

Review

Human Technological Enhancement and Theological Anthropology.
By Victoria Lorrimar. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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In the 1990s, several theologians argued that biotechnology's power to modify living organisms should be regarded theologically as "co-creation." Most prominent among them was Philip Hefner, professor emeritus of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and editor of *Zygon* until 2008. Hefner coined the phrase, "created co-creator," to define the status of human beings as creatures who could create. We human beings are "created" by God through evolution. As creatures, however, we are unique among creatures because we alone have the ability through technology to contribute to the ongoing creation. Simply put, we are "created" by God in order to be "co-creators" with God. This claim puts a theological frame around genetic engineering, offering legitimacy for bold human action while suggesting that biotechnology must serve the most noble of purposes.

Victoria Lorrimar has offered what is so far the best study of the meaning of the human "created co-creator," starting with what it means in Hefner's own writings and how it came to be used by others. She quotes Hefner's main work, *The Human Factor* (1993, 69): "Human beings are God's created co-creators whose purpose is to be the agency, acting in freedom, to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us....Exercising this agency is said to be God's will for humans." Then she carefully parses this phrase by tracing its development throughout Hefner's writing.

As the title of Lorrimar's work suggests, her central theological question has to do with human enhancement. For Hefner and others in the 1990s, human enhancement technologies had not yet captured the attention of theologians. The theological question then had to do with the legitimacy of genetic engineering. By what right do human beings modify the DNA of other living creatures? To this day, there are critics of genetically modified organisms, many of whom are not particularly religious, who think human beings have no business "playing God" by tinkering with genes. Theologians like Hefner showed a surprising openness to the idea that humans are created to be creators through technology. Instead of "playing God," bioengineers are engaged in "co-creation," something we are meant to do.

In the decades following the 1990s, theological attention turned from the modification of nonhuman creatures to the modification of our own species, specifically to the question of the theological legitimacy of human enhancement. Are human beings created or intended by God to create themselves, even if only in a limited or qualified way? Does the "created co-creator" now become the "created self-creator"? How far should Christian theological anthropology go in offering support to Transhumanist visions of an enhanced humanity? Or should theology

insist that if humans really are “created” by God, any attempt at “self-creation” must be rejected?

Although Lorrimar has explored some of these issues elsewhere in her published work, more could be said about it here in this book. That said, the strength of what she offers lies precisely in the way she returns to the past (all the way back to the 1990s!) for guidance for today’s debates about theology and enhancement.

A central claim of the book is that whatever its strengths may have been, the theological anthropology of the 1990s failed to take account of the theological significance of human imagination or creativity. Hefner and other writers did not engage literary, artistic, or creative sources, nor did they consider critical or disciplined interpretations of human creativity as a source for theology. In Hefner’s case, science and technology were regarded as sources of theological insight, against which the traditional claims and novel proposals of theology might be assessed. But the works of human imagination were generally not considered by Hefner or others.

As Lorrimar writes (169), “The central question of the present work is to consider how a greater focus on imagination might equip and expand current theological responses to the challenges of human enhancement.” Her “focus on imagination” is realized mainly by a turn to literary sources and literary theory, and her central focus is the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, best known for his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In his nonfiction writings, Tolkien comments on the process of literary creation and on the human creative process in general. Instead of calling it “co-creation,” he uses the term “sub-creation,” thereby emphasizing the smallness of the human contribution compared with the divine work of creation. The attention that Lorrimar gives to this is perhaps its most original contribution.

The point of any theological interpretation of technology is to provide some sense of guidance to human beings as creators and consumers of technology. Beyond our frantic pursuits of novelty, fame, or fortune, what exactly is technology for, what forms should it take, and what goals should we pursue? Toward the end of her book, after having taken the contribution of the human imagination into account and offering a revised interpretation of the meaning of “co-creation,” Lorrimar readily admits that “this framework for co-creation does not produce quick or easy answers to the forms of enhancement we might devise...” (269). The lack of easy answers does not mean that there are no answers.

For Lorrimar, any possible answer would seem to lie in the complicated mix of an imagination-inspired theological anthropology expressed in the liturgies and practices of religious communities that shape the consciousness of just enough human beings to make a difference in the direction of technologies that truly enhance all humanity and all living things. Of course, technology can be used for evil. Theology can seem irrelevant and impotent in comparison. And human imagination can inspire greed and destruction. And yet there are voices like Lorrimar that seek to show us a better way.

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