The Singularity is Near,' Or Is It? Techno-Gnosticism and the Politics of Eschatology

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The inventor, author, and post-humanist cheerleader Ray Kurzweil proposes that, by the year 2045, technological progress will become so advanced that it will allow humans to download their consciousness into computers and thus live forever, as ghosts within a machine. Such championing of technological innovation to solve all of humanity’s problems—most importantly, death—is not a new line of thinking, but in fact corresponds to a range of new media theorizations with numerous historical precedents, including the writings of Teilhard de Chardin and Gnosticism, which Eric Vogelin contended to be the most influential religion within the modern technological era. While aspects of Kurzweil’s writings address compelling issues currently faced by Western society within its precarious position between the realms of biology and technology, his arguments simultaneously neglect many profound elements of human nature; as Douglas Hofstadter has observed, “It’s as if you took a lot of very good food and some dog excrement and blended it all up so that you can’t possibly figure out what’s good or bad.” Nonetheless, Kurzweil’s philosophical project has received widespread support from Google, the US military, and even has its own Singularity University. This paper will investigate the underlying implications, biases and assumptions within the post-humanist claims of thinkers such as Kurzweil—who actively seek to transform the essence of humanity from beings of flesh to objects of metal—that neglect issues of ontology, identity, commodification, and the socio-economic reality of capitalist production, in addition to providing a panacea against other forms of social change in an era desperately in need of transformation. At what point does innovation become destruction, and can such a progression ultimately be avoided?