THE VIEW FROM THE VALLEY
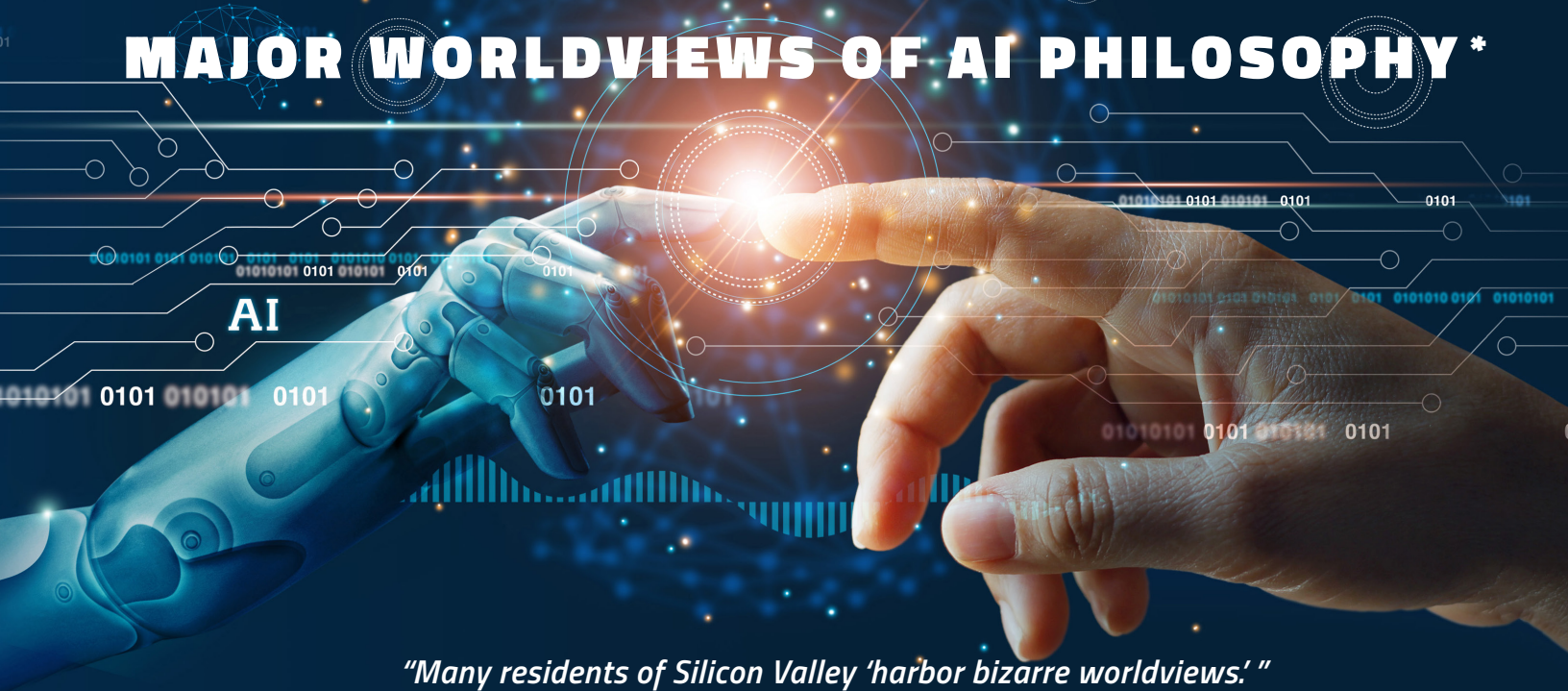
MAJOR WORLDVIEWS OF AI PHILOSOPHY*

"Many residents of Silicon Valley 'harbor bizarre worldviews.' "
- Noah Baron[1]

WALLACE HENLEY

▶ **A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS**

It is no secret that Big Tech has flexed its muscles and weaved its influential fiber ever more prominently into the fabrics of all of human life in the last two decades and especially since the global pandemic. The promises of artificial intelligence (AI) for human flourishing, and especially its integration into all aspects of commerce, would by necessity a prime mover of the New Kingdom Economy. But what exactly are the implications for Christians who must adopt and adapt to this new world order? Pastor and author Dr. Wallace Henley sounds the alarm for believers in his new book, *Who Will Rule the Coming 'Gods' - The Looming Spiritual Crisis of Artificial Intelligence*. Henley's analysis offers critical insights for Christians navigating a marketplace controlled by AI technology and by extension the beliefs and philosophies of its creators. It is a very timely exposé for the theme of the current issue of the CBR. We are deeply grateful to the author for permission to reprint excerpts from his new book.

INTRODUCTION

How do the people who are developing and programming the "gods" of the future see the world? How can "principle" get into the logic-systems of an AI machine? And what "principles" would the programmers install? What are the spiritual, philosophical, ethical, and moral beliefs that humans will wire into *imago hominis*, and how will they do it?

What are the "permanent things" (to borrow Russell Kirk's terminology) that will be constants in the AI machine, meaning that no matter where their self-learning takes them these will be immovable, like the "ancient boundaries" set by the "fathers" in Proverbs 22:28?

Russell Kirk reminds us that by "the Permanent Things" T. S. Eliot "meant those elements in the human condition that give us our nature, without which we are as the beasts that perish. They work upon us all in the sense that both they and we are bound up in that continuity of belief and institution called the great mysterious incorporation of the human race."[2]

These are all vital worldview issues. They can be answered only by understanding the worldview of AI makers that gets programmed into the machines.

Steve Jobs may have been reflecting an important component of the Silicon worldview when he contemplated death. "I'm about fifty-fifty on believing in God… For most of my life I've felt there must be something more to existence than meets the eye…"

Jobs, facing death from pancreatic cancer, seemed to have been giving evidence of *ambiguity* as a major component in his worldview relating to transcendence, and perhaps that of many others in Silicon Valley.

At one point in his musings about dying, Jobs said that he liked "to think that something survives after you die… But on the other hand, perhaps it's like an on-off switch: Click! And you're gone. Maybe that's why I never liked to put on-off switches on Apple devices." [3]

A worldview afloat on ambiguity has significant implications regarding decision-making and values. However, despite Jobs' preference, non-ambiguous on-off switches for artificial intelligence devices are essential. A question of apocalyptic proportions may loom in the future as a desperate humanity asks, *How can we stop these machines?* There will be no room for philosophical haziness regarding such a conundrum.

That brings us back to the fundamental question of this book: *Who will rule the coming "gods"?* What do the people who program limits into AI devices believe ethically, morally, and spiritually? On-off switches deal with absolutes. What are the absolute values that set boundaries on belief for the tech titans and their minions, and behavior embedded in their worldviews individually and collectively?

How do the creators of the machines see the world?

EIGHT ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

All worldviews are "religious" in the sense that they seek to answer ultimate questions, and rest on values. James Sire lists eight essential questions every worldview should answer:[4]

1. What is ultimate reality?
2. What is the nature of external reality… the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person at death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?
8. What personal, life-orienting commitments, are consistent with this worldview?

To explore each of these in relation to AI would require another entire book. However, the question at the heart of the issue of transcendence is Sire's first: *What is ultimate reality?*

Answering the question requires going back in history, to the Enlightenment, and the reach of its tentacles into modern time. Fazale R. Rana and Kenneth R. Samples write that, "in some respects transhumanism, the merger of humans and AI machines, is the culmination of the vision of the Enlightenment, a philosophical movement of the seventeenth

and eighteenth centuries." [5] That movement that Western culture embraced saw reason as the ultimate, "the only legitimate authority." [6]

Rana and Samples quote Rene Descartes, the seventeenth century French philosopher who many regard as the "father of philosophy," when he said that humanity might come to the point in its acquisition of knowledge of the natural world that humans might "thereby make ourselves, as it were, the lords and masters of nature." [7]

In contemporary times Ben Saunders says that "techno-faith" is "a fundamental belief in the power of the human will to transform the world to reflect human desires, through the agency of technology." [8]

> ## What are the absolute values that set boundaries on belief for the tech titans and their minions, and behavior embedded in their worldviews individually and collectively?

▶ ULTIMATE REALITY

In this worldview humans, their self-interests, and capacities for reason constitute the ultimate reality in the minds of many creators of the tech-world—for which Silicon Valley and its concentration of companies is a prime symbol.

However, Silicon Valley is not godless, and neither is the tech-world. Skip Vaccarello has lived in Silicon Valley, the heart of America's tech world, for more than forty years. In his book *Finding God in Silicon Valley*, he breaks through common assumptions regarding its secularity.

Vaccarello writes on his website: "It may surprise you that the God of the Bible is active and working in Silicon Valley. He is at the center of the lives of many entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, business and non-profit leaders, programmers, and ordinary people." [9]

It is crucial to know the core elements of what we will call here the "Silicon Valley Worldview" for three reasons:

First, as artificial intelligence development reaches toward producing a machine with some level of consciousness, the makers will unwittingly program their own worldviews into the machines.

Second, worldviews evolve value systems, and therefore the principles inherent in the worldviews of the human developers will be the values that determine algorithms and set boundaries for the actions of the artificial intelligence robots.

Frank Pasquale writes, in his book, *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms that Control Money and Information*, that "proprietary algorithms… are immune from scrutiny." They render us vulnerable to surveillance, censorship masking as persuasion, and so 'undermining the openness of our society.'" Almost all "the major social media networks" promote the worldviews associated with progressivism and "left-wing politics. Because of "the monopolistic power" of the big networks "contamination" with such worldviews "is inevitable." [10]

Third, censorship is an increasing concern, and the Silicon Valley worldview will set the criteria by which such censorship works. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg told a congressional committee in 2018 that he understood the concern because his huge company and the tech industry in general are headquartered in California's Silicon Valley which he described as "*an extremely left-leaning place*." [11]

If the time comes that artificial intelligence dictates thought to an increasingly compliant humanity, what will be the philosophies that determine what people can know and express?

The answer to that is in the details of the philosophy. What, then, are key components of the Silicon Valley worldview that determine how many makers of artificial intelligence devices will answer life's most important questions?

Carl Cantana, a former Google software engineer living in San Francisco, reflects on the silicon valley culture he experienced, and finds these characteristics:

- *Self-righteousness*: "Very few people seem comfortable admitting that maybe, just possibly, they are not changing the world. Many people have a savior complex, even if they are working on a food delivery app. It's unlike anything I've seen anywhere else. At least in New York, people feel comfortable admitting they're in it for the

money," says Cantana.[12]

- *Hedonistic subculture*: Organizational psychologist Barbara Adams says there is a difference between "espoused values" of Silicon values and the actual "values-in-use." The actuality, she writes, suggests "burnout from a killer work culture, rampant sexism and ageism, embarrassing lack of ethnic, racial, and gender diversity, and a perverse pride in lack of professionalism." [13]

- *Utilitarianism*: Utilitarianism believes that things are right and good if they have practical outcomes for the majority of people. It is a primary doctrine promoting the idea that the ends justify the means. Noah Baron, the civil rights attorney quoted at the beginning of this chapter, told of going to a party not long after he moved to San Francisco. Most of the attendees were from the Silicon Valley tech industry. In a conversation with one of them, the man argued that (Communist) China's single party system was better than American democracy because it was "more efficient." Baron responded that though the American system has its imperfections, nevertheless it "preserves many of our political freedoms and secures rights of workers to an extent unknown in China." The Silicon Valley man could only reply by noting China's "massive" economic growth.[14]

- *Objectivism*: "Perhaps the most influential figure in the (tech) industry…isn't Steve Jobs or Sheryl Sandberg, but rather Ayn Rand," according to an article in Vanity Fair. "At their core, Rand's philosophies suggest that it's O.K. to be selfish, greedy, and self-interested, especially in business, and that a win-at-all-costs mentality is just the price of changing the norms of society." Someone said that Rand's books should be retitled, "It's O.K. to Be a Sociopath"[15] …Rand promoted objectivism, the idea that what matters is what "exists" in the existential world rather than the transcendent. Knowledge comes by

reason, not revelation. The highest moral goal for any individual is his or her own happiness.

- *Progressivism*: "The French Revolution, communism, and Nazism each believed itself the vanguard of a dawning age. They each claimed a position for their version of the new man (in original), gloriously evolved individuals who had glimpsed into the very cosmic truth of where history was marching," writes Peter M. Burfeind.[16]

> **Humans, their self-interests, and capacities for reason constitute the ultimate reality in the minds of many creators of the tech-world.**

Many in Silicon Valley believe they are on the leading edge of the "right side" of history, and will bring into reality the technology that will be messianic in saving people and the world they inhabit from the "hell" of the old world and its cumbersome values. The "new transhuman" is the dream of the makers of artificial intelligence.

Farhad Manjoo, writing in the *New York Times*, summed up the Silicon Valley worldview:

> A 2017 Stanford University survey of Silicon Valley elites sought to discover the principles that would guide policy as they and their industries grow as a political force. The findings provide a clear summation of the Silicon Valley worldview, especially as it relates to political philosophy. The study showed that tech entrepreneurs are very liberal—among some of the most left-leaning Democrats you can find. They are overwhelmingly in favor of economic policies that redistribute wealth, including higher taxes on rich people and lots of social services for the poor, including universal health care. Their outlook is cosmopolitan and globalist—they support free trade and more open immigration, and they score low on measures of "racial resentment… They oppose restrictions on abortion, favor gay rights, support gun control and oppose the death penalty…"

The Stanford survey showed one area where the leaders of Silicon Valley "deviate from Democratic orthodoxy." They

don't like "government's efforts to regulate business, especially when it comes to labor."[17]

Worldviews arise from religious beliefs. Such systems try to answer the questions of deity and ultimacy. What or who is supreme in the universe? What or who caused creation? What is the position of the reasoning, feeling human being with respect to the ultimate? What is the purpose of it all?

Israeli academician and writer Juval Harari sensed the religious vibes in the AI cosmos. "If you want to meet the prophets who will be remaking the 21st century, don't bother going to the Arabian Desert or the Jordan Valley—go to Silicon Valley," Harari said.[18]

But those "prophets" are not proclaiming a biblical message. "You can be openly polyamorous, and people will call you brave. You can put micro-doses of LSD in your cereal, and people will call you a pioneer. But the one thing you cannot be is a Christian."

So said a participant appearing in HBO's "Silicon Valley", referring to the religious atmosphere of the region and the realm of which it is the capital. Silicon Valley is "statistically one of the least religious section of the states, with sixty-one percent of the Bay Area (of California) not attending church, compared to a thirty-eight percent average," wrote Zara Stone, in a *Forbes* report.[19]

But, again, that does not mean that the heart of computerdom is without religion. Silicon Valley does believe that something—if not Someone—is ultimate, and, like all religious people its adherents interpret the world through the lens of that belief system. It may not be compatible with Christianity, but Silicon Valley religion is as doctrinaire as any church or denomination.

Worldviews produce doctrinal systems, whether theistic or not. The AI religion, though it may have been created by fun-loving freethinkers, nevertheless is developing its own Magisterium, sets of dogma that would vie with stacks of systematic theologies. Except this dogma centers on AI-ology.

Jesus Christ shared with His people a grand vision for the coming of the Kingdom of God into the world—the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 24; Romans 14:17).

(Multi-millionaire AI engineer Anthony) Levandowski also has a "kingdom" vision: *Way of the Future is about creating a peaceful and respectful transition of who is in charge of the planet from people to people + machines.*[20]

AI religion's "god" is strictly quantitative. What qualifies the "machine" as being "godlike" is that it possesses more *quanta* than mere humans. "It's not a god in the sense that it makes lightning or causes hurricanes," Levandowski says. "But if there is something a billion times smarter than the smartest human, what else are you going to call it?"[21]

Yet as we have seen elsewhere (in this book), the true and transcendent God cannot be "created" because He is eternally "I Am," not "I was," or "I will be." He interacts with finite time, but He is not in time, bound to finitude.

God's omniscience is not merely a greater collection of data than that held by humans, but knowledge of the essence of all things. That is, in His transcendent mind God knows the actuality of pure being. By contrast, the human on the immanent plane sees only the manifestation of phenomena in time and space and knows appearance and function to which he or she gives "name." To put it another way, a person may know the name of someone or something, but God knows what's "behind" the name, the essence, or essential being, of the person.

Isaiah 42:20 reveals the limitations of human vision without transcendence: "You (humans) have seen many things, but you do not observe them." Thus, "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

The God revealed in the Bible is the "Spirit" in whom "spirit and truth" combine (John 4). "Spirit" refers to His qualitative Being of otherness, while "truth" the objective information He knows—which is all information about all things.

Humans have invested "spirit" with all kinds of meanings, from the ethereal to the ghostly. The old translators of the Bible into English even called the Holy Spirit the Holy "Ghost." But authentic "spirit" has to do with dimensionality and otherness.

Levandowski and his AI religion probably don't represent

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the major view in Silicon Valley. However, Levandowski is one of the Silicon Valley inhabitants who believes artificial intelligence will transform human existence and even dictate "whether our species survives or not."[22]

The AI "religious" view of God is *immanence pretending to be transcendence*. This belief is dangerous to its adherents. History shows what happens when people ascribe transcendence to institutions and individuals who actually exist on the immanent scale. When humans structure their own deities, they easily become instruments of exploitation.

> ## The AI tech world is full of "congregants" who pursue a "kingdom" vision, one in which human-made superintelligence plays an angelic role in the sense of Hebrews 1:14

Despite all this, AI religion shares with Christianity a theology of *soteriology*, or salvation. This means there is evil from which the world must be saved.

▶ SIN AND EVIL

Google professed a sense of moral purity—as exemplified by its informal motto, 'Don't be evil...' [23] That slogan has now been changed to "do the right thing"—but what is the "right thing," according to Google and others working especially in developing artificial intelligence? The "right thing" in Google's eyes is the "moral thing." However, "moral" seems to be thoroughly pragmatic or in the eye of the beholder in the AI catechism. If this characterizes AI religion, then it is another form of legalism. However, grace is needed in computerdom, and without it all that's left is a do-or-die progressivism.

Yuval Noah Harari reflects on the emergence of AI religion and its promised salvation, and sees it in the context of Marx:

> The socialists created a brave new religion for a brave new world. They promised salvation through technology and economics, thus establishing the first techno-religion in history and changing the foundations of human discourse. Up until then, the great religious debates revolved around gods, souls, and the afterlife... After Marx, however, questions

of technology and economic production became far more divisive and important than questions about the soul and the afterlife." [24]

Progressivism is not only a worldview but a religion for many. Not only is the doctrine of the "coming kingdom" important in Judaism and Christianity, but, as we have seen, also in AI religion. The AI tech world is full of "congregants" who pursue a "kingdom" vision, one in which human-made superintelligence plays an angelic role in the sense of Hebrews 1:14, which says that God sent them as "ministering spirits" ...to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation.

"Progressives believe they have unique insight, a secret *gnosis* (knowledge) into the cosmic end toward which society must *progress*, and their cosmically-ordained task is to lead their benighted fellow citizens toward this end," says Peter Burfeind.[25]

AI religion even displays evangelistic zeal and missionary vision. Google co-founder Larry Page had a vision from childhood of transforming the world. He wanted to be an inventor because, he said, "I really wanted to change the world... I didn't want to just invent things, I also wanted to make the world better, and in order to do that, you need to do more than just invent things."[26] Such a vision drives many who are developing artificial intelligence. They believe they are serving humanity by making robotics that can solve our problems.

"Google was a company built on the values of its founders," discovered Peter Levy, in spending time at "The Plex," Google's California headquarters. Larry Page and Sergey Brin "harbored ambitions to build a powerful corporation that would impact the entire world..."[27]

One of their goals "was building a giant artificial intelligence machine that would bring uncertain consequences to the way all of us live. From the very beginning, its founders said they wanted to change the world."[28] "From the very start, its founders saw Google as a vehicle to realize the dream of artificial intelligence in augmenting humanity."[29] They believed this could be fulfilled by making information available

on the widest scale.

Jesus said, "the *truth* will make you free" (John 8:32). Google said, *information* will give you liberty. There is a profound difference between the respective promises. Jesus meant *qualitative* truth, while Page and Brin were thinking of *quantitative* data. The danger enters, however, when Google or any other internet source begins to twist information according to its own worldviews and values.

AI religion also has a "hope of heaven." This is the great quest driving the transhuman passion. It is not just a desire to enhance human performance in the here and now, but to do away with death itself. An article about PayPal Founder Peter Thiel begins with this editor's note:

> "Billionaire Peter Thiel believes it all: Singularity, Convergence, Transcendence and most importantly, Transhumanism. In other words, Thiel wants to become immortal and live forever, essentially becoming a god. He is spending his billions to achieve it."[30]

Where will all this lead? Those who cross the "transhuman" threshold and become immortal may discover that they have not stepped into Heaven, but into Hell itself, and dragged the rest of humanity down with them.

So, even more than in 1939 we need "scientists of conscience" whose worldview is formed by ultimate truth and its values. There is a surprising example in a man who, like Albert Einstein, fled from Germany, but, unlike Einstein, used his science for a period to actually serve the Nazis. His story shows what happens when a person of science is transformed by True Transcendence.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

WALLACE HENLEY is the author or co-author of more than 25 books, including *God and Churchill* (with Jonathan Sandys, Great-grandson of Sr. Winston Churchill)(Tyndale, 2015), and *Globequake: Living in the Unshakeable Kingdom While the World Falls Apart* (Thomas Nelson, 2012). Wallace writes as an exclusive columnist for the *Christian Post*, where he focuses on the confluence of politics, culture and theology. He is a teaching pastor at Grace Church (Woodlands, TX.) and was Senior Associate Pastor of Houston's Second Baptist Church. A leadership expert who has trained leaders in more than 20 countries, Wallace started his career in the 1960s as a reporter and editor for the Birmingham (AL) News, followed by a stint at the White House as an assistant to President Richard Nixon and as Assistant Director of the Cabinet Committee on Education. Wallace, who holds degrees from Samford University, Southwestern Theological Seminary, and Trinity Theology Seminary (U.K.), is married to Irene for 60 years and together they have 2 children, 6 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren.

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