

A BIBLICAL VIEW ON
Transhumanism



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Transhumanism



Over the last few years, we have heard more pundits and futurists talk about transhumanism. What is this philosophy? How will it affect our families and us? How should a Christian think about transhumanism?

Transhumanism is an intellectual and cultural movement that seeks to transform the human condition. The leaders of this movement want to use developing technologies to

eliminate aging and enhance human potential (physical, psychological, and mental).

Two primary ways they want to do this is through genetic engineering and artificial intelligence. They want to genetically create “the new man,” and they want to use technology to merge humans with machines. Previous booklets on *A Biblical Point of View on Genetic Engineering* and *A Biblical Point of View on Artificial Intelligence* can provide some helpful background to the discussion in this booklet.

The genetic part of this equation claims that we can use gene splicing and other genetic modification techniques so that genes can be easily transferred between species. This might even create a global super-organism. Christians can certainly endorse the use of genetics to rid humankind of genetic diseases.¹

But we should be concerned about geneticists who want to create a superhuman race. Leon Kass warned that “Engineering the engineer seems to differ in kind from engineering the engine.”²

The other part of the equation concerns technology. The leaders of transhumanism believe we are on the cusp of a technological threshold in both artificial intelligence and human-machine technology.

The “humanism” in transhumanism reminds us that this is a philosophy rooted in Enlightenment humanism. But it is different. Whereas the goal of humanism was to develop the ideal human, the goal of transhumanism is to transcend what we have traditionally considered human.

The Transhumanist Declaration provides eight key points to describe

what the signers believe should be the future of humans.³ Transhumanism can be understood by focusing on two foundational principles: metaman and the singularity.

Two Principles of Transhumanism

The first principle is “metaman.” Futurists predict that our current human condition will evolve into being a cyborg (short for cybernetic organism). Our bodies will be joined to machines as we “evolve” through technological progress.

Transhumanists believe we will have immense knowledge and information because of the rapid advances in artificial intelligence and computing power. These advances will eventually exceed human intelligence. Meanwhile, advances in genetic engineering will allow scientists to modify the human body to keep pace with these tech-

nological advances.

This is the two-fold hope of the transhumanists: artificial intelligence and genetic engineering. One represents biological change through mixing and matching genes. The other presents the merging of human intelligence with artificial intelligence.

In fact, the hope is to create a superorganism through the transference of genes between species. This may even eradicate the differences between species. One scientist even suggested that tampering with the genetic codes of all plants and animals on this planet would cause the “definition of human beings to drift.”⁴ Humans would merge with the rest of nature, thereby creating a planetary superorganism he calls “Metaman.”

In essence, transhumanists would

like to erase any distinction between human, other forms in nature, and machines. Humans would now control the future direction of evolution and merge all forms of life and non-life together in one enormous superorganism.

The second principle is “the singularity.” Transhumanists wait for the arrival of a technological threshold that will be achieved through artificial intelligence. Futurists predict that sometime in the middle of this century, we will achieve what transhumanists call “the singularity.”⁵ The current distinction between humanity and nature and machine will fade and there will no longer be any barriers between the natural world and artificial world.

This utopian view assumes that humans will be able to transcend the limitations of our biological bodies and brains. There will no longer be

any distinction between humans and machines. And this, say the transhumanists, will allow humanity to no longer be resigned to death as the end. All of this, they predict, will usher in a technological millennium.

Transhumanism in the Movies

Science fiction writers often portray concepts found in transhumanism, but also show the inherent problems with these ideas. Genetic engineering and breeding the human race sounds like a good idea until you watch the movie *Gattaca*.⁶ In that future, eugenics plays a key role in determining a person's social class.

In the movie, Vincent is born without the aid of this technology and is seen as inferior to his brother Anton who was conceived with the aid of genetic selection. Vincent dreams of a career in space, but is constantly

reminded of his genetic inferiority and faces discrimination. He decides to impersonate someone with a superior genetic profile. He is accepted into the space program not on the basis of his ability. The entire interview process is a DNA test. The movie reminds us that there is likely to be significant discrimination of people who are produced “the old fashioned way” in a society that produces children “the new and improved way.”

In this movie, the idea of living in a perfect body that does not age sounds exciting, until you watch the movie *In Time*.⁷ A genetic advancement now allows humanity to stop aging at 24, but also requires people to earn more time or die. “Living time” can be transferred between people and essentially has replaced money. But when the clock reaches zero, you die.

Society in the movie is divided into social classes who live in specialized towns called “Time Zones.” The poor live in the ghettos and must work hard just to survive and add enough time to their bodies. Meanwhile the rich live in luxury and have all the time they need (and can even live for centuries). Will Salas begins to discover the inequity of the way time is allocated and ultimately upsets the entire social stratification in the “Time Zones.” The movie reminds us that living forever may sound inviting, but you eventually wear out. As one rich person says, “your mind is worn out, even though your body may not be. We want, we need, to die.”

In the movie *Elysium*, two classes of people exist.⁸ Wealthy people live on a luxurious space station called Elysium. They enjoy the best of technology, including medical devices

(called Med-Bays) that rid them of disease and injury. The poor live on an overpopulated, devastated Earth and are policed by unemotional and compassionless robots.

Max Da Costa lives in the ruins of Los Angeles and works on an assembly line for a military company that supplies arms and weapons for Elysium. He has an accident at his work and is exposed to lethal radiation. Knowing he only has a few days to live, he works to find a way to get to Elysium and be saved by using one of the Med-Bays. He is able to download a program to his brain that can override the central computer in Elysium. He makes his way to Elysium but dies in the process of uploading the computer program that registers every resident of Earth as a citizen of Elysium. Shuttles are then deployed to take the sick from Earth to Elysium.

What about the idea that technology could allow us to live our lives through humanoid robots in the world while we are safe and protected at home? That may seem appealing until we watch the movie *Surrogates*.⁹ People in the film live through high-tech surrogates who are beautiful, athletic, and remotely controlled. People experience life vicariously from the comfort of their homes.

Agent Tom Green ventures out into the real world to investigate a murder of two people who died when their surrogates were destroyed. That is not supposed to happen. People using a surrogate are protected from harm and pain. They are not supposed to die even if the surrogated is damaged or destroyed. This movie challenges the idea that we should use technology to keep us from living in the real world.

We can think of many other movies that warn us of what might happen in a world where machines control the world. The *Terminator* movie series and the *Matrix* movie series are examples. They remind us that machines should be our servants, not our masters.

Biblical Perspective

How should Christians respond to transhumanism? We should begin by looking at the philosophical foundation of this movement. It begins with a belief that there is no God and we are responsible for our own destiny. It is also based upon an evolutionary foundation that assumes that we are the product of millions of years of chance process.

The leaders of transhumanism see genetic engineering as a tool to be used to speed up the process of evolution. We can use genetics to

enhance and improve the human race. If we believe that humans are merely the product of the undirected force of evolution, then certainly intelligent scientists can “improve on nature.”

Evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley looked forward to the day in which scientists could fill the “position of business manager for the cosmic process of evolution.”¹⁰ Transhumanists believe that possibility is within our grasp. One proponent explained that transhumanism is “humanity taking control of its evolutionary destiny.”¹¹

The evolutionary argument goes like this. Humans die due to some technological glitch (e.g., heart stops beating). Therefore, “Every technical problem has a technical solution. We don’t need to wait for the Second Coming in which to overcome death. A couple of geeks in a lab can

do it. If traditionally death was the specialty of priests and theologians, now the engineers are taking over."¹²

But if humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), then we can and should use genetic technology to treat and cure the physical effects of the Fall (Genesis 3). That does not mean we should usurp the role of the Creator and breed a super human race.

The leaders of transhumanism believe we should use technology to improve the human race so that we are perfect and immortal. In many ways, this technological imperative harkens back to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Instead, we should use technology wisely as we exercise dominion over the world (Genesis 1:28).

Additional Resources

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Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2019.

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End Notes

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³Transhumanism Declaration, <https://www.humanityplus.org/the-transhumanist-declaration>.

⁴Gregory Stock, *Metaman: The Merging of Humans*

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⁵Ray Kurtzweil, *The Singularity Is Near*, NY: Penquin, 2005.

⁶Gattaca, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0119177/>.

⁷In Time, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1637688/>.

⁸Elysium, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1535108/>.

⁹Surrogates, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0986263/>.

¹⁰Julian Huxley in Joseph Fletcher's book, *The Ethics of Genetic Control* (Anchor, 1974), 8.

¹¹Michael Hauskeller, *Better Humans? Understanding the Enhancement Project*, UK: Acumen, 2013, 85.

¹²Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, London: Penquin, 2016, 23.



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