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Creatures and creators: God, humanity, and artificial general intelligence

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Abstract

This short piece addresses how the possibility of humanity's creating the technological singularity challenges and reshapes a host of traditional debates in the philosophy of religion about the significance of God's status as creator.

> Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power,
>
> for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.
>
> *Revelation (4:11)*

> We marveled at our own magnificence as we gave birth to A.I.
>
> Morpheus, *The Matrix*

For some, God's status as the creator of humanity and the world is ethically significant. Perhaps we owe things to God *qua* creator, or *vice versa*. God's status as creator bears on a variety of traditional debates in the philosophy of religion including the problem of evil, the problem of divine authority, the issue of worship-worthiness, the relation between morality and divine commands, and the axiology of theism. The possibility of artificial general intelligence (AGI)[1] reshapes these debates in so far as the status of creator is morally significant. For humanity's creation of AGI would be the closest humanity has, and perhaps ever could, come to approximating God *qua* creator. To paraphrase Bostrom,[2] we would be like God to AGIs – we would be their creators and may even sustain their digital reality.

Recent work in AI ethics considers the possibility of AI moral patiency (Coeckelbergh 2014; Danaher 2020; cf, Moosavi 2023) and AI moral agency (Altehenger and Menges 2024; Railton 2020). However, philosophers generally, and philosophers of religion specifically, should consider the ethical implications (if any) of humanity's possible future status as AGI's creators. Inquiry into the existence and structure of moral obligations between AGI

and humans *qua* creators is relevant to the case of humanity and God *qua* creator. To the extent that one thinks the two cases are analogous, intuitions about the humanity–AGI case bear on the God–humanity case. Many traditional debates in the philosophy of religion are reshaped in light of the possibility of humanity's creating AGI. In what follows, I briefly outline how this reshaping might go.

Moral obligations generated by the creator-creature relationship can run in two different directions: the *creature-to-creator* direction (e.g., humanity owing God), and the *creator-to-creature* direction (God owing humanity). In the creature-to-creator direction, one might think that humans owe worship, obedience, and a debt of gratitude to God *qua* creator (Murphy 2008, 325–326; Swinburne 1977, 212–213). Relatedly, a traditional line of thought – perhaps due to Locke – is that divine authority and commands are rooted in something like property rights that God *qua* creator enjoys over the world (Taliaferro 1992). These creature-to-creator obligations are highly relevant to debates about worship-worthiness, divine authority, and the nature of morality and divine commands.

In the creator-to-creature direction, we might think that God *qua* creator owes humanity love or deliverance from evil. Alternatively, we might think that, as a perfect being, God lacks any requiring reasons to promote human well-being (Murphy 2017, ch. 4). On this picture, God's status as creator generates very few creator-to-creature obligations. Whether there are creator-to-creature obligations of this sort is highly relevant to, for instance, the problem of evil and the problem of divine hiddenness.

All these relevant debates take on a new form when we consider the analogous obligations, if any, generated by the creator-creature relationship in the case of humanity and AGI. Of course, God and humanity differ greatly – for example, humans are, unfortunately, less than perfectly good. Still, we can ask whether humanity *qua* creators would bear creator-to-creature obligations to their creation. We can also ask whether there would be obligations running in the AGI-to-human direction. Philosophers of religion should think carefully about their answers to these questions. Indeed, a difference in intuitions between the two sets of relationships should be investigated carefully.

For example, if one thinks that AGI would lack any obligation to worship humanity *qua* creators, this is some evidence that an obligation to worship God does not stem from God's status as creator. So too with things like praise and gratitude. Conversely, thinking that humans owe God *qua* creator worship may push us toward the novel view that AGI would owe humanity worship. In the creator-to-creature direction, suppose we think that, as creators, humanity would be obligated to promote the well-being of AGI. This intuition, when transposed to the case of God and humanity, makes the problem of evil all the more salient. Conversely, if God *qua* creator is not obligated to promote the well-being of humans, then it seems that humans *qua* creators would not be obligated to promote the well-being of AGI. This is an interesting result as well.

Finally, we might wonder whether the value of AGI is increased because it was created by humanity. Our answer here, I think, is relevant to debates in the axiology of theism. One might think that the world – including humanity – is more valuable if and because it was created by God (Ballard 2025). Analogously, we might think that human-created AGI would be more valuable than some naturally occurring cousin. If this is right, then lessons from the axiology of theism may count in favour of humanity's creating AGI. Alternatively, those who find this result unintuitive may wish to reconsider the analogous line of thought in the axiology of theism.

Ultimately, the possibility of AGI reshapes traditional debates in the philosophy of religion by putting humanity's place in the world sharply into focus. That is, were humanity to create a new kind of rational creature in the form of AGI, philosophers of religion would need to grapple with humanity's being both creature *and* creator in a deeply significant way.

I have programmatically sketched what some of the implications of this possible future duality might mean for a host of traditional debates in the philosophy of religion. More work in this vein will no doubt prove fruitful.

Notes

1. I use 'AGI' synonymously with 'technological singularity'. My usage differs from the more technical notion of an intelligence explosion resulting from a self-enhancing mechanism (see Chalmers 2010). I use the term 'AGI' to distinguish future, singularity-like technologies from current AI, like large language models.
2. Bostrom (2003, 253) writes that 'In some ways, the posthumans running a simulation are like gods in relation to the people inhabiting the simulation'.

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