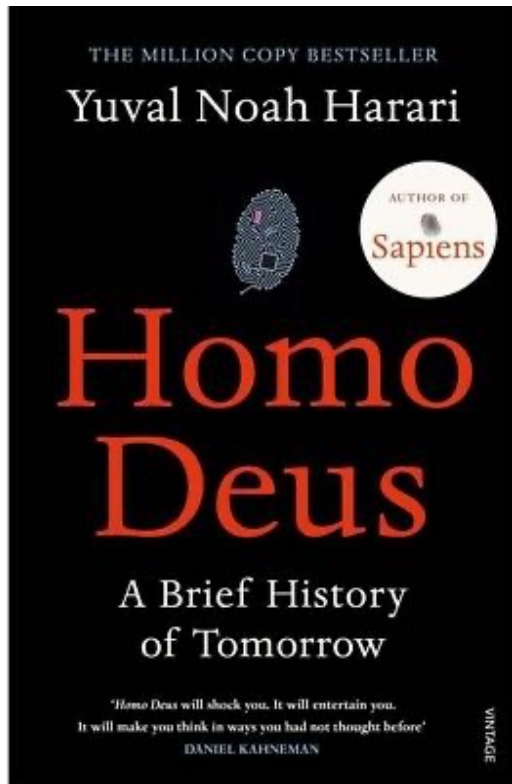


DISCERNING CONVERGENCE: A Theological Framework for AI and Ministry

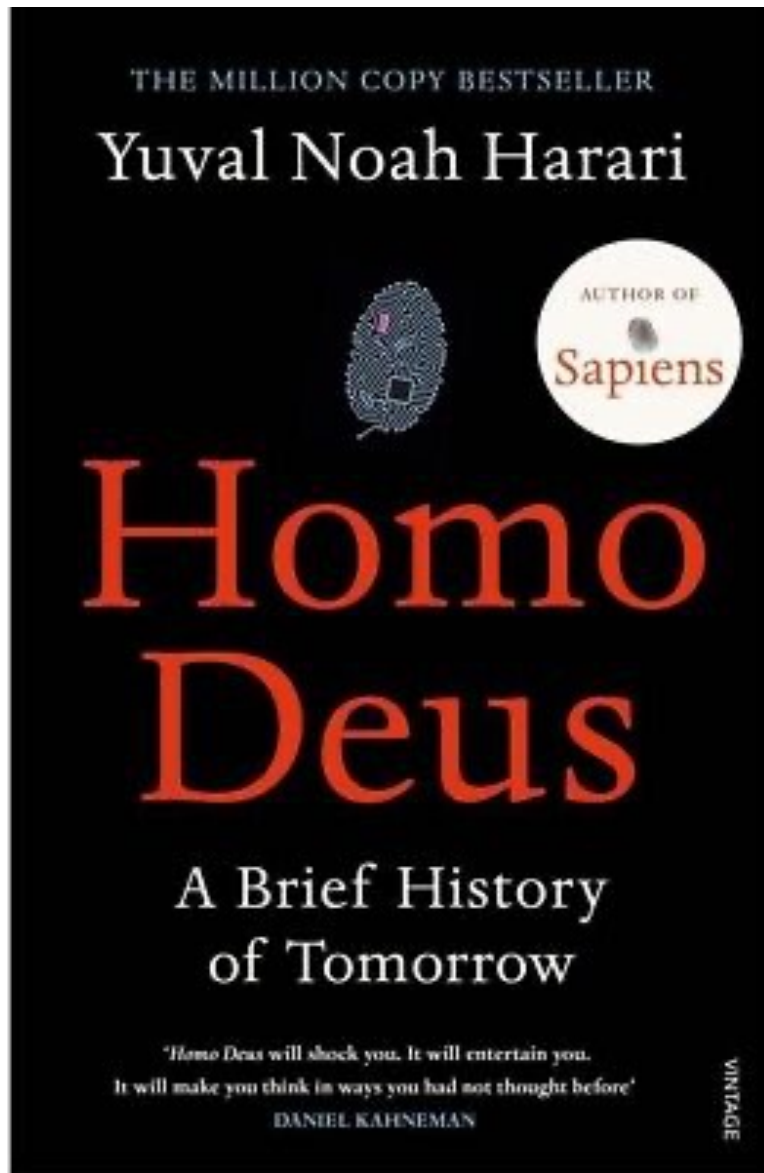
A Workshop with
Tony Sundermeier
Wednesday
October 8th
9:00 am

At Woods Memorial Presbyterian Church & Hybrid



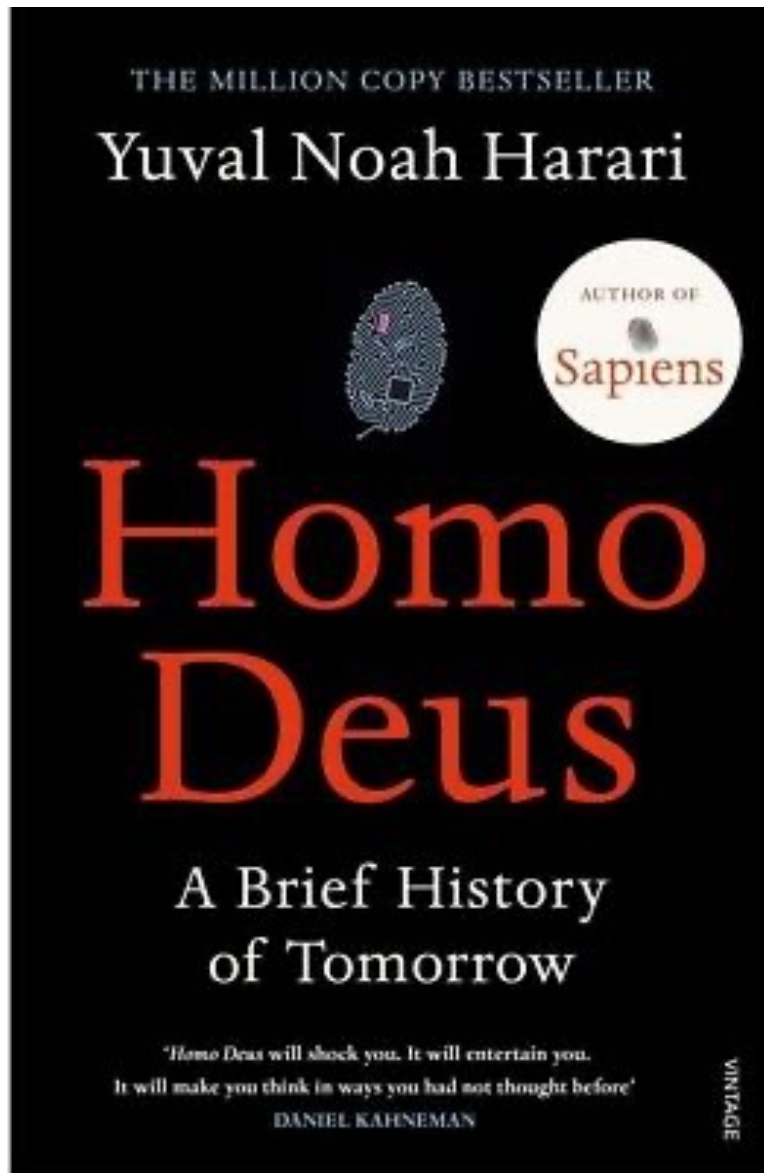
Yuval Noah Harari (born February 24, 1976) is an Israeli historian, philosopher, and public intellectual best known for his works on the history and future of humankind. He earned his Ph.D. in history from the University of Oxford and is a professor in the Department of History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.





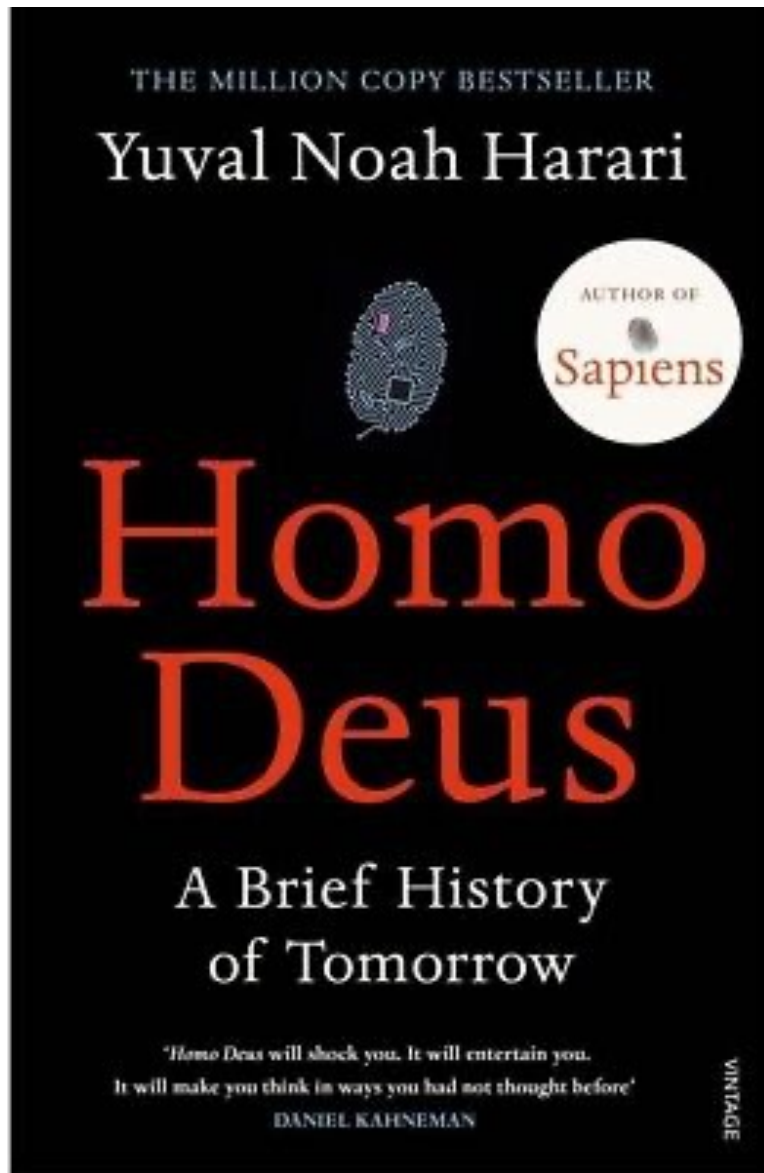
The Old Quests: Humanity's Struggle for Survival

For thousands of years, human beings were primarily preoccupied with **overcoming three constant enemies**:



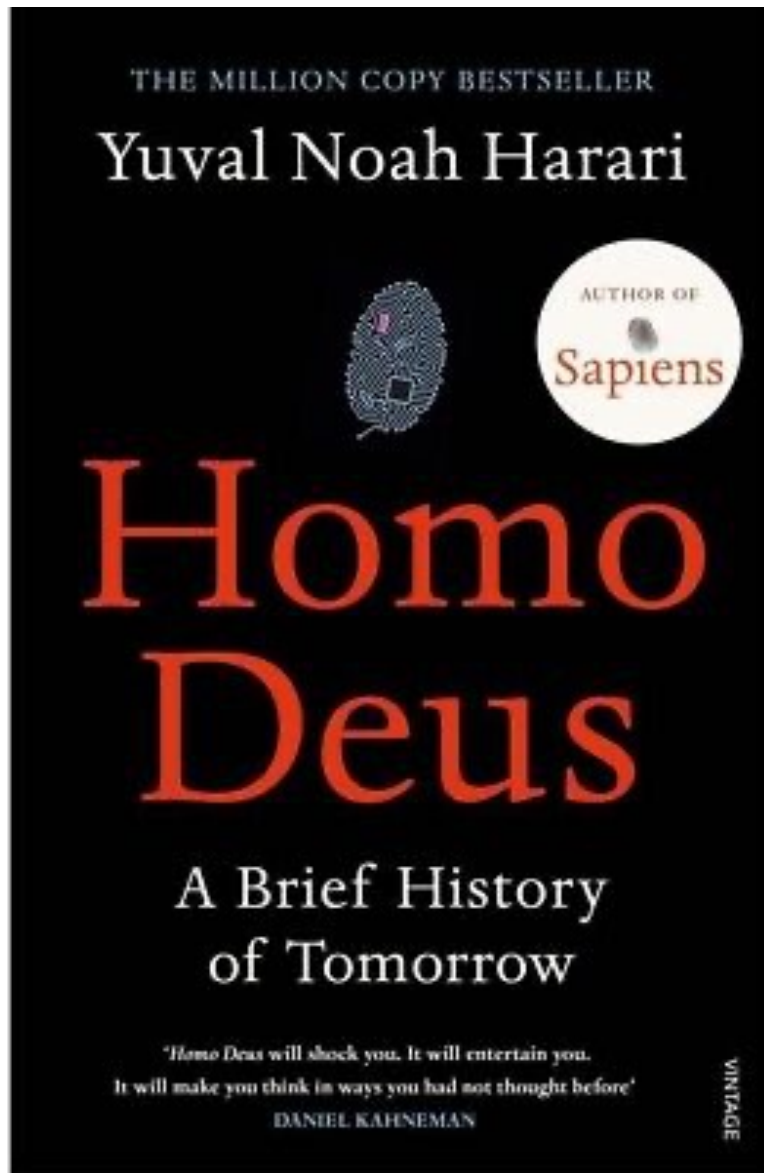
Famine

1. The quest to secure food and survive scarcity. In the premodern world, hunger shaped almost every social, political, and moral system.
2. Agriculture, trade, taxation, and religion were often designed to stave off starvation.
3. Harari notes that for most of history, famine—not obesity—was the great threat to human health.



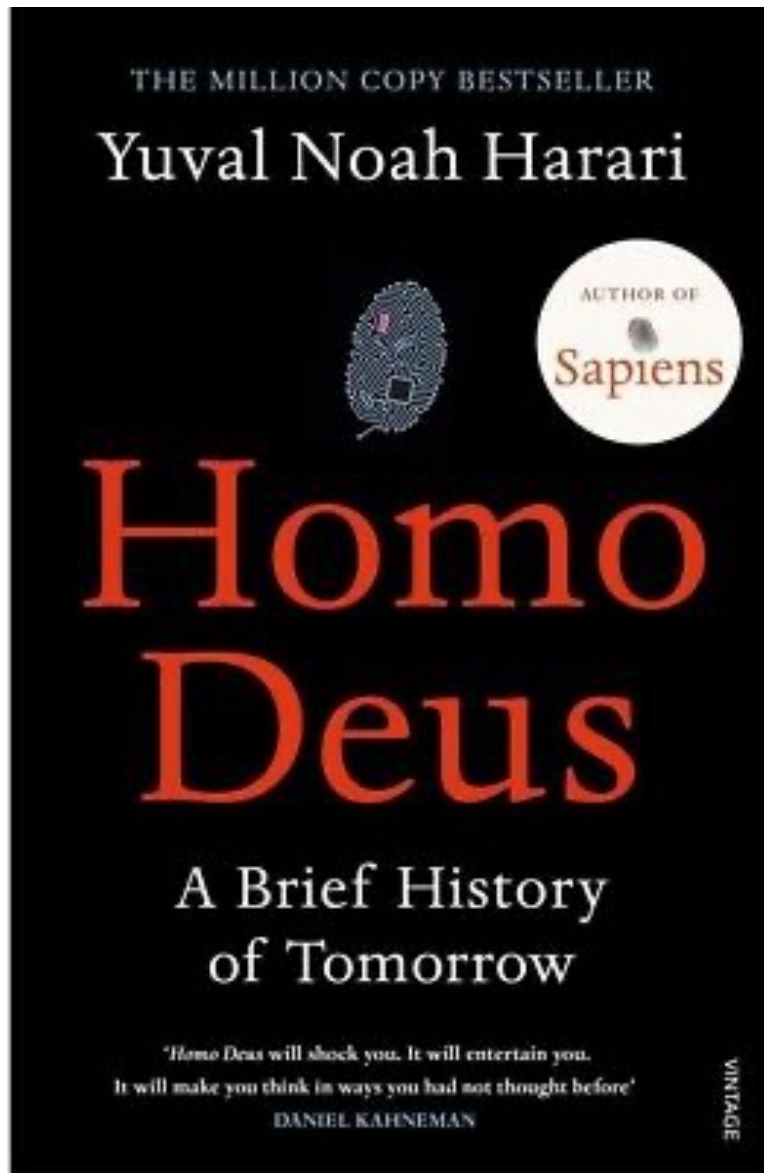
Plague (Disease)

1. The quest to survive nature's invisible assaults. Before modern medicine, epidemic diseases like the Black Death, smallpox, or cholera routinely killed massive portions of the population.
2. People saw these as divine punishment or fate—realities to be appeased, not solved.
3. Only in the last century did humans begin to treat disease as a technical problem that can be cured or prevented.



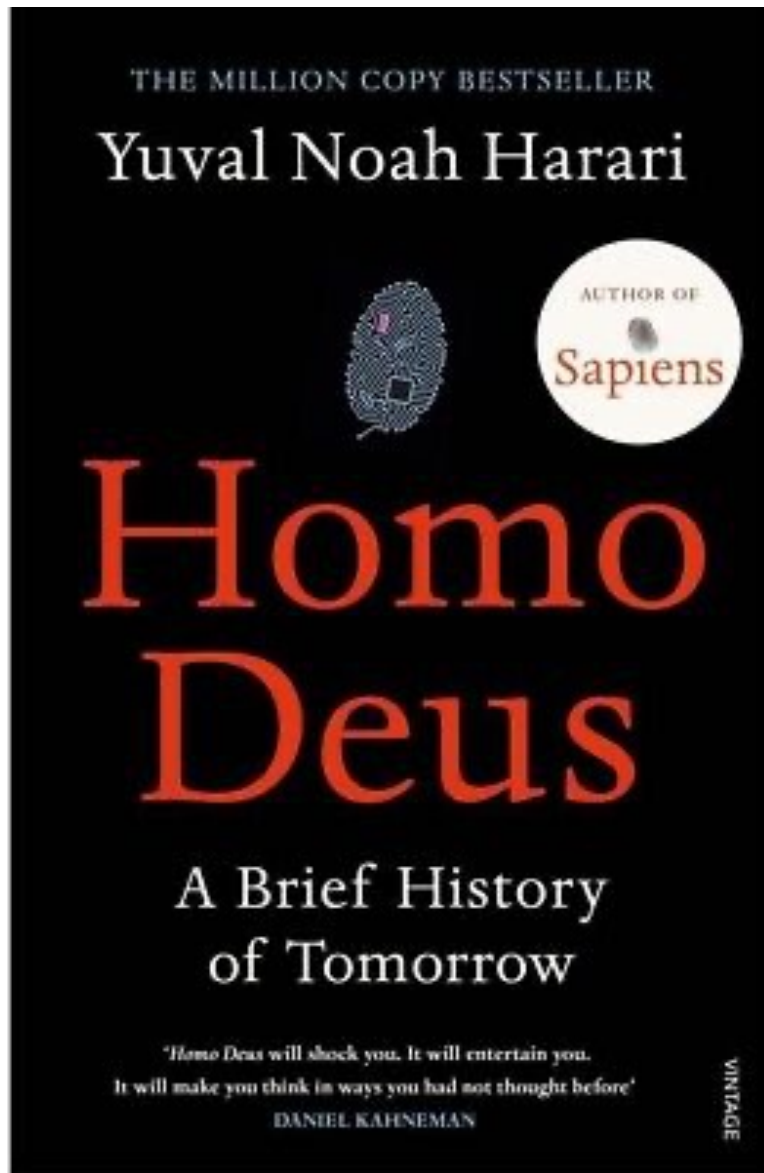
War

1. The quest to secure peace and stability.
2. For millennia, human life was shaped by chronic violence, tribal conflict, and empire-building.
3. War determined borders, economies, and identities.
4. Until the mid-20th century, political power largely meant military power.



War

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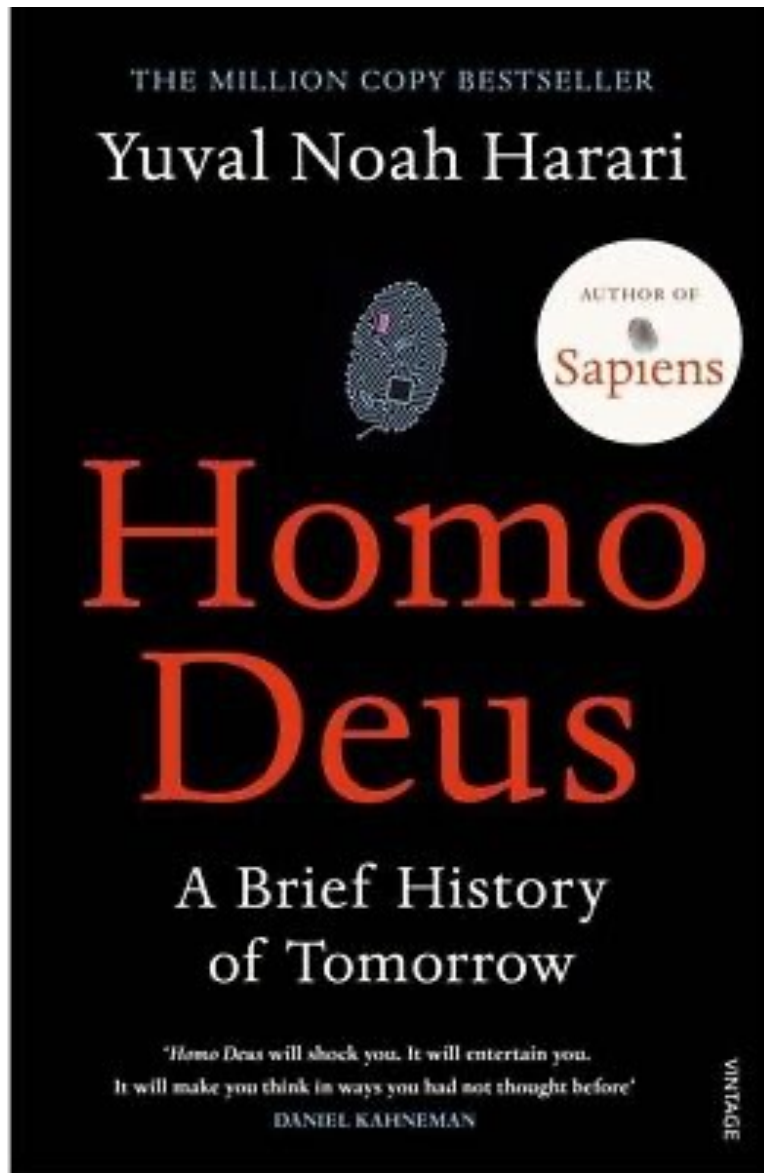
The Transition: From Survival to Mastery

Harari argues that—largely through science, technology, and global cooperation—humans have achieved remarkable control over these three enemies.

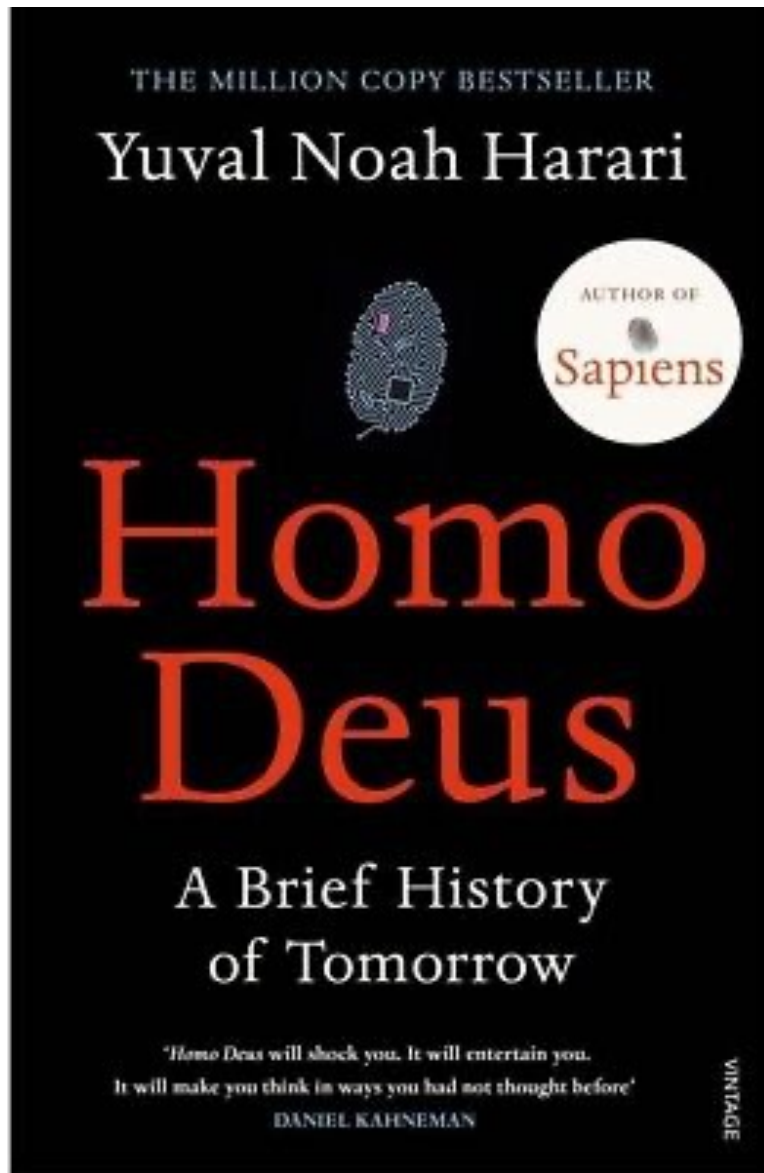
Famine is now more often caused by politics than nature. Epidemics can be prevented or contained through medicine and hygiene.

Large-scale wars between major powers have become rare compared to past centuries.

For the first time in history, **humans have shifted from a survival species to a species of self-creation.**

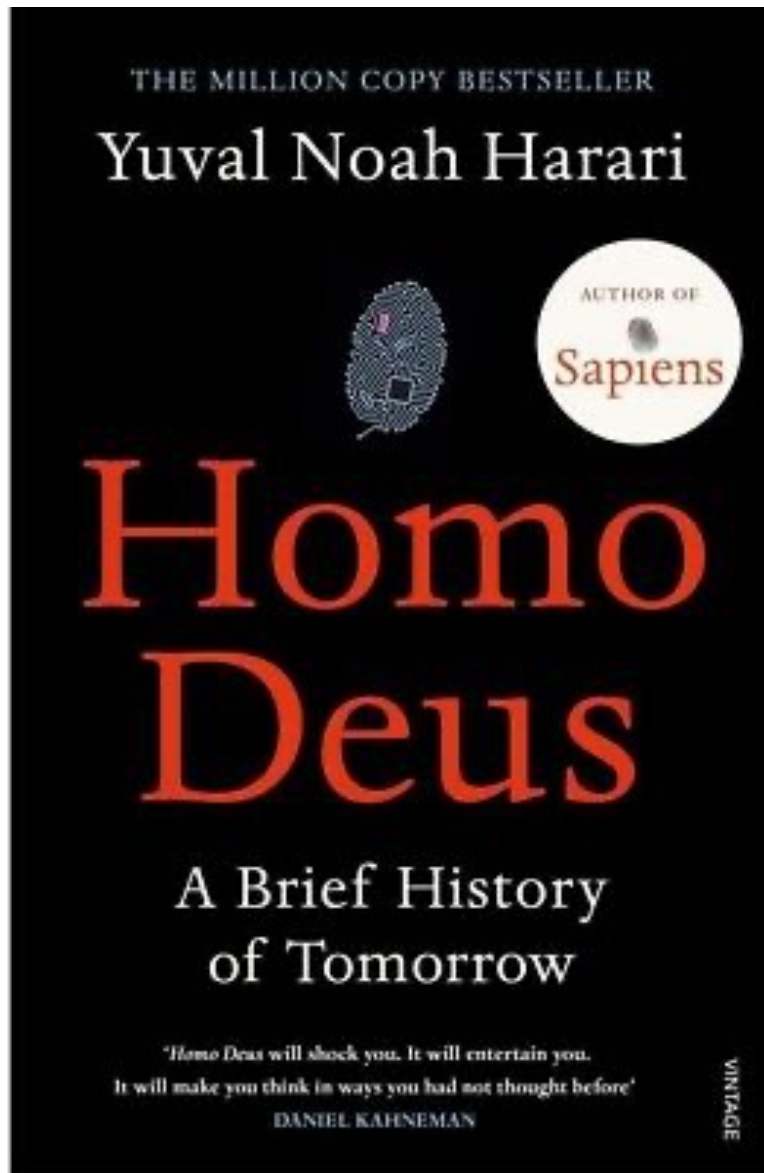


Harari argues that as humanity moves beyond the traditional concerns of survival (famine, plague, and war), we have embarked on **three new overarching quests**—what he calls humanity’s new “projects” or “ambitions” in the 21st century.



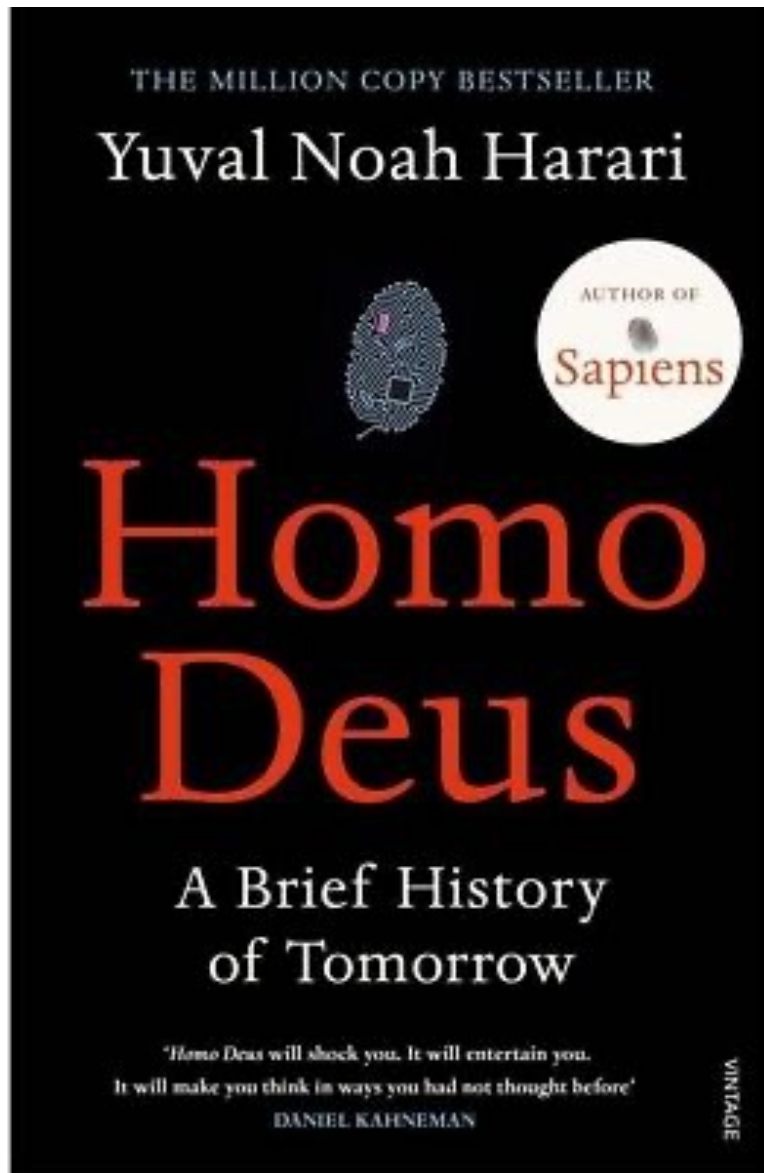
The Quest for Immortality

1. Humanity's drive to overcome death and extend life indefinitely.
2. Harari argues that we no longer see death as a divine decree but as a technical problem to be solved through medicine, biotechnology, and genetic engineering.
3. Goal: To upgrade humans biologically and technologically so that death becomes optional.



The Quest for Happiness

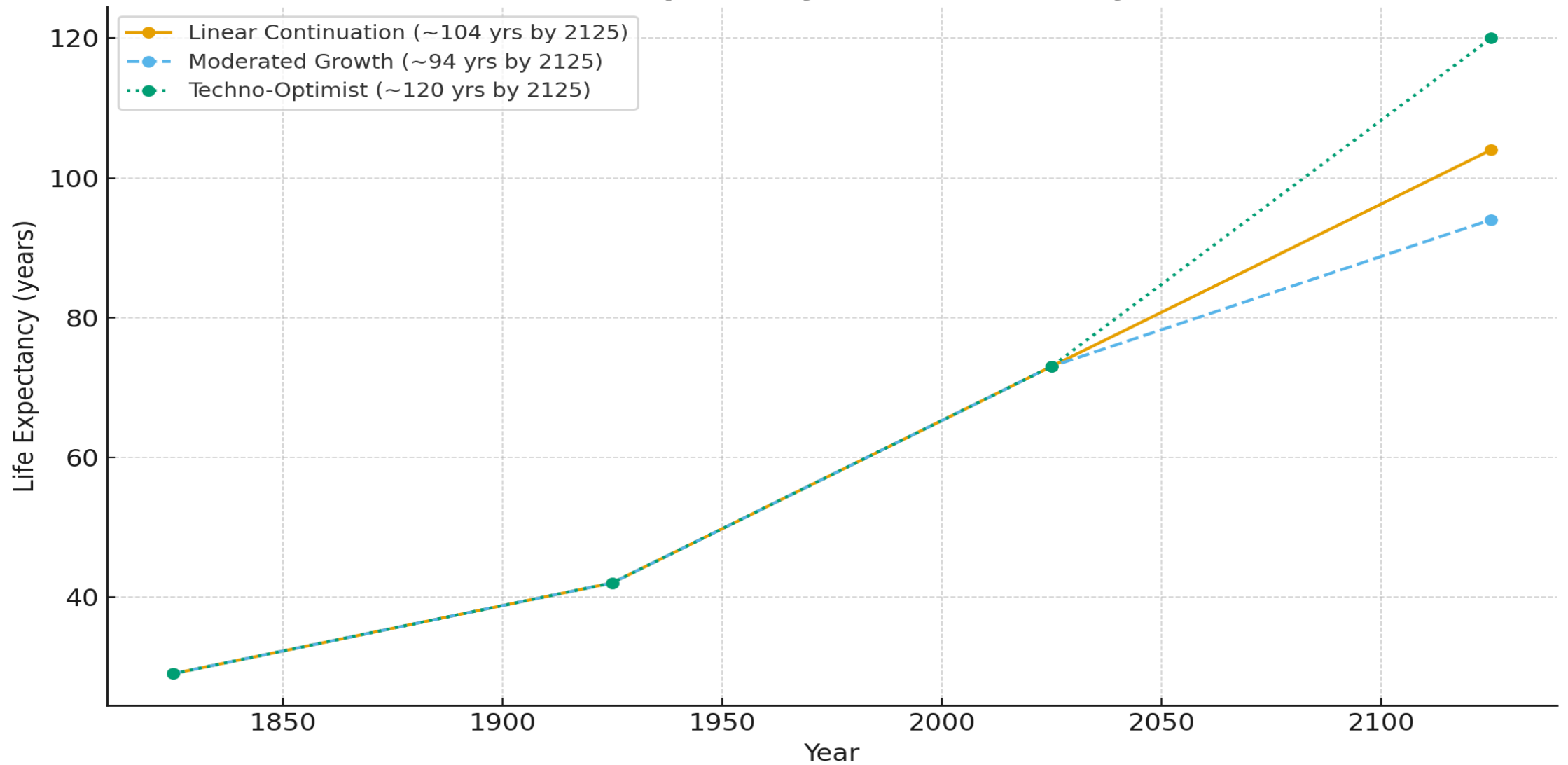
1. Having largely secured physical survival, humans now seek sustained well-being and inner contentment.
2. Harari notes the growing reliance on biochemistry, pharmaceuticals, and neurotechnology to manage mood and emotion.
3. Goal: To chemically or technologically engineer happiness and eliminate suffering.



The for God-like Power

1. The aspiration to become *Homo Deus*—"the human-god."
2. Humanity seeks not only to extend life and optimize emotion but to acquire creative powers once attributed to God or the gods: to design and create life, to manipulate evolution, and to control nature through data, algorithms, and artificial intelligence.
3. Goal: To transcend human limitations and achieve omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence through technology.

Global Life Expectancy: 1825-2125 (Projected)



WHO IS THE FIRST PERSON IN SCRIPTURE
DESCRIBED TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?



“See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft...” (Exodus 31:2–3, NRSV)

NOT A PROPHET OR PRIEST, BUT AN ARTISAN

Tools in the Bible: **Toward** or **Away** from God's

Construction & Worship

- **Noah's Ark** (Gen. 6–9) – tool of salvation for creation.
- **Tabernacle & furnishings** (Exod. 25–31; 35) – Spirit-filled artistry for God's dwelling.
- **Temple** (1 Kings 6–8) – built as a house for God's presence.
- **Altars** (Gen. 8:20; Exod. 20:24–26) – for sacrifice and worship.
- **Stones of remembrance** (Josh. 4:1–9) – markers of God's faithfulness.

Tools in the Bible: **Toward** or **Away** from God's

Everyday Implements

- **Staff of Moses/Aaron** (Exod. 4, 7, 14) – sign of divine authority.
- **Fishing nets** (Luke 5; John 21) – repurposed into metaphor for evangelism.
- **Musical instruments** (Psalms, 1 Sam. 16:23) – for worship, comfort, celebration.
- **Scrolls & writing tools** (Jer. 36; Luke 4:17) – preserving and proclaiming God's word.
- **Plowshares & pruning hooks** (Joel 3:10, Isa. 2:4) – tools of agriculture, sometimes symbolic of peace.

Tools in the Bible: **Toward** or *Away* from God's

Craft & Skill

- **Bezalel and Oholiab's craftsmanship** (Exod. 31:1–11) – Spirit-filled artistry.
- **Potter's wheel** (Jer. 18:1–6) – metaphor for God shaping Israel.

Tools in the Bible: Toward or **Away** from God's

Construction & Worship

- **Tower of Babel** (Gen. 11) – human pride “to make a name.”
- **Golden Calf** (Exod. 32) – idol fashioned from jewelry.
- **High places & Asherah poles** (2 Kings 17:10–11) – tools for false worship.
- **Altars to idols** (e.g., 1 Kings 12:28–33) – counterfeit worship.

Tools in the Bible: Toward or **Away** from God's

Weapons & Military Technology

- **Chariots of Egypt** (Exod. 14; Isa. 31:1) – reliance on military power instead of God.
- **Swords & spears** (Amos 1; Hos. 2:18) – violence, oppression, unjust war.
- **Siege ramps & machines** (2 Kings 25) – Babylon's tools of destruction.

Tools in the Bible: Toward or **Away** from God's

Economic & Social Tools

- **Weights and scales** (Amos 8:5; Mic. 6:11) – corrupted for exploitation.
- **Bricks at Babel** (Gen. 11:3) – uniformity and pride instead of diversity and dependence on God.
- **Luxury items** (Amos 6:4–6) – ivory beds, bowls of wine, symbols of excess.

Tools in the Bible: Toward or **Away** from God's

False Words & Writings

- **Writing tablets of false prophets** (Jer. 23; Ezek. 13) – words used to deceive.

Tools in the Bible: **Toward** or **Away** from God's

The Cross as a Tool for Evil

- **Roman instrument of terror:** Crucifixion was designed to dehumanize, torture, and publicly humiliate.
- **Political oppression:** It was a tool to crush dissent and silence anyone who threatened imperial power.
- **Religious distortion:** Jesus was handed over in the name of protecting religious order, showing how even faith leaders can weaponize human tools.
- **Embodiment of sin:** On the cross, we see the culmination of human rebellion, violence, and idolatry against God.

Tools in the Bible: **Toward** or **Away** from God's

The Cross as a Tool for Good in God's Hands

- **Instrument of redemption:** God takes the very symbol of empire's power and turns it into the means of salvation (Col. 2:15).
- **Place of atonement:** On the cross Christ bears sin, reconciling humanity to God (2 Cor. 5:19).
- **Victory over death:** The cross becomes the pathway through which resurrection life breaks in.
- **Reversal of meaning:** What Rome intended as shame becomes glory; what humanity used for death becomes the tree of life.
- **Model of discipleship:** Jesus transforms the cross into a call: "Take up your cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

Theological Insight

- The cross reveals that **no human tool is beyond God's redeeming reach.**
- Evil is not erased but subverted: the worst thing becomes the place where God does the best thing.

Tools in the Bible: **Toward** or **Away** from God's

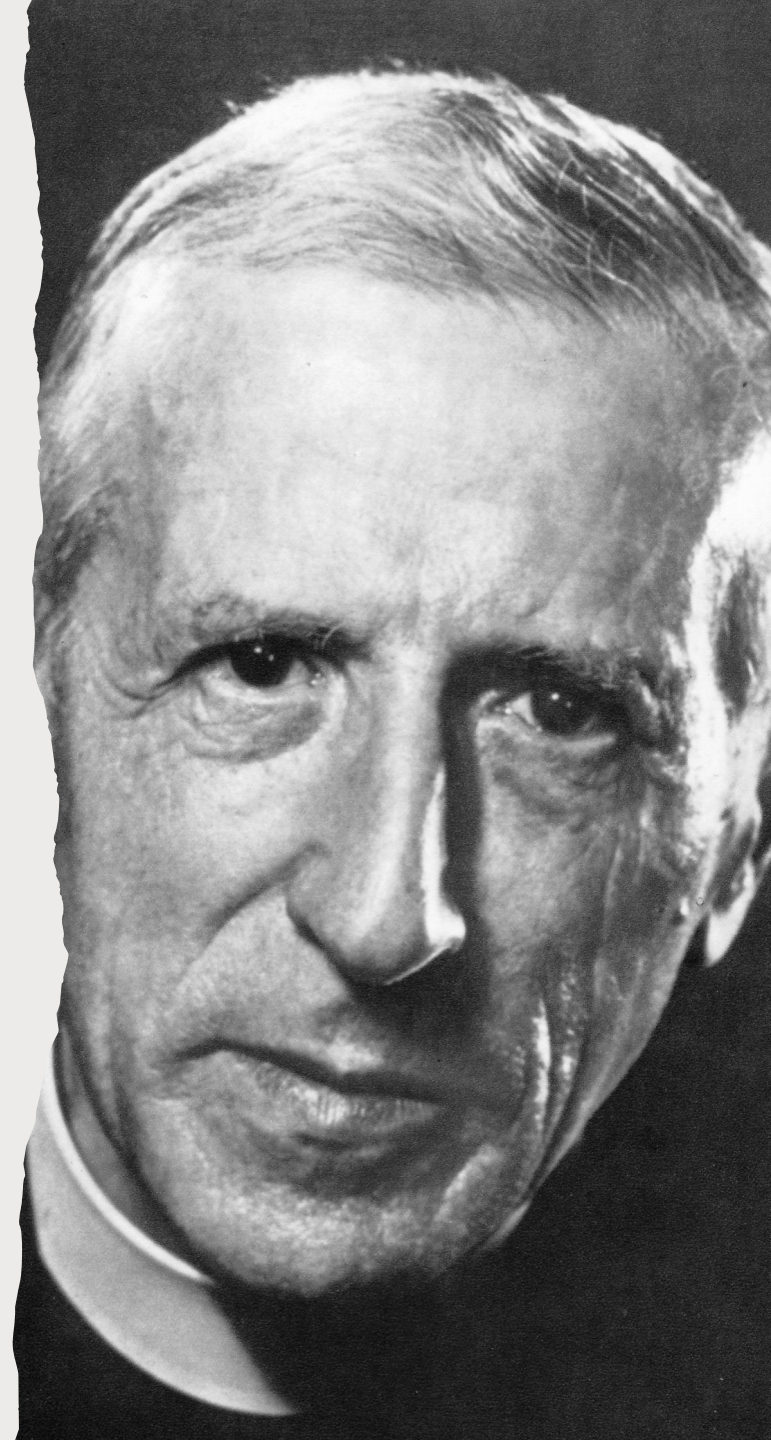
TOOLS ARE NEVER NEUTRAL.



Jacques Ellul

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

*A Comparison of Two Theological
Visions of Technology*



Jacques Ellul & Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

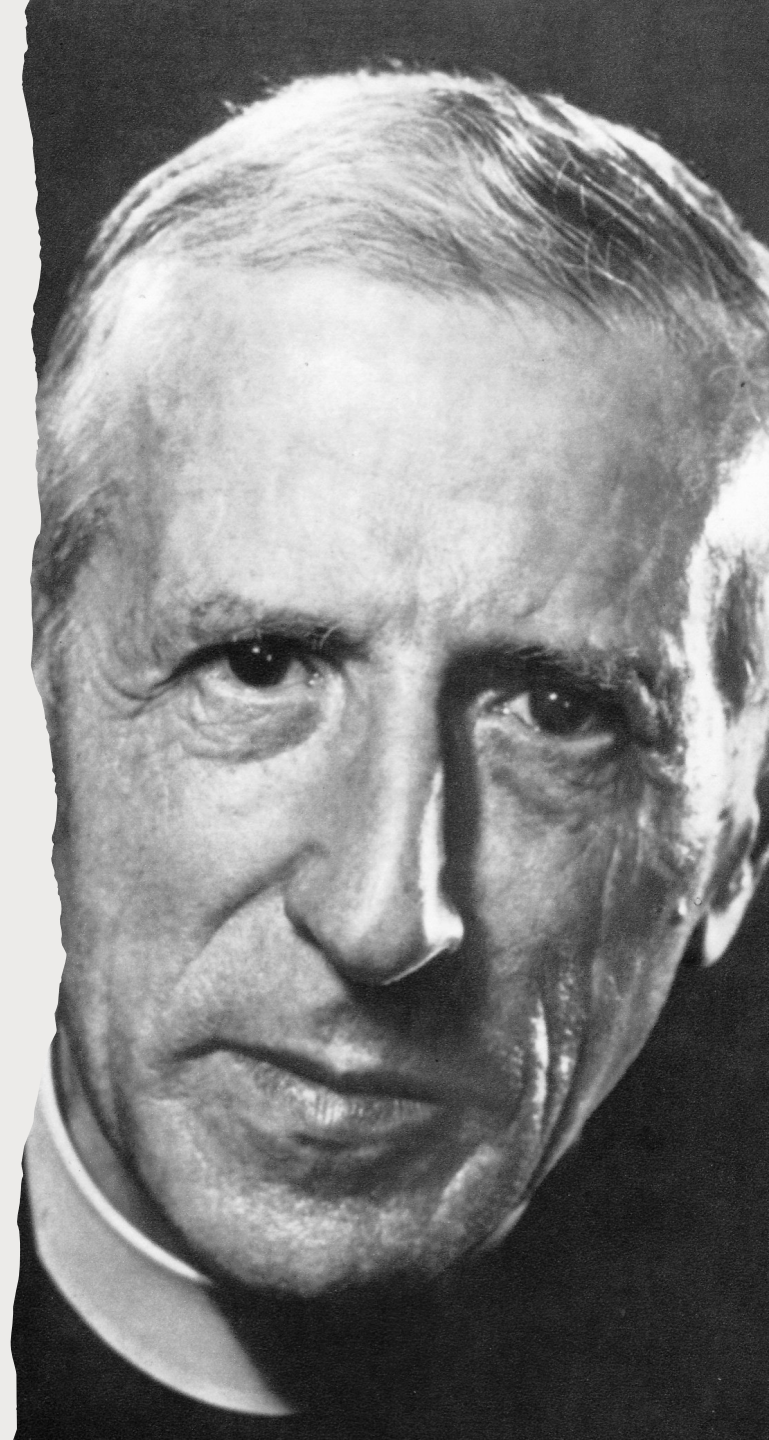
A Comparison of Two Theological Visions of Technology

Category	Jacques Ellul (1912–1994)	Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955)
Background	French Reformed lay theologian, sociologist, ethicist; known for works like <i>The Technological Society</i> .	French Jesuit priest, paleontologist, and mystic; known for <i>The Phenomenon of Man</i> .
View of Technology	Technology (<i>la technique</i>) develops autonomously — once a tool can be made, it <i>will</i> be made, regardless of ethics.	Technology is part of human evolution moving creation toward greater complexity and unity.
Theological Lens	Pessimistic/critical: technology reveals human idolatry and the will to power.	Optimistic/teleological: technology can be a vehicle in God’s evolutionary plan.
Human Role	Humans are often captive to technological determinism; we lack control.	Humans are co-creators with God, directing evolution toward the “Omega Point.”
God’s Sovereignty	God alone redeems; technology cannot save. Technology often tempts us to deny our dependence on God.	God draws all creation toward Christ, the Omega Point. Technology may be one instrument of that divine convergence.
Eschatology	Warns against false eschatologies: the illusion that technology can deliver utopia or immortality.	Sees technological and cultural progress as potentially converging with God’s eschatological fulfillment.
Ethical Posture	Resistance, critique, and discernment: Christians must unmask technology’s idolatries and limits.	Participation, hope, and openness: Christians may embrace technology as part of God’s redemptive movement.
Key Image	Babel — humanity’s prideful attempt to master life apart from God.	Omega Point — the fullness of creation converging in Christ through evolutionary and technological development.



Jacques Ellul

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin





DISCERNING CONVERGENCE

Stanchion One

Sovereignty of God

Stanchion Two

Human Flourishing

Stanchion Three

Sacred Vocation

Stanchion Four

Virtue



DISCERNING CONVERGENCE

Stanchion One **Sovereignty of God**

Does this tool reinforce our trust in God's providence, or does it tempt us to believe that ultimate power and control rest in human hands and human innovation?

Does this tool express hope in God's reign and the coming Kingdom, or does it embody an alternative eschatology; a promise of salvation, immortality, or utopia apart from God?



DISCERNING CONVERGENCE

Stanchion Two **Human Flourishing**

Does it contribute to the well-being of people and communities — physically, emotionally, spiritually — or does it erode dignity, health, or wholeness?

Does it draw people into healthier patterns of connection, compassion, and care, or does it isolate, fragment, and commodify human lives?

Does this tool widen the gap between the privileged and the vulnerable, or does it lift up the poor, marginalized, and forgotten in ways consistent with God's justice?



DISCERNING CONVERGENCE

Stanchion Three

Sacred Vocation

Does it affirm that God calls people into meaningful labor or does it risk making those vocations redundant or devalued?

Does it conserve energy, materials, and ecosystems, or does it accelerate patterns of waste, extraction, and environmental harm?



DISCERNING CONVERGENCE

Stanchion Four

Virtue

Does its use encourage patience, humility, wisdom, and compassion, or does it cultivate pride, greed, haste, or vanity?

Does its use call us into deeper dependence on God's Spirit and moral imagination, or does it dull our capacity to choose wisely and faithfully?

BREAK

What is AI?



Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems designed to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as recognizing patterns, understanding language, making decisions, or learning from experience.



What is AI?

What is AI?

How It Works (Simplified)

AI is built on **algorithms** (sets of rules) that allow machines to:

Collect Data → like text, images, or numbers.

Learn Patterns → using methods such as machine learning or deep learning.

Make Predictions or Outputs → such as generating human-like text, recognizing a face, or suggesting a product.



Large Language Models

A type of Artificial Intelligence trained on massive amounts of text. They work by predicting the next most likely word in a sequence, allowing them to generate human-like sentences, paragraphs, and conversations.

Examples: ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Anthropic Claude, Meta's LLaMA.

Strengths: Can summarize, draft, translate, and answer questions with remarkable fluency.

Limits: They don't "understand" like a human. They can sound confident but be wrong, biased, or incomplete. They have no soul, conscience, or Spirit.



What is AI?

Sermon Preparation & Teaching

Drafting & Outlines: Generate sermon outlines, illustrations, or thematic connections.

Exegesis Support: Summarize biblical commentaries or compare translations.

Illustration Ideas: Suggest cultural or historical examples to illuminate Scripture.

Teaching Prep: Create study guides, quizzes, and discussion questions for Bible studies.

⚠ Pastoral Caution: LLMs provide breadth, but they don't replace prayerful exegesis or Spirit-led preaching. They are conversation partners, not preachers.



What is AI?

What is AI?

Administrative Efficiency

Writing Support: Draft emails, newsletters, reports, and announcements.

Summaries: Condense meeting notes or lengthy reports into actionable points.

Planning Tools: Generate event schedules, marketing copy, or project plans.

⚠️ **Pastoral Caution:** Always fact-check and personalize. LLMs can free time, but leaders must ensure authenticity.



Pastoral Care & Counseling Support

Resource Creation: Draft devotionals, prayer guides, or liturgies for hospital visits.

Conversation Starters: Suggest questions for pastoral counseling or small groups.

Accessibility: Simplify complex theological language for seekers or new believers.

⚠ Pastoral Caution: AI cannot provide true empathy or discernment of the Spirit — it can only augment, not replace, pastoral presence.



What is AI?

Discipleship & Formation

Personalized Resources: Create reading plans, prayer guides, or catechetical material tailored to age groups.

Training Modules: Develop curricula for leadership training, confirmation, or membership classes.

Interactive Learning: Use AI for Q&A in small groups (with oversight).

⚠️ **Pastoral Caution:** Ensure AI is a tool of formation, not a substitute for embodied community and mentoring.



What is AI?

Outreach & Evangelism

Communication: Draft social media posts, blog entries, or digital devotionals.

Cultural Translation: Suggest ways to explain the gospel in contemporary idioms.

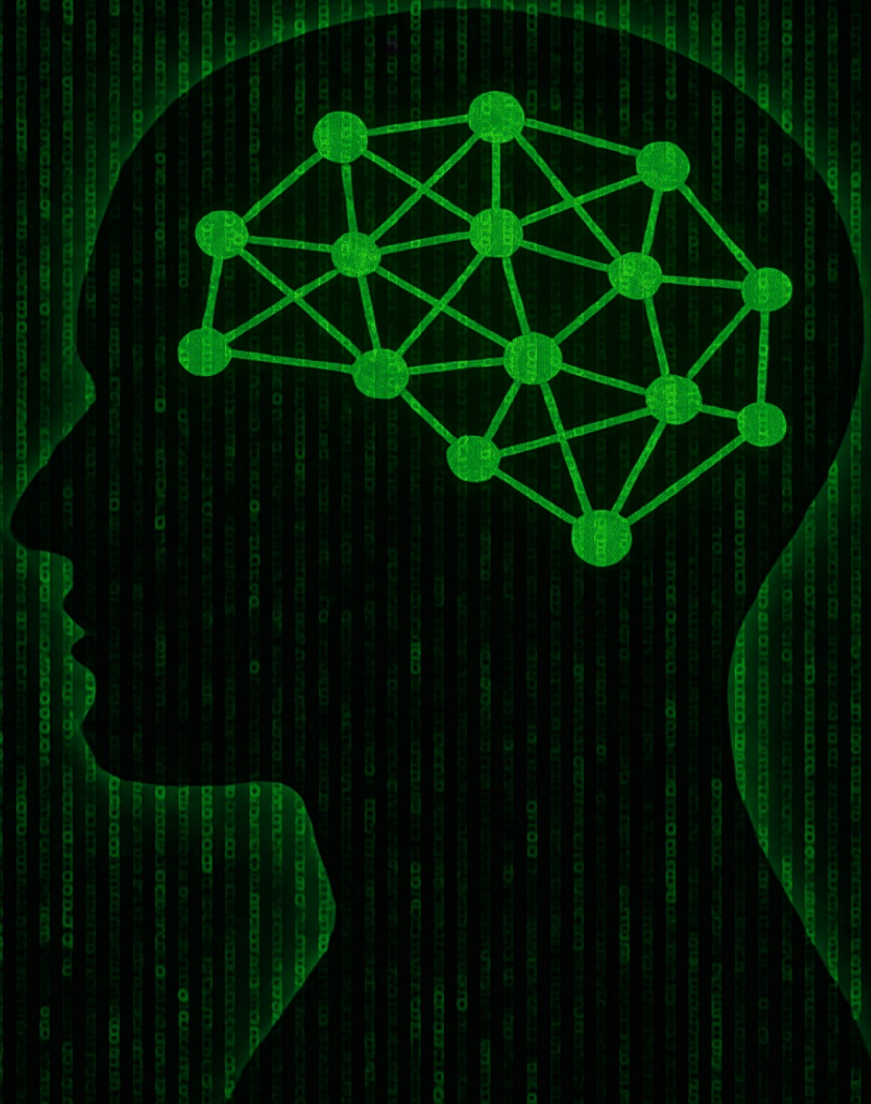
Global Reach: Provide first drafts of translations (to be checked by native speakers).

⚠️ **Pastoral Caution:** Evangelism is relational. AI can support the message, but the messenger must be Spirit-filled.



What is AI?

BREAK



Industry – Information – Intelligence

The Industrial Revolution Age (18th–20th century)

Core Feature: Tools that extend **muscle** — machines doing physical labor faster and stronger than humans.

Key Technologies:

Steam engines, spinning jennies, railroads, steel mills.
Electricity, telegraphs, telephones, automobiles, airplanes.
Factories, mass production, assembly lines.

Social Impacts:

Urbanization, labor migration, rise of wage economies.
Child labor, unsafe conditions, new class divisions.
Consumer culture emerges; time becomes standardized by the clock.

Pastoral/Theological Concerns:

Dignity of work vs. dehumanization.
Stewardship of creation (pollution, exploitation).
Sabbath rest vs. 24/7 production cycles.
Gospel engagement with inequality and justice (labor movements, abolition, social gospel).

Industry – Information – Intelligence

The Information Age (mid-20th century – early 21st century)

Core Feature: Tools that extend **memory and communication** — computers and networks storing, processing, and transmitting information at scale.

Key Technologies:

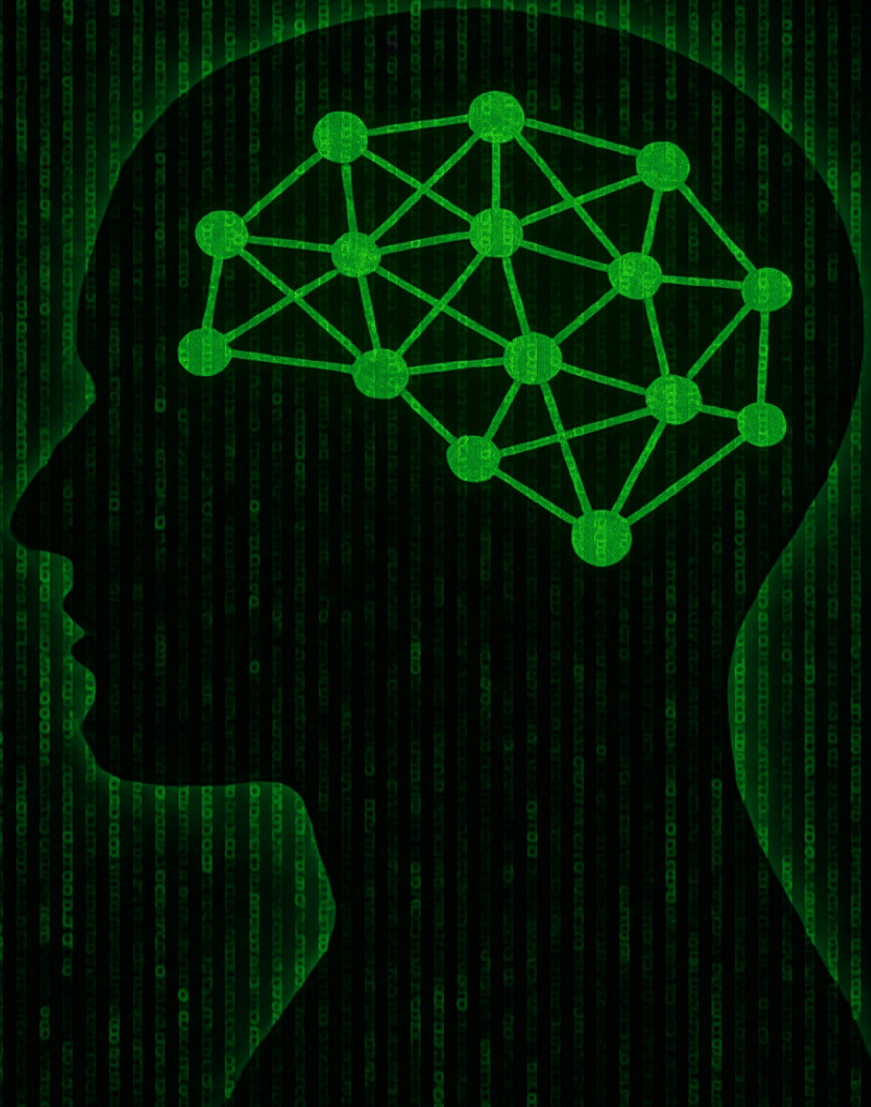
Mainframes, personal computers, microchips.
Internet, email, World Wide Web, smartphones.
Cloud computing, social media, global connectivity.

Social Impacts:

Rise of the knowledge economy.
Global communication and commerce across borders.
Democratization of information (but also misinformation).
New forms of community (virtual) and isolation (digital).

Pastoral/Theological Concerns:

Truth vs. misinformation (deep need for discernment).
Embodiment vs. disembodied community (online church, Zoom worship).
Pastoral presence across distance — blessing and challenge.
Attention economy vs. contemplation, prayer, and silence.



Industry – Information – Intelligence

The Age of Intelligence (21st century – unfolding now)

Core Feature: Tools that extend **cognition** — machines not just storing and transmitting, but “learning,” predicting, and generating.

Key Technologies:

Machine learning, neural networks, generative AI (ChatGPT, DALL·E).

Autonomous vehicles, robotics, drones.

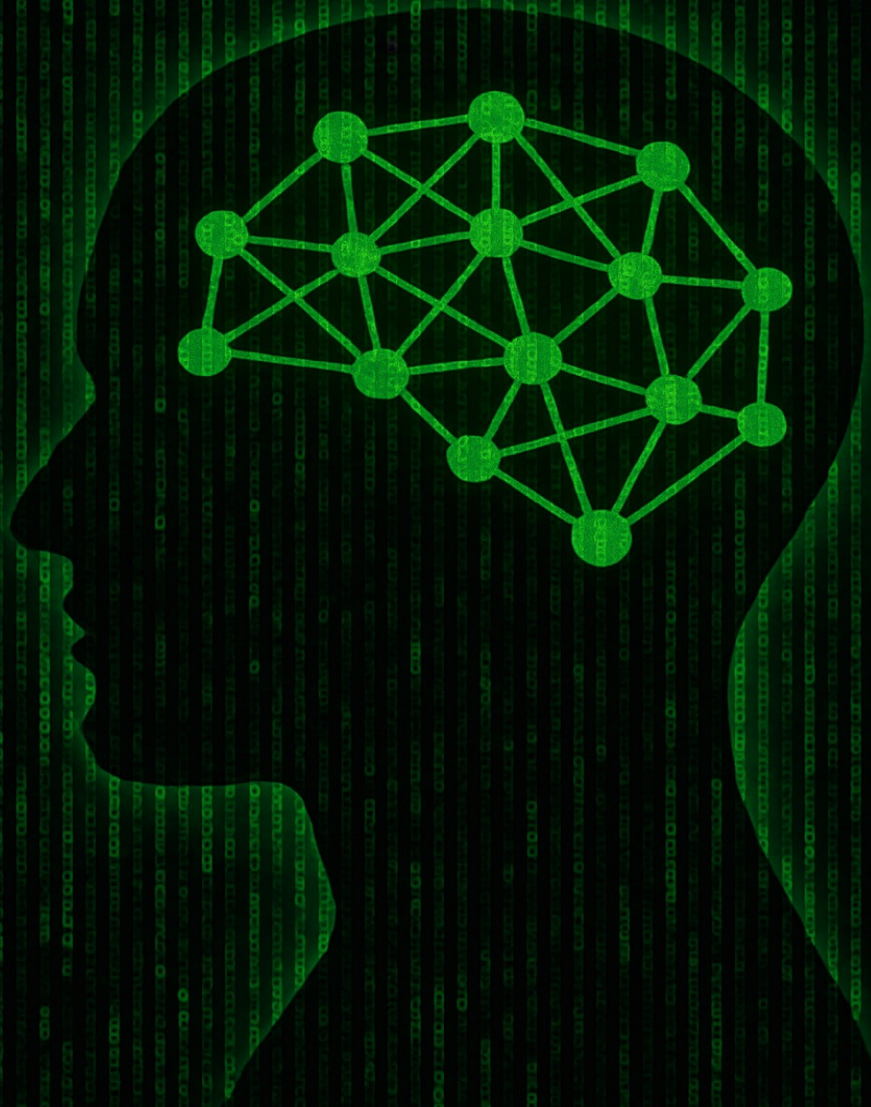
Voice assistants, predictive analytics, recommendation systems.

Biotech and neurotech integrations (CRISPR, brain-computer interfaces).

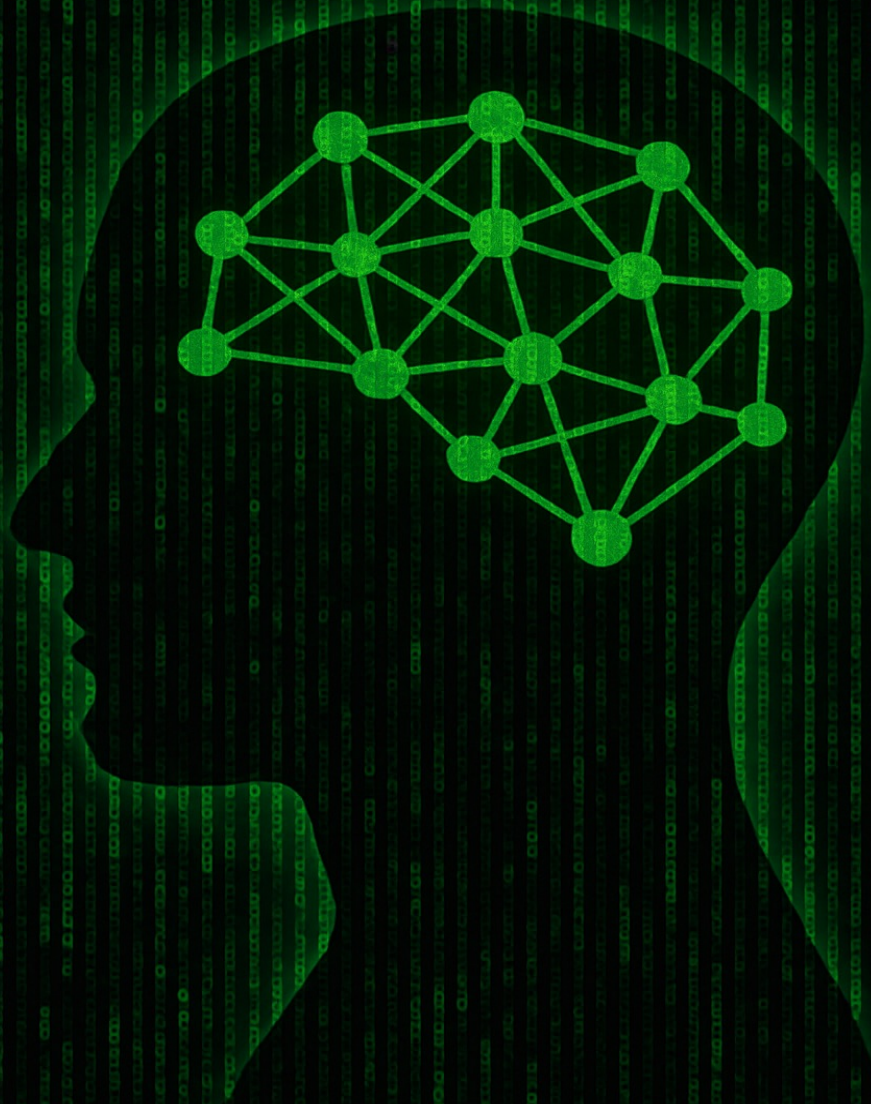
NEXT HORIZON – AGI (Artificial General Intelligence)

A still-hypothetical form of AI that could understand, learn, and apply knowledge across *any* domain at the level of a human being.

Flexible, adaptable intelligence; the ability to reason, problem-solve, and make judgments across multiple contexts (like humans do).



20 AI-Influenced Technological Concerns on The Horizon



Category 1

Life, Death, and the Body

Category 2

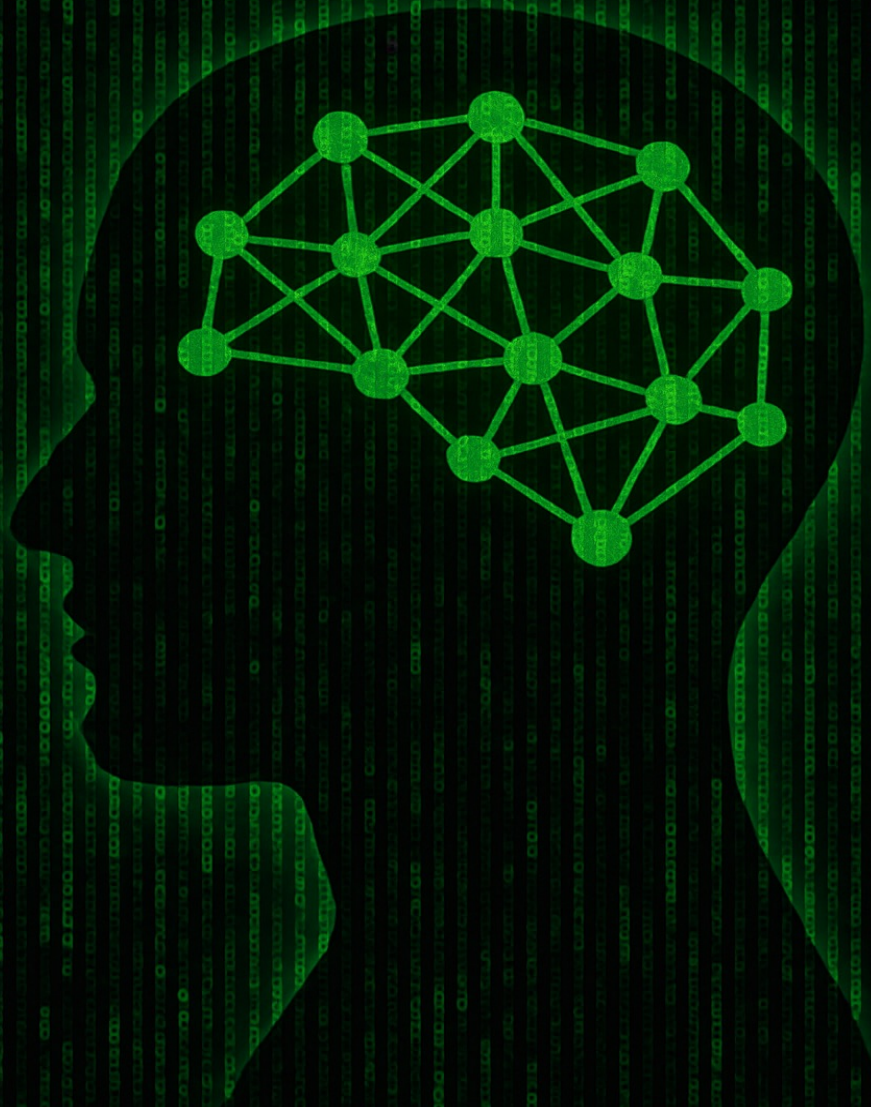
Worship, Sacraments, and Formation

Category 3

Identity, Relationships, and Vocation

Category 4

Justice, Creation, and Global Witness



Life, Death, and the Body

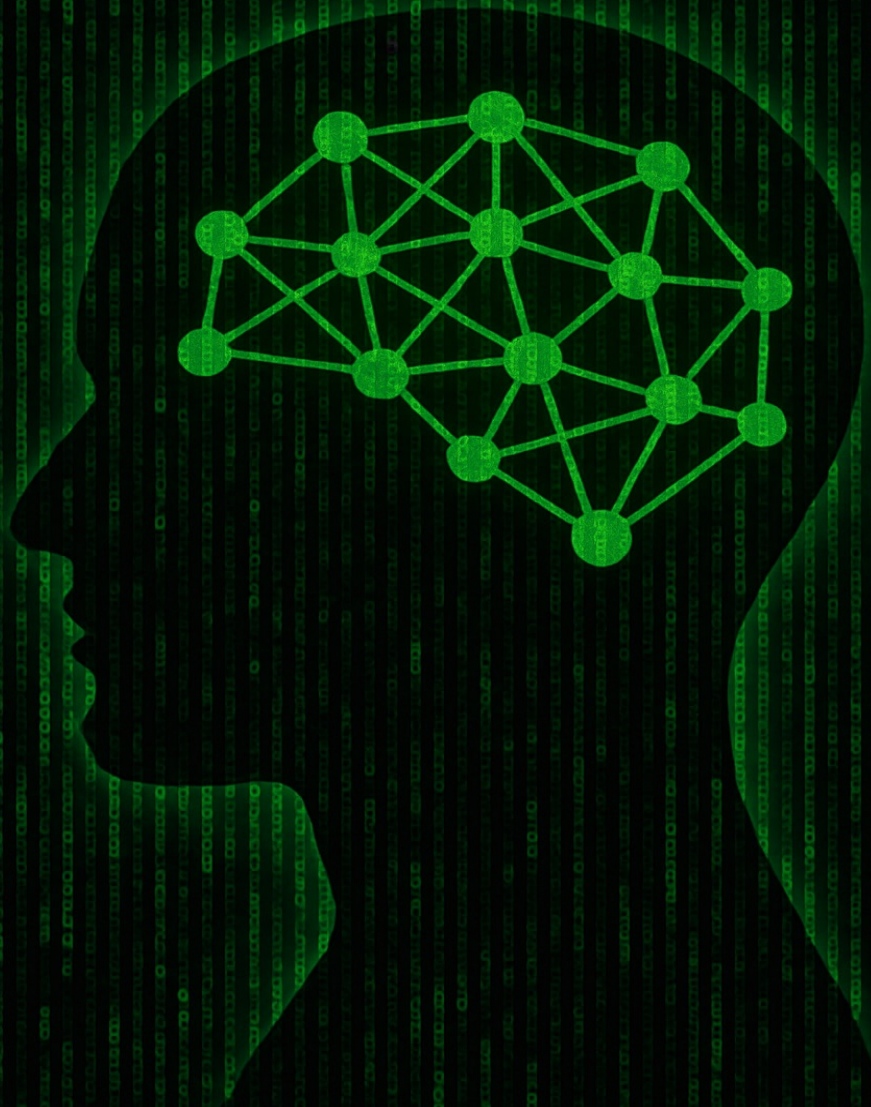
Longevity and Aging – navigating purpose, vocation, and discipleship in 100+ year lifespans.

Medical Ethics & Transhumanism – discerning limits of genetic editing, implants, and enhancements.

End-of-Life Decisions – faithful dying amid pressures to endlessly extend life.

Memory, Grief, and Digital Immortality – “deadbots” and AI recreations vs. resurrection hope.

The Temptation to Bypass Suffering – preaching the cross in an age seeking to eliminate pain.



Worship, Sacraments, and Formation

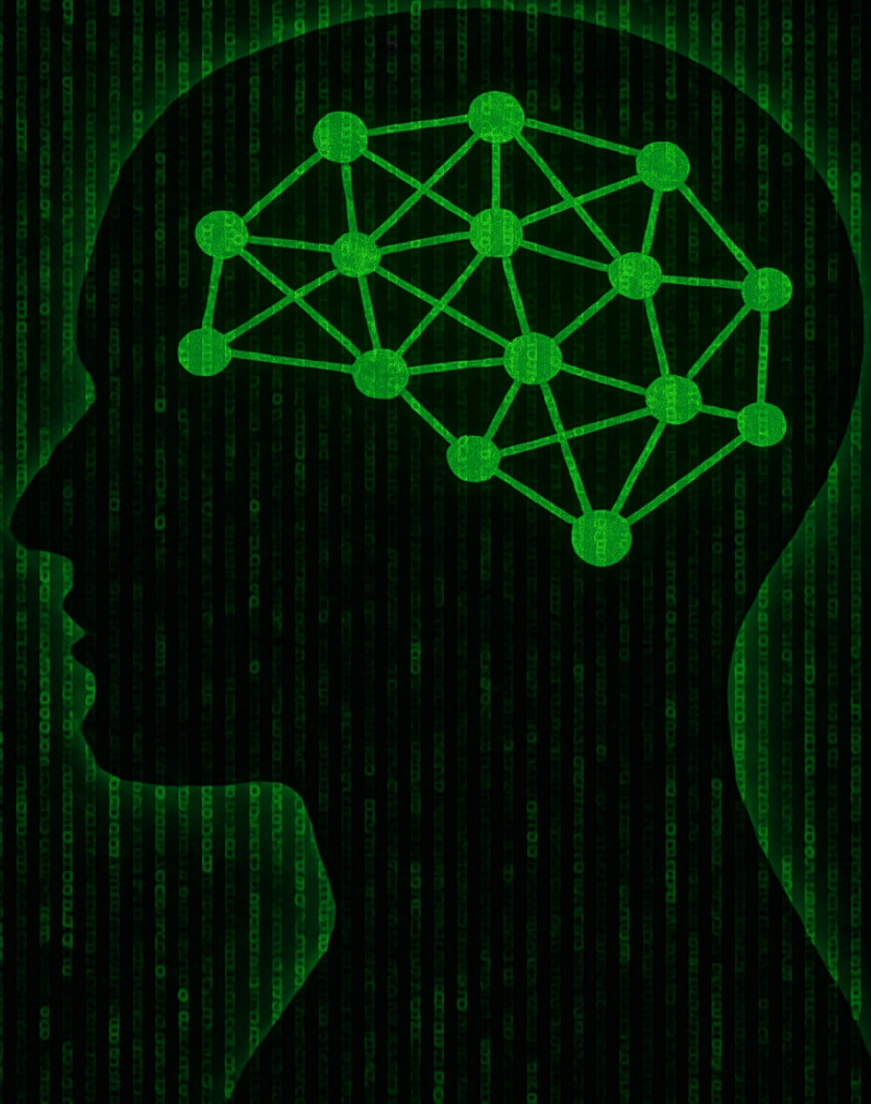
Digital Discipleship & Formation – embodiment vs. virtual-only Christian practice.

Worship & Sacraments in Virtual Spaces – can baptism, Eucharist, or ordination be digitally mediated?

Religious Authority & AI Theology – AI as preacher/teacher vs. Spirit-filled proclamation.

Scripture & Truth in a Post-Deepfake World – discernment when AI blurs reality and authority.

Chatbots as Spiritual Companions – relational presence vs. algorithmic guidance.



Identity, Relationships, and Vocation

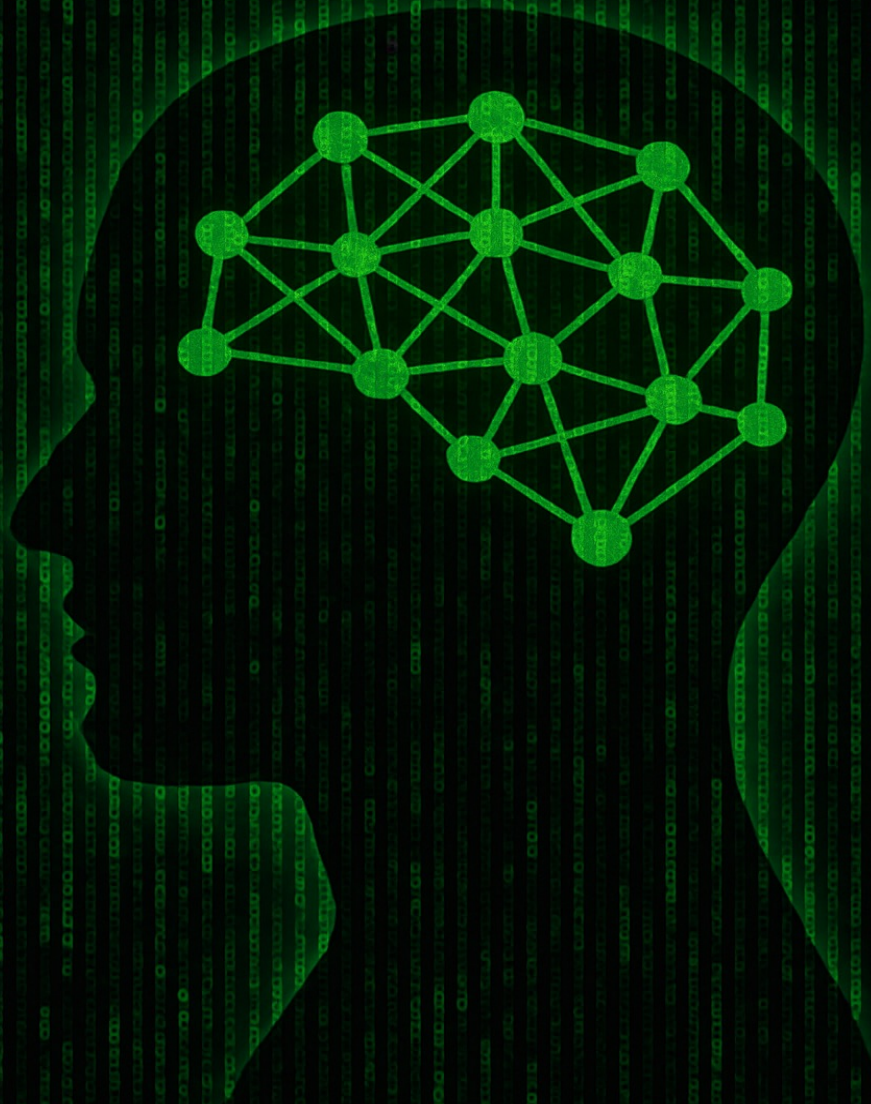
Human Identity & the Imago Dei – what it means to bear God’s image amid biotech and AI.

Human Relationships & Sexual Ethics – VR intimacy, robotics, and covenantal love.

Family & Parenting in a Tech World – forming children whose identity is grounded in Christ.

Economic Displacement & Dignity of Work – affirming vocation beyond automation.

Community Fragmentation through Hyper-Personalization – resisting isolation in an age of curated spiritual feeds.



Justice, Creation, and Global Witness

Global Inequity & Access – technology as a divider or bridge for “the least of these.”

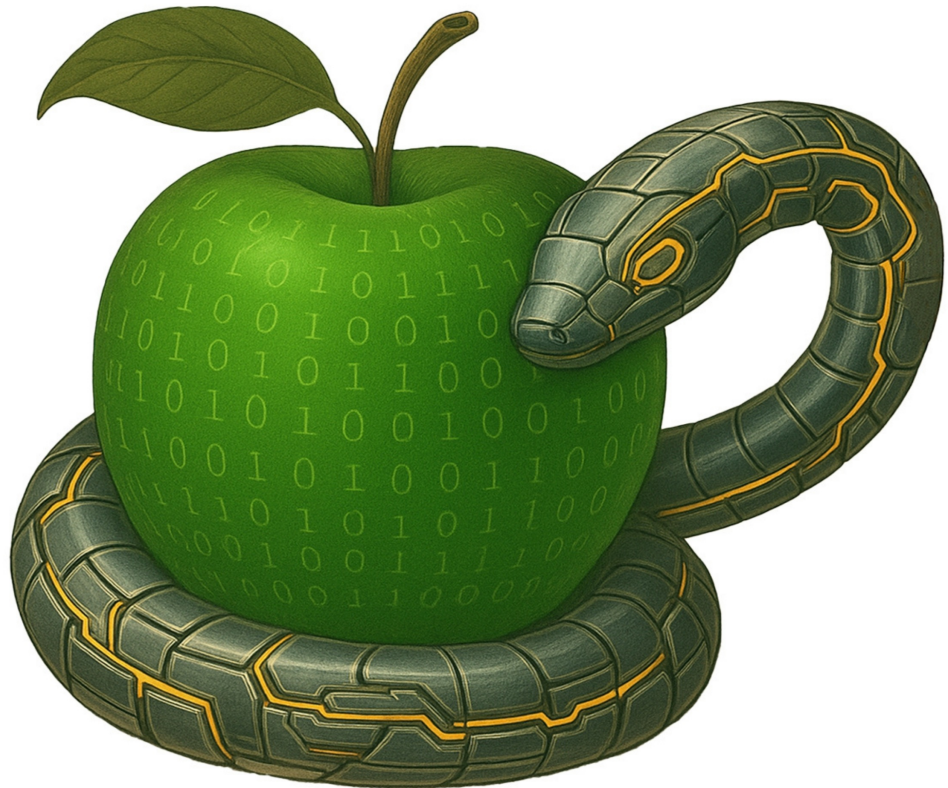
Creation Care in a High-Tech Economy – ecological costs of AI, rare-earth mining, and data consumption.

Weapons of Power & Control – surveillance, drones, and military technology shaping global peace.

Privacy & Surveillance – being more known by machines than by God’s people.

Mental Health & Tech Saturation – anxiety, isolation, and addiction in digital life.

The New Garden



LISTEN ON

