a definition which made its debut close to forty years ago in *Christian Dogmatics* (1984; Carl Braaten and Robert Jensen, eds.). Arguably, the created co-creator model has contributed significantly to the anthropological dialectics within the scholarship of Christian theology and science, having garnered several accolades—and criticisms. Perhaps its most appreciable success is the impressive representation of the advancements in science and technology as an integral part of the active continued process of creation and of human *becoming* (p. 11).

The book is both a monograph and an edited collection of responses, the latter intelligently synchronised by editors Jason Roberts and Mladen Turk. The book's content, grammar, and style are very engaging and intellectually stimulating, making it accessible to various readers—academics and non-academics alike. The book is divided into three parts with thirteen chapters. The first part, made up of five chapters, is written by Philip Hefner and expresses his concluding thoughts on the created co-creator model. Here, Hefner aptly reiterates his convictions (despite several criticisms) about the adequacy of the created co-creator model as a capacious framework for answering the problematic question of human identity today and for the impending future (p. 16). For Hefner, the enterprise of “becoming human” can be thought of in terms of a metaphor and a symbol of present reality as well as an unfolding process of our *becoming* as humans; a “memoir,” with humanity

being memoirists of the journey. He remarks, “We are discovering that our experience in the world is moving us toward new understandings and interpretations of who we are ... we are caught up in a process of becoming that requires fresh ideas ... images of ourselves ... as creators and created co-creators” (p. 18). The highlight of this section was his confrontation of the greatest challenge facing humanity as co-creators: the advance of AI and robotics. “The more perfectly robots serve human needs ... the more like us they will become ... they may not be humans, but they will be functioning like human creatures. The human-created co-creator will have created its own co-creator” (p. 70). With rapid advancement in technological creation in the image of humanity, the extent to which AI systems and technology will accurately mirror all that it means to be human remains debatable and open to conjecture. Hefner’s reference to a three-phased creation or creative activity, God–Humans–Robots, is delineated with consistent reference to a “threshold,” which, in cosmic terms, is imminent as humanity grapples with climate change and other negative consequences of our creative prowess. Hefner argues that once the “threshold” of creating in our (human) image has begun, there is not a question of stopping it, only that it must be done “thoughtfully and soberly” (p. 76), even though such a clause is undoubtedly malleable and subject to divergent opinions, interpretations, and use cases.

The book's second part features extended responses from Jason Roberts and Karl E. Peters. Roberts beautifully crafts a Protestant trinitarian re-representation of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as creator, redeemer, and sustainer respectively, in an analogous reference to humanity as co-creator, co-redeemer, and co-sustainer (p. 85). His argument unveils the theological tension created by the near conflation of “creator” and “creature” in ideological and pragmatic terms since humanity wiggles between being creators and creatures at different points, which ultimately presents humanity as “playing God” in many instances (p. 94), such as noted by critics of transhumanism and allied scientific expeditions. Karl E. Peters expounds on creativity, co-creating, and the common good of society, especially considering numerous ethical concerns emerging from the limitless technological creativity of humanity.

The third part of the book is a compilation of reflections from several authors such as Ted Peters who writes about the cosmic meaning of being human and the crisis of technological civilisation as the direct outcome of humanity's creative activities. Anna Case-Winters has a chapter titled "Knowing our Place: In the Image of God, at Home in the Cosmos" and Ann Pederson writes about icons and images and the representation of all creation as created co-creators. Gregory Peterson focuses on institutional interpretations of the created co-created model, while Mladen Turk writes on the idea of "uncertainty" as humanity unravels our becoming, and on the place of skepticism in our knowledge of humanity as co-creator and of the divine as Creator.

As beautifully curated as the book may be, it is not without its shortcomings. Some (not all) aspects of the second and third parts of the book appear as a reiteration of previously established ideas in the first part of the book. Perhaps the book could have been best presented as two separate publications with the second and third parts expanding and building off the created co-creator model, not necessarily a "response" to it. Also, the use of symbol and metaphor to describe the created co-creator model subliminally obscures the harsh realities of the negative consequences of technological exploits and ingenious scientific achievements. The perpetual effects and aftermaths of technological and scientific human creativity are not metaphors but present realities that all of creation must grapple with.

Notwithstanding, the book is an impressive compilation of the intersection between Christian theology and technological developments. Many ideas and concepts in scholarship often lose relevance over time, but the created co-creator model has managed to remain viable for decades. The book is highly recommended for any curious reader interested in the traditional understanding of humanity as created in the *imago Dei* and contemporary bio-techno-scientific ways of defining humanity.

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