Review

film: *Ex-Machina*

The Latin term (in full) *Deus Ex Machina* translates as 'god from a machine' and instantaneously introduces the perceived dichotomy between religion and science. In harmony with its title, *Ex-Machina* cleverly explores some of our fears surrounding the exponential growth of technology in recent years.

Released in 2015, this sci-fi film follows the experiences of Caleb, a keen coder after he 'wins' the highly coveted opportunity to visit the CEO of his company, Nathan, in his lavish home for a week. Nathan's home, surrounded by natural beauty and cut off from all connection with reality also functions as a research facility. On arrival, Caleb's role for the week is revealed – he is to assess the ability of Ava, a female android, to pass the Turing test (a measure of a machine's abilities which makes it indistinguishable to those of a human). This opportunity, sold to Caleb as 'a moment in history', requires him to formally assess Ava's ability to think, feel and form connections, all qualities involved in human consciousness.

Through a subsequent series of encounters, Caleb grows closer to Ava. He understands her and even trusts her more than Nathan, the only other human on site – an idea that is currently inconceivable. Following the formality of this test, every encounter Caleb has with Ava is filmed for later viewing by Nathan, except the moments during the 'power cuts', secretly orchestrated by Ava. In these moments, the pair can communicate freely and form an emotional intimacy without anyone watching. It is during these moments that Ava can encourage Caleb to aid her escape.

Through a tense series of plot twists, a battle ensues - will AI outsmart the human race?

In his directorial debut, Alex Garland skilfully cultivates a sense of isolation and uncertainty, which given the context, creates tense and uneasy viewing at a time when the dark side of technology `is increasingly becoming a reality. It address our fears of technological advancement; namely the invasion of privacy and the dangers of transitioning from an 'I-it' relationship to an 'I-you' dynamic with our devices, as we begin to assign qualities of personhood to man-made products.

To Christians, the notion of an artificial organism exhibiting qualities intrinsic to human existence is uncomfortable. It directly conflicts with how we are uniquely 'made in God's image.' (Genesis 1:27) This plays on the dangers of humans acting in the role of God, resonating with themes from the tower of Babel[1] and reminding us of the futility of our efforts when we lose sight of God.

Though uneasy viewing at times, this film is beautifully crafted, relates well to its audience and effectively relays some key questions for debate, such as: *Should we enforce limits on technological advancement? How do we know when we have crossed the line?* ▪

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REF 1.   Genesis 11:4