

AI, Power, and the Question of the Human Soul, Part 1

Who Is My Neighbor?

²⁹ But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”...

³⁶ “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” — Luke 10:29, 36–37

There is a great deal of concern today about artificial intelligence. Some of it is overblown, some of it is under-informed, and some of it is probably not worried enough.

The public conversation often focuses on practical fears: Will AI take jobs? Will students use it to cheat? Will it spread misinformation? Will it become smarter than we are? These are important questions. But beneath them is a deeper one: What kind of people will be holding this power?

Technology does not arrive in a moral vacuum. The society that produces AI shapes it. A hammer can build a house or break a window. A printing press can spread scripture or propaganda. The internet can connect the lonely or inflame the angry. Artificial intelligence is no different, except that its reach may be greater and its speed far faster than anything we have known before.

A genuine threat lies in AI advancement transforming into a competition between differing political and ethical viewpoints.

In the West, AI is often shaped by consumer capitalism. I don't mean to imply that everyone participating has ill intentions. Many people working in technology are thoughtful, responsible, and genuinely trying to do good. But the system itself tends to reward profit, speed, attention, convenience, personalization, and market dominance. The danger is not always tyranny by force. It may be tyranny by appetite.

AI can learn to give us more of what we already want: more entertainment, more outrage, more convenience, more affirmation, more distraction. It can reduce the human person to a consumer, a data point, a productivity unit, or a bundle of preferences.

In authoritarian systems, the danger looks different. There AI can become an instrument of surveillance, control, censorship, military power, and national dominance. The individual is not treated primarily as a consumer to be captured, but as a citizen-subject to be managed. The temptation there is tyranny by order.

So we face two distorted visions of humanity.

One says: You are what you desire.

The other says: You are what the state requires.

But Jesus asks a different question.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus refuses to let “neighbor” remain an abstract category. My neighbor is not a problem to be managed, a market to be captured, or a subject to be controlled. For a Christian, a neighbor is the wounded person on the road, a person deserving mercy.

Objectification is why AI raises such deep questions. Any technology with this much power will eventually reveal what we believe a human being is.

- Is my neighbor a consumer?
- A voter?
- A threat?
- A data source?
- A rival? A burden?
- Or is my neighbor someone to whom I owe mercy, a relationship?

Where does this leave the average Christian?

This is the point where we will resume next month.