Bingecast: John Lennox on Artificial Intelligence and Humanity

Austin Egbert:

Greetings. I'm Austin Egbert, director of Mind Matters News. You're listening to another bingecast, where multiple episodes are combined into a single program. This week, we talked with Dr. John Lennox about the impacts artificial intelligence will have on the future of humanity. Enjoy.

Announcer:

Welcome to Mind Matters News, where artificial and natural intelligence meet head on. Here is your host, Robert J. Marks.

Robert J. Marks:

Greetings. In "1984," George Orwell forecasts a dystopian future under Communism. His classic book was titled, "1984." Many of Orwell's prediction about Communism were proven. So what will be the effects of A.I. a century later in the year 2084? Replacing George Orwell is Dr. John Lennox who has written the book, "2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity." How will AI, not Communism, affect the future?

Robert J. Marks:

Dr. Lennox is able to look at the AI phenomenon from a number of different perspectives. From the typical side, he is an emeritus professor of mathematics at Oxford University. On the theoretical side, he is a pastoral advisor of Green Templeton College at Oxford University. Dr. Lennox, welcome.

John Lennox:

Thank you very much. I'm delighted to be on your program.

Robert J. Marks:

That's wonderful. This is the second time we've talked. Your first interview had a lot of traffic, so it's really great to talk to you again. You have written a book entitled, "2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity." The first obvious question to ask is, why did you write this book?

John Lennox:

Well, there is a sense in which I have been interested in futuristic scenarios for a long time. I'm not a sci-fi addict, but I was deeply impressed by C.S. Lewis's sci-fi trilogy. And he raises the question in the third of those books, "That Hideous Strength." He imagines scientists trying to increase their power by preserving a human brain. And as I read that book and saw the issues it raised, it put into my mind the idea that it might be important to think through this stuff as it develops as it has.

John Lennox:

But the major reason for writing it was that I was asked to give a lecture on the topic in connection with the Book of Genesis. And I said, "Look, I think you've come to the wrong person." And they said, "No. We think you're the person to do this." Well, I decided in the end to do it because it initially had to do with artificial intelligence and the nature of humanity.

John Lennox:

As I started reading, background reading, of various people, I discovered that a lot had been said, a lot had been written, but there was a real need, in my view, of evaluating it. And so, it has ended up with this book.

Robert J. Marks:

I see. Well, could you give us a quick overview, a thumbnail sketch, of what the book is about?

John Lennox:

Well, the book really is, has several purposes. I want to demystify the good side of AI, so that people, particularly Christians, but not only, are not afraid of it. And secondly, I want to take some of the hype out of the science fiction side, artificial general intelligence. So we need to distinguish between those two things. That's very important. And then discuss for both kinds of artificial intelligence, the ethical and philosophical and indeed, theological questions that are raised by them.

Robert J. Marks:

Very good. In talking about AI duplicating humans, duplicating us, it seems important to ask the question, what does it mean to be human? So we're looking at AI possibly duplicating humans. I don't believe that'll ever happen. But what do you think? Do you think that AI will ever had the capability of duplicating a human?

John Lennox:

Well, I doubt it, like you, because I think this is where we need to make the distinctions very clearly. Narrow artificial intelligence tends to do one thing superbly well that normally takes human intelligence to do. But the machinery, and it consists of a computer with a capacity to dig into a large database and recognize patterns there, that's impressive. And there are wonderful examples, particularly in medicine, of it working very efficiently.

John Lennox:

But the second kind of artificial intelligence, AGI, artificial general intelligence, is really the quest for a superintelligence of one of two kinds, either enhancing human beings as they exist and building a biological superintelligence, or else discovering ways of uploading or downloading the contents, say, of the human mind onto silicone, so that we remove the dependence on an organic substrate. And there, it seems to me, that the likelihood of building a superintelligence that exceeds human capacity in every direction is very slim, because human intelligence is conscious. And we don't know what consciousness is. No scientist knows what consciousness is. And that the most serious people recognize that, that is a huge barrier. How can you build a conscious being when you don't even know what consciousness is?

Robert J. Marks:

Yes, I think there is different theories of consciousness. One is called panpsychism, I believe, which is the idea that since you can't explain it, it must be a property of the universe and that everything has a degree of consciousness, for example, a refrigerator. Just because it has mass, it has energy, but it also has a consciousness associated with it. Do you have any thoughts on that and panpsychism?

John Lennox:

A very few serious thoughts on that, because it seems to me to be a misuse of the word consciousness. Once everything is conscious, the word loses its meaning. A refrigerator is not aware of itself, we are. And it seems to be a vast difference between the two. And I suspect there is very little mileage in eroding the concept, so that everything that we said of consciousness and so that one can say, well, there is no mystery. Of course, some philosophers, I think Daniel Dennett may be one, just deals with the question by supposing it doesn't exist.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. I tell people, "I'm pretty... I know I'm conscious. I'm not really sure about you." It's a hard thing to communicate. It's a hard thing to define as you said. I don't think believe artificial general intelligence will ever be developed. But if indeed I'm wrong, should AGI be given rights? You talk about this in the book a little bit. And I thought about it, and it turns out that there are non-human entities that are given rights, such as corporations. They're treated as a non-human entity. Do you believe that artificial general intelligence will ever mature to the point where its given rights like a freedom of speech or whatever?

John Lennox:

Well again, I think consciousness is the big barrier. What do rights mean given to an entity that does not appear to be in itself a moral entity? Now, why I put it that way is, the fact that even narrow AI, for example, we are involved these days in very rapidly developing self-driving vehicles controlled by artificial intelligence. And the programming of such vehicles raises all kinds of ethical questions.

John Lennox:

For example, if an artificially intelligent self-driving car is coming down a road and its sensors pick up an old man crossing the street and on the other side there is a line of children waiting for a bus and it's going to hit one of the two, how does it decide between them?

John Lennox:

There are huge ethical questions. And the problem is that the machine itself is amoral, so that the ethics that's built into it have got to be the ethics of the programmers. And therefore, we have to inquire what right have they and on what principles will they function? And that's a concern to many people who are working at the higher levels of implementing AI in great corporations and so on.

John Lennox:

What ethical principles are we going to go by? Because one thing is very clear to everybody, the technology is outpacing the ethics by a very large factor.

Robert J. Marks:

Interesting. I agree with you, by the way, that ethics is never the responsibility of the artificial intelligence. It belongs to whoever did the programming and who is ever the end user of it.

Robert J. Marks:

You also mentioned self-driving cars. I think that there we have a case of the failure of a type of general artificial intelligence that has failed to deliver what it was promised to deliver. And if you can't do self-driving cars, people and corporations are abandoning the research into self-driving cars, how can we ever have an artificial general intelligence? It's going to be an interesting thing to watch.

Robert J. Marks:

As all these things happen, John, technology is changing everything. I had withdrawal symptoms a couple weeks ago when I was separated from my cell phone. You just rely on these things. So in what sense do you think AI technology will change what it means to be human?

John Lennox:

Well, it is going to do certain things. It's already doing them. One very important example of that is the change in the job structure in society, because as more and more processes get automated, and they reckon in the United States, I think, within 20 or so years, at least 30% of current jobs will fall under artificial intelligence and therefore, will no longer exist for human beings.

John Lennox:

It's going to create a huge problem of reemploying such people, because employment will increasingly depend on advanced knowledge of technology and not everybody's got that. Now, I'm speaking of a highly developed nation like the USA.

John Lennox:

I was recently in South Africa. And they were saying that AI is creating a huge problem, because when people lose their jobs there, there isn't the educational infrastructure to educate them to take over these new technological positions. So that's creating a problem.

John Lennox:

And the thinking members of the community are asking questions about what does it mean to have a large proportion of your culture unemployed? Because from the biblical point of view, and I think this is very important because psychology confirms this, that jobs mean a great deal to people. They supply part of the meaning of their lives. And if you deprive them of jobs, the recent research has shown, it can lead to all kinds of pretty serious psychological problems. So we got to think that through. And you can repeat this in all kinds of other spheres, but that's one example.

Robert J. Marks:

Very interesting. It's been said that AI is the new electricity. It's neither good nor bad. You've addressed some of the potential negative uses of artificial intelligence or the negative impacts of artificial intelligence. But expanding on that, what are some of the big threats that you see in the use of AI technology in the near future?

John Lennox:

Well, the threats are best explained by comparing them with the advantages. So let's take a very simple and practical example, which is extremely useful, and that is in the field of X-ray technology. Let's imagine that we construct a database of a million X-rays of people's lungs. And we get the best medical experts in the world to label the diseases on those images. That becomes a big database for a computer AI system. And then you or I, we get problems with our breathing, an X-ray is taken, and in a few seconds it's compared with a million pictures in the database and out comes the diagnosis. Now, we're already at the stage where such diagnoses tend on average to be quite a bit better than you would get in your local hospital. So there is a positive thing.

John Lennox:

Now, let's go down the scale and think of the AI associated with our smart phones. We buy a book. And a few days later, up pops a little message that says, people that bought that book also were interested in this book. And your attention is drawn to buying the second book. Well, that can be very useful, or it can be very irritating. That's what many people do not realize is that, that system is actually harvesting a great deal of information about us, about where we go, who we meet, what our buying preferences are. And it's being sold on to third parties without our permission. So this is what is, in a way, called surveillance capitalism.

John Lennox:

And Shoshana Zuboff, who is an emeritus professor at MIT, has written quite a chilling book about this as being very dangerous for society, this theft of our property, our data property, without our permission. And the problem is that, we willingly wear these trackers. And we're sacrificing, in a sense, quite a lot of our privacy in order to gain these alleged advantages. And whether they are advantages or not is something that we need to seriously think about before we're engulfed by it.

Robert J. Marks:

One of the big negatives about artificial intelligence you also mentioned in your book was the use of facial recognition, especially currently about China. And what I found really interesting is that there is an intersection here between your book and Orwell's book with the face recognition and all of these things happening with our loss of privacy. We are living in an age of Big Brother. And I think that they have a long way to go.

Robert J. Marks:

I share my amazon.com account with my daughter who also orders off of my account. And they haven't figure out, I don't need ads for baby diapers yet. So they have yet to differentiate between my use and other people's use, so it's far from perfect.

Robert J. Marks:

You discussed Dan Brown's novel entitled, "Origin." Now, Dan Brown is famous for writing many, I don't know, kind of strange books, one was "The Da Vinci Code." But his recent one deals with artificial intelligence. And you discuss his novel as the springboard for your discussion about AI in the future. What did you find appealing or compelling about Brown's novel that you commented on it so much?

John Lennox:

Well, it was the actual storyline. The main character in "Origin" is a billionaire computer scientist and AI expert whose called Edmond Kirsch. And he claims to have solved the fundamental big questions that everybody asks at some time. Where do we come from and where are we going? And he uses AI in the novel to answer these questions. But his intention is philosophical. And that's what caught my attention. In fact, somebody told me that this was in the book and that's why I read it.

John Lennox:

His goal was to, I quote, "Employ the truth of science to destroy the myth of religions," mainly in particular, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And he actually concentrates on Christianity. And so, here is someone using AI to answer these big questions in such a way as to completely destroy, in his view,

religious answers. And he's using AI to do it. And the kind of AI involved is, of course, the more science fiction type. It's the advanced technological modification of human beings into transhuman beings or into superintelligences. And I was very interested in the kind of philosophy that's coming through. And that was one of my motives for writing this book.

Robert J. Marks:

I see. Dan Brown has some presuppositions, doesn't he?

John Lennox:

Oh, of course, he has presuppositions. It's hard to really disentangle his own presuppositions from those of his main characters, except for the very interesting fact that the hero of many of his books is a professor of symbiology, whatever that means, called Robert Langdon. And he's an expert at recognizing all sorts of mysterious and rare and hidden patterns and things.

John Lennox:

But one of the astonishing things about the book was when Langdon is asked the question about the origin of the genetic code, which figures very largely in the book. And there is great interest in developing exactly what this involves. And Langdon says something like this, and it raises the questions of God, he says, "The question of God for me lies in understanding the difference between codes and patterns." Patterns occur everywhere in nature, the spiraling seeds of a sunflower, the hexagonal cells of a honeycomb and so on. Codes are special. Codes by definition must carry information. Codes must transmit data and convey meaning. And he ends up by saying, "Codes are the deliberate inventions of intelligent consciousness. They don't appear organically. They must be created."

John Lennox:

And one of the other female heroes in the book says, "You think DNA was created by an intelligence?" And he just goes as far as saying, "I feel as if I'm seeing a living footprint, the shadow of some greater force that is just beyond our grasp." And I thought this is utterly fascinating. In a book by someone who is trying to bring down religion by the use of AI, what he's doing is actually heightening evidence for the existence of God by postulating an intelligent designer for DNA. So it's a very complex thing.

Robert J. Marks:

Very interesting. So Dan Brown who is obviously agnostic or certainly not religious in any sense came to the logical conclusion that I think many theists or deists do. That there must be a creator behind some of these things. At least, he was intellectually honest at the end.

Robert J. Marks:

All AI applications to date are narrow AI. AGI, or artificial general intelligence is still, or general artificial intelligence is still a dream. And that was an assumption, for example, in Brown's book.

Robert J. Marks:

In your book, MIT's Max Tegmark who said of the prophesied general artificial intelligence, "In creating AI we're birthing a new form of life with unlimited potential for good or ill." Tegmark is referring to general artificial intelligence, of course. What's your take on Tegmark's viewpoint?

John Lennox:

Well, I think that's a very grandiose statement. He is president of the Future of Life Institute at MIT. And that kind of statement is what you make, and he did make, in a TED Talk. And I would question how much science lays behind it, because as another brilliant AI expert put it, Rosalind Picard of MIT who is doing some wonderful work, she's a Christian thinker, she's doing wonderful work in using AI to help autistic children, she says, "The AI system is no more alive than Microsoft Word."

Robert J. Marks:

Okay.

John Lennox:

I though that was rather good. I think Tegmark is guilty of a bit of hype although, he's a very interesting person to read. He's a physicist.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. Well, I think certainly there is lots of hyperbole here. In his quote he says, "It will be a new life form with unlimited potential." And I read that and thought, "My goodness, unlimited, that's a lot of potential."

John Lennox:

Oh, it is. And it's very interesting because in his book he imagines how we can expect world domination by artificial general intelligence. And he's got these three steps towards that. First of all, make human level AGI, two, use that to create superintelligence, and then unleash this intelligence to take over the world. That's one of his scenarios. But he's got the sense to think of other scenarios.

John Lennox:

And one of the things that interested me greatly was the list of scenarios that he provides. And what struck me about them is that many of them introduced the God question either directly or indirectly, because this superintelligence is essentially behaving like God. And so, it resonates with Yuval Harari's idea of the God man, "Homo Deus," the title of his world best-selling book. And Tegmark goes through all of these. And several of them, and one in particular, reminded me very much of a biblical scenario for the future.

John Lennox:

To give you some idea, he thought the superintelligence might be a benevolent dictator. And everybody thinks this is a great thing. Or, it might be, behave almost as a god enhancing human happiness. Or, it might be controlled by humans who use it to produce wonderful technology and wealth that can be used for good or bad. Or, it could take control and decide that humans are a threat and get rid of them. And so, it goes on and on with these different scenarios. And he doesn't condone us to which one he prefers.

Robert J. Marks:

I see. But also, there is some presupposition on Tegmark's part also.

John Lennox:

Huge. There is presupposition on everybody's part.

Robert J. Marks:

Exactly.

John Lennox:

I think that's one of the reasons I wrote the book to investigate these presuppositions.

Robert J. Marks:

Yes. I think Walter Bradley, who we talked about before, mentions that those that hold a more than a materialistic point of view that will appeal to deism, for example, have a greater arena in which to perform exploration than narrow materialists. I always thought his perspective was very interesting, but it's much broader to talk about it in terms of deistic presuppositions.

Robert J. Marks:

Now, Max Tegmark is not only a physicist at MIT, but he writes fiction like Don Brown. And he wrote a novel called "Omega Team." And in "Omega Team," he talks about a powerful general AI system that's developed. And the system is dubbed Prometheus. And eventually, it takes over the world. I had to do a little head scratching to figure out why Tegmark would name his AI system Prometheus. But you outline that in the book. Could you share that with us? I thought that was interesting.

John Lennox:

Well, Prometheus was the titan of Greek mythology. And an ancient Greek poet, Hesiod says that Prometheus was thought to have created humans from clay, and defied the Gods and stole fire from them that he gave to the humans to drive forward their development. And because he sinned against the gods, he was punished, and a terrible punishment. The god Zeus chained him to a rock. And every day an eagle came and ate his liver, which grew again overnight and the process was repeated. So Prometheus is often thought of as an example of tragic results that could emanate from attempts to improve the human condition.

John Lennox:

There is a famous novel that most people have heard of by Mary Shelley, "Frankenstein." And Mary Shelley who wrote the book gave the name The Modern Prometheus to Frankenstein, so that's where that comes from.

Robert J. Marks:

I also noticed in Tegmark's novel, he makes use of Amazon Turk, which is a service that we have used in our research. And it makes use of wisdom of crowds. I just read a fascinating book on the wisdom of crowds. And how crowds can come to conclusions that aren't evident to individuals. And again, I have not read the book "Omega Team." But the interesting thing is that AI apparently takes over. I don't know if AI would have the capability of duplicating an Amazon Turks. Do you have any thoughts on that?

John Lennox:

Not really. But may I point out that this Omega is... It's not a book. It's not a novel. This is the first chapter, as I understand it, to Tegmark's book, which is called Life, I think, 3.0. It's the upfront chapter

where he gets people imagining this Omega Team. And then he goes on for the main part of his serious book on artificial intelligence.

Robert J. Marks:

I see. Well, I stand corrected on that. We've talked Tegmark and also Dan Brown's novel about AI duplicating some of the capabilities of human beings. This is in contrast to enhancement of human beings. And there is a movement, or a philosophy called transhumanism that almost seems to be a religion to some. You address that in the book. What's transhumanism and what's going on here?

John Lennox:

Well, of course, transhumanism is, as it suggests, is going beyond the human. And this is the goal of many of these people who want to make a superintelligence. They want to go beyond human intelligence. They want to really deify human beings. They want to turn human beings into gods. And that is a very dangerous thing, it seems to me. But of course, most of it is mercifully still science fiction. And I would seriously think that transhumanism is a very, essentially atheistic thing. It's produced by atheistic naturalism. And the idea is very simple. That we have, if you believe, those that tell us that we have evolved by mindless, unguided processes. We've gone up through the animal stage. And now with a evolved mind, so there is no stopping us. We're going to move into the future. But the big difference is, that we can take into our hands the producing of super human beings. And therefore, we'll accelerate that very rapidly indeed.

John Lennox:

The origin of the word transhuman is not secular, actually. And though many people think that it was Huxley that first thought of it, it comes from a translation from Dante's Paradiso. This is very ironic. And I developed this. It occurs in a passage where Dante tried to imagine the resurrection of his own body. And here is a quote, "Words may not tell if that transhuman changed." So it originally was applied to the biblical concept of resurrection. And that is something that I then discuss in my book of course, because all of this is paralleled in Christianity. But the difference is that Christianity gives a strong evidence base for believing in resurrection, whereas science fiction of the AGI type doesn't.

Robert J. Marks:

Transhumanism talks about augmentation of human abilities using artificial technology and artificial intelligence. Certainly, we use that today. We have pacemakers. We have cochlear implants and such things. Where is the line crossed into transhumanism?

John Lennox:

Well, that is an important question to think about actually, because all of us are grateful. As I speak to you, I'm wearing glasses. And they're ordinary glasses, but I could easily have them in my eyes. And you can imagine operations which will deal with your eyes and your no need for glasses anymore. And if my hearing was bad, I could wear a hearing aid. And some of those are getting small. And they'll eventually be fixed inside our heads. So that we're grateful for many of these kind of transformation.

John Lennox:

Now, where the line is, I'm not sure. But where a line is I think is the question of genetic modification. And that is doing something that's only just become possible in our lifetime. And that is to modify the

germ line, that is the transmissible information that goes from generation to generation. And this was something that C.S. Lewis was concerned with long before the technology was available.

John Lennox:

And the problem is this, that if we start or scientists start interfering in human nature, so that we change it for all future generations, Lewis's point, which I still find chilling, he said, "That if that happens what will be created will not be a human being in the image of God. It will be an artifact produced by some scientist." And then he said, "Therefore, the final triumph of humanity will be the abolition of man." And that's the danger. And that's why I want to bring the whole topic into consideration in the context of the biblical concept of human beings as made in the image of God.

John Lennox:

It was very interesting watching Jordan Peterson talking about that particular statement. And he says, "Look, we've got to realize that the statement that humans are made in the image of God is the cornerstone of Western civilization." And then he broke off and appealed to his audience and say, "Man, we're going to neglect that at our peril." And it was very interesting to hear someone like Peterson strongly affirming the biblical concept of human beings 1.0.

Robert J. Marks:

Excellent, as opposed to Max Tegmark's Humanity 3.0, or whatever, whatever he was talking about.

Robert J. Marks:

Let's talk about the theological implications of AI. You have a reputation not only as a mathematician, but a Christian apologist. And I wanted to go into some of the apologetics that you gave in the book and how it relates to some of the modern perceptions of artificial intelligence. Generally, how will technical advances affect the way in which people, either believers or non-believers, think of God?

John Lennox:

Well, sometimes technological development has a very positive effect because if, like myself, you believe that God is the intelligence behind the universe, and that He's made human beings in His image, so that we are to a certain extent creators and we can produce this technology, then the existence of the technology and indeed science itself is evidence that there is a God behind it all. So that is a positive development. And I welcome it, because as a scientist in that sense, I have always felt that one of the strongest evidences for there being a God behind the universe is the fact that we can do science. And the universe is mathematically intelligible. So that gives me a huge impulse to do the subject that I've spent my life doing.

John Lennox:

Now, how AI will affect that, I don't know, because the more we understand of how things work, I look at it this way, then the more I can admire the ability of God to produce all this potentiality. Just as the more I know of engineering, the more I can admire the genius of a Rolls-Royce. Rolls and Royce who produced the beautiful engines of their motorcars. But of course, the development of technology is always two-edged. I often say, "Artificial intelligence is a bit like a knife. You can use a knife to do surgery and to save people's lives. You can also use it to stab them to death." So we mustn't be naïve about just saying that everything is wonderful, because it isn't.

Robert J. Marks:

Interesting. The development of science, is said by some, to replace the need for a belief in God. Wherein, I think you can also look at science as exposing how great God is. Do you think that that is going to be the case with artificial intelligence?

John Lennox:

Well, I just don't know. But I spent most of my life contending with people that think that science replaces God. And I see that as a very foolish argument, really. It's like saying that if you understand how a Ford motorcar works, you don't need to believe in Henry Ford. It's a confusion between different kinds of explanation.

John Lennox:

And I often say to people, "Look, the God explanation no more competes with the scientific explanation than Henry Ford competes with the law of internal combustion to explain a motorcar engine." And in fact, you need both levels of explanation, the scientific one and the one in terms of the creative agency of God to give you a complete explanation. And so, it's been clear to me for many years that a lot of the heat could be taken out of this science versus God thing if people only could realize that explanation comes at different levels.

Robert J. Marks:

Excellent. I think that your old professor, Polkinghorne, addressed this.

John Lennox:

He does, yes.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, that's good stuff. There is a guy, and we talked about this offline a little bit, and you said you didn't know about it, but I'd like your comment on it, and his name is Levandowski, a Silicone Valley wunderkind. And he founded an AI church. So AI is finding churches now, people that worship AI. The name of his church was Way of the Future. In trying to get tax exemption for his church, he wrote an epistle to the IRS in the United States. And his epistle reads, "The AI Church believes in the realization, acceptance and worship of a god head based on artificial intelligence developed through computer hardware and software." I wanted your take. Do you see any chance that Levandowski's church will ever catch on?

John Lennox:

Not really. But this is the first time I've heard of it, so I would need to think about it. But you see, I would be initially very skeptical of these kind of churches for very clever and specially trained people, because the real church is formed of all kinds of people. And the gospel is accessible to the most simple people. And a god that's based on AI is a god that's a product of technology. It sounds a little bit like the Tower of Babel in the ancient world. And it's far too small for me to believe in anything like that.

John Lennox:

He thinks it's expanding the mind. Actually, it's contracting the mind, because AI hasn't reached anything like the state of, let's say, constructing a conscious entity. And God is a conscious entity who spoke the

universe into existence. So their god is far too small. And anyway, I would be fascinated to know what their doctrine of salvation is and eternal life? Although, I can guess that eternal life will come when they upload their weary brains onto silicone and somehow they exist forever, which is another transition that I very much doubt.

Robert J. Marks:

Yes, interesting. A footnote on Levandowski, he was subsequently charged with a theft of proprietary technology. I'm not sure that his AI church had the equivalent of Ten Commandments about theft.

John Lennox:

Yes. Clearly, they haven't got as far as Thou shalt not steal, so they're morally rather infantile. Yeah.

Robert J. Marks:

And I don't know the outcome of that. I should look that up some day. But that was an interesting commentary on Levandowski.

Robert J. Marks:

You mentioned the idea of obtaining immortality. That's a common theme in many religions. That's certainly a theme that you mentioned that's in the AI religion. Well, I think the answer is obvious, but let me ask you anyway. What is the solution to immortality in Christianity.

John Lennox:

Well, perhaps the best way to discuss this is to put it in the context of Yuval Noah Harari's best-selling book "Homo Deus." And in it, he says, that there are going to be two major agenda items for the 21st century. The first one is that we'll solve the problem of physical death. And I quote, "Every tactical problem has a tactical solution. We don't need to wait for the second coming in order to overcome death." So he's aware of a Christian hope there.

John Lennox:

But then secondly, "Once we've overcome the need to die," he says carefully, "that humans will still die, but they won't have to die. Once we overcome this problem of mortality, then the next item, the second major item will be the intensification of the pursuit of human happiness. And that agenda involves changing our biochemistry, re engineering bodies and minds, so that we shall re engineer Homo sapiens, so that it can enjoy everlasting pleasure." That's what he says.

John Lennox:

And he finishes, "Having raised humanity above the beastly level of survival struggles, we will now aim to upgrade humans into gods and turn Homo sapiens into Homo Deus. But think in terms of Greek gods."

John Lennox:

So there are two agenda items. One solved the problem of physical death and reach immortality. And you are right. This has been a topic not only in many religions and many mythologies and it goes right back to the Book of Genesis where we are told a fascinating account of human beings being tempted to

reach after Godhood. And the enemy tempts them by saying, "If you eat that fruit of that particular tree, you shall be as gods knowing good and evil." So there is the origin of the twisted notion of Homo Deus.

John Lennox:

Now, the ironic thing to my mind is this, here are these people trying to, like Harari, to solve the problem of physical death. But they're too late. It has already been solved, because Jesus Christ was raised by the power of God from the dead. So God has got a solution to the problem of physical death. And the message of the Christian gospel is of course, that anybody who repents of the mess they've made of their own life and the lives of others and trust Christ for salvation receives eternal life. And therefore, they will be resurrected from the dead. So we don't need to worry what happens to our brains, nor do we need to hope that they can be uploaded onto silicone. So that's the first thing.

John Lennox:

And the second thing is, that he's searching to intensify human happiness by re engineering our bodies and minds. And the very interesting thing is that part of the Christian hope is that the true Homo Deus, that is Christ himself will return and will raise us from the dead and we will be transformed. That's the real upgrade for which there is strong evidence as contrasted with Harari's hope.

John Lennox:

So there within Christianity, you have both sides of this thing. And you've got a credible solution. And that was one of the major motivations for me writing this book because I thought, look, if people in the world are prepared to take seriously scenarios like Tegmark's and those of other people, why don't we have a look again at a scenario that most people know very little about? And that is the biblical view of death and the solution of the problem of mortality and also, the question of the transmutation of human bodies in the resurrection. These are hugely important topics, it seems to me.

Robert J. Marks:

Interesting. There is another parallel, interestingly, between AI and Christianity on superintelligence that you address. Could you elaborate on that?

John Lennox:

Well, I don't know what particularly you mean. But one of the ironic things is that you could characterize AGI as human beings trying to reach up to God and achieve superintelligence that way. The Christian message is the exact opposite. It talks about God becoming man and God becoming man in Jesus Christ who then through what He does in His life, death, resurrection, ascension and return, He deals with all these questions in a far deeper level. So the parallels are very strong. And therefore, I feel that they can be used to advantage to help us to explain what the Christian message is.

Robert J. Marks:

Fascinating. The last question I want to ask you, you offer a conjecture in your book about some passages in Revelation and the possibility they could relate to the adoption of AI. Talk about that.

John Lennox:

Well, of course, the Book of Revelation tends to be very controversial in discussing it, because there are a lot of symbols in it. But C.S. Lewis taught me a long time ago, that symbols usually stand for a reality.

And we've got to ask ourselves, what is the reality about which the Book of Revelation is talking? And very briefly put, in Revelation 13, we read about an animal or a beast. And it's clearly talking about a world authority or leader. And we read that it commands a construction of an image that is an image of another animal or human. And it gives breath to this. And the result is worldwide deception and control. And all who refuse to bow down and acknowledge the authority of this beast stroke human, whatever it is, are killed. So that you're dealing with a scenario where social control is absolute.

John Lennox:

And what is intriguing and rather chilling, actually in the light of our AI developments, is that freedom to buy and sell is determined by the wearing of some kind of mark, an implanted chip. Tegmark talks about a bracelet that people may have to wear that will determine whether or not they're regarded as socially acceptable. And we've already got that kind of social acceptability factor in the credit system that's being rolled out in the Chinese population today. So it's relatively easy to see how this kind of thing could come about.

John Lennox:

Now, I'm not one of these speculators that know exactly what it means. But I'm interested in what it stands for. And if you've got something that appears to give breath to another creature, to an image actually which is presumably a material thing, and it's so effective that it causes the whole earth to worship it, which is a fascinating concept, then are we here? And that's a question. Is it a partial realization of AGI? We just don't know.

John Lennox:

But we do know, looking back in history, that at every stage, human beings have set up images and bowed down to worship them. And what technology will produce one day is probably beyond our wildest dreams. For that reason, I want to take this scenario as seriously, indeed much more seriously, then Tegmark's scenario.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, that's a fascinating conjecture about the passage in Revelation. Dr. Lennox, thank you. This has been a lot of fun. We've been talking to Dr. Lennox. And his new book is entitled, "2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity." We're going to provide on the podcast notes a link to his website. And Dr. Lennox, if I remember, the site is really simple. What is the site for your book?

John Lennox:

Yes, it's 2084book.com

Robert J. Marks:

2084book.com, please visit there. There is a very nice video that tells a little bit about the book, and you can also order it there. And I'm sure like everything else in the world, it's available on amazon.com.

John Lennox:

Yes, it is.

Robert J. Marks:

Excellent, excellent. Do you know if it's out in audio yet? I'm a big audio fan.

John Lennox:

I think it may well be. And of course, there is lots more stuff on my own website, johnlennox.org. But I'm fairly sure it's on Audible and it's on Kindle. I know that.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay, wonderful. Wonderful. And yeah, if you do go to amazon.com, I encourage you to look at some of Dr. Lennox's other books, which are also excellent. I recommend the book. I've read it. And it's a very easy, but it's a very deep read, and I think you'll enjoy it. So until next time, be of good cheer.

Announcer: