

Living in the Borderlands: Cyborgs and the *Imago Dei*

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Introduction

In recent times the figure of the cyborg has imposed itself upon Western technoculture through popular culture, and in sociological reflection within academia. The term ‘cyborg’ or ‘cybernetic organism’, coined by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in the 1960s, was part of a proposal to technologically augment human beings to survive in harsh environments, in particular, astronauts.¹ Drawing from this idea popular culture has often portrayed the cyborg figure as the literal fusion of the biological human being with inorganic technology, often to the detriment of human identity and dignity. Alternatively, in the academic world the cyborg represents a metaphor for exploring contemporary technoculture, existing as a hybrid figure that forms a nexus where existing categories used to organize the world collapse and restructure themselves. In both cases the cyborg inhabits in a new, constructed world that exists in the borderlands of more familiar cultural and experiential terrain.

The cyborg is a generator of ‘narratives of apprehension’ about technology and human technological proclivity. It stands in contrast to many of the traditional ways in which the world is ordered, and is a disconcerting form that raises questions about human nature, human identity, the relationship between the human and non-human in the world, and in particular how to live wisely and wholesomely in a world constantly being reshaped by technology. In the past few years religious and theological engagement with the concept of the cyborg has begun to emerge, particularly within discussions about bioethics.² This discussion has often been

¹ Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline, "Cyborgs and Space," in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995), 29-33.

² Philip Hefner, *Technology and Human Becoming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), Anne Kull, "Cyborg Embodiment and the Incarnation," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 28, no. 3-4 (2001): 279-

carried out in strident terms, tied into extreme visions of techno-pessimism and anxiety, and in doing so has failed to engage with the concept of human beings and the Christian tradition as being rich with images of hybridity that may provide helpful insight into engaging with the cyborg and technoculture constructively.³

In the following presentation, the theological motif of human beings being made in the image and likeness of God found in the Judeo-Christian tradition will be used to engage with the figure of the cyborg. It is asserted that the *imago Dei* is realized in hybridity, and, in conjunction with other theological motifs, provides resources for living wisely in contemporary technoculture.

284, Anne Kull, "Speaking Cyborg: Technoculture and Technonature," *Zygon* 37, no. 2 (2002): 279-287.

³ Tal Brooke, ed., *Virtual Gods: The Seduction of Power and Pleasure in Cyberspace* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1997), Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *The Pursuit of Enhancement: The Latest from Brave New Britain* [Internet] (Christianity Today, 22 February 2006, accessed 10 March 2006); available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/108/32.0.html>, C. Christopher Hook, "The Techno Sapiens Are Coming," *Christianity Today* 48, no. 1 (2004): 36-40.