

Session 2.2: Redeeming Technology in Practice 2nd December 2017

Title: Technology and Human Nature:
Is it ethical to use technology to enhance our bodies and minds?
Should we change our fundamental human nature?

Speaker: Prof John WYATT
Ethics and Perinatology, University College London



John Wyatt is Emeritus Professor of Neonatal Paediatrics at University College London. He was previously Professor and academic lead for the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at University College London Hospitals, an internationally recognised centre for the care of critically ill new-born infants. He has a special interest in the implications of advances in technology for the future of humanity and he is currently leading a research project based at the Faraday Institute on the philosophical, social and ethical implications of advances in robotics and artificial intelligence.

Prof Wyatt will be presenting his talk, and participating in the Q&A / discussion, live from the UK.

Abstract:

The idea of using technology to enhance and improve the function of our bodies and minds can be traced back to the European Enlightenment, in the writings of Diderot and other thinkers. It can be considered part of the "Enlightenment Project" but it has taken more than 200 years for this to become technically feasible. The Canadian writer George Grant wrote that the fundamental goal of technology is the mastery of nature, and the mastery of human nature represents the final frontier for this way of thinking. We don't have to accept the limitations of our own bodies - we can transcend and change our humanity.

Christian responses to these challenges have been varied. Some see use of technology to improve humanity as a form of "co-creation", taking on and enhancing the creative work of God. Others see it as a threat to the goodness of creation and the way in which the original embodied human nature is vindicated and affirmed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. There is no doubt that enhancing technology will become increasingly powerful and widespread in the coming decades and thoughtful responses are urgently needed.

Reading:

- "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity" Nick Bostrom. Article #43 in Scharff and Dusek.

Further reading:

- *Technology and Justice* (1987) George Grant, University of Notre Dame Press.
- *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian hope in an age of technological enhancement* (2011) Ronald Cole-Turner (ed), Georgetown University Press.
- *Resurrection and Moral Order* (1994) Oliver O'Donovan, Inter-Varsity Press.