Playing God

The Theological Implications of Man Creating Sentient Life with an Emergent Vital-Factor in Science Fiction

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Abstract

This dissertation will discuss the theological and ethical ramifications of man creating new life, specifically in their own image, by scientific and technological means in science fiction. Advances in science and technology over recent decades, in areas concerned with the design and creation of 'life', have reinvigorated the public's concern of scientists 'playing God'; seeing science fiction attempt to address such issues. The story of a religious deity creating man in its own image is not restricted to one faith; but for the most part I will be referencing the Judeo-Christian God, and the Titan Prometheus from Greek mythology. This dissertation chronologically discusses the materialistic creations of man seen in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), the re-imagined Battlestar Galactic (2003) and Ridley Scott's Prometheus (2012). The 'theft' of forbidden knowledge and technology, and the consequential 'wrath of God' motif is shared by all three case studies, with each text showing man's creation of a new 'life' in humanoid form which I sometimes refer to as 'biological robots'. The biological robot is a sophisticated speculation as to the future of robotics; much more so than the traditional, metal robot often seen in science fiction as it draws upon contemporary biorobotics. Science fiction propagates the idea of creation being a progressive chain that might have theological implications but is not restricted to a metaphysical deity. Even a creation can create life with sentience, meaning and existential requirements; to consider this, I will be looking at the theological concept of the 'created co-creator'. I will also be heavily referencing the vitalist concept of an immaterial "vital factor in living things", common referred to as the soul, as well as the contrasting materialist ideology. These two concepts, along with the unpredicted characteristics that emerge in each 'biological robot', represent an evident 'vital factor', are extremely prevalent throughout all three case studies of this paper.