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In the Beginning, *Who Created?* Reflections on God, Cyborgs and the Internet

My research examines the ways our technology, especially human life as lived online, shapes how humans understand themselves and God. This paper relates to a book and several papers I have given on the subject. In this particular paper, I compare the biblical Genesis creation stories with the stories of humans who create online-gaming avatars, social media programs like Facebook, and other means of identity-formation online. I argue, based both on sociological studies of online identity formation as well as robust discussion of Genesis creation stories, that our creations and creativity online are often much more detrimental to our collective well-being than we realize. Yet, we live inexorably in a technological age, so in my conclusions I suggest that we need to tell more compelling creation stories to and about each other for both online and offline life. This study offers immediate connections for lay people who know little about either theology or the philosophy of technology because it draws out both reflection on and practical application for online and offline life, something about which many Americans have direct experience.

A key point in my work is that creation, in a variety of meanings of the word, matters. This is one of the reasons why theology is an important conversation partner in discussions about technology. Scholars working in the field of theology known as theological anthropology (the study of God's relationship with humanity) know that the stories we tell, and *how* we tell those stories, matter for peoples' identities. Feminist theologians, for example, discuss the symbolic nature of Eve being created from Adam's side for what that has meant about how Christians and those impacted by Christian culture understand women. Even when people do not profess Christian beliefs, the language associated with those creation stories still permeate identity formation - especially in a world where about half the world's population profess to belong to religious traditions that make use of the Genesis creation stories in some way. Putting the biblical Genesis creation accounts in conversation with contemporary technology enables us to ask questions of both Genesis and contemporary technological creations. Asking those questions, in turn, allows for deeper and better understanding of what it means to be human.

While my project is theological, it is integrally related to several other fields, including literature, psychology, philosophy and neurobiology. For example, I use the term "cyborg" in both the title and the paper itself as a technical term (one that shows up in philosophies and theologies of technology) to describe what it means to be human in a technological age like ours. The traditional definition of "cyborg" is a human being whose physiological processes are aided or controlled by mechanical or electronic machines. Many philosophers and theologians studying technology say that we have now entered the age of the cyborg because of the ways we use smart phones, ipads and other such devices as aids or add-ins for our brains. Such a view has been supported by the work of psychologists and neurobiologists whose studies have shown how technological devices form our responses to each other and the world. The work of scholars from these fields forms part of my collaborative discussion of online creation stories and the biblical creation stories.