

Transhumanism

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Founder: Julian Huxley

Founding Date: 1957

INTRODUCTION

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:1-4).

Consider two serpentine lies: you will not die and you will be like God. Our first parents did not die immediately after sinning and, in a way, they became like God, but not in the way they imagined. When our first parents succumbed to the temptation of the serpent (the devil in disguise),¹ they became morally separated from God and lost their original felicity in God’s good world. They would both die, the serpent’s lie to the contrary. Ever after, humans would continue to be tempted to live independently from their Maker and to go after false religions, false hopes, and even the aspire to deity itself. As Jeremiah records: “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jeremiah 2:13).

Death has haunted our lot since death first appeared. The first death was a murder when Cain slew his brother Abel (Genesis 4). Genesis, chapter five, speaks of both the long life and inevitable deaths of Adam, Seth, Enoch, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Methuselah, and Lamech. Enoch seems to have mysteriously escaped. “Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away” (Genesis 5:23-24). He was the only one who got out of here alive, except Jesus, who had to die before he rose again and ascended into heaven. Death exists because of sin. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Those who deny God’s offer of eternal life through Christ Jesus often do not give up on eternal life through some other means. Hindus and Buddhists hope to leave this sorry wheel of reincarnation and attain ultimate enlightenment. Muslims hope their good deeds will warrant paradise from Allah, whom they call “most merciful.”

FOUNDATION OF TRANSHUMANISM

Transhumanism is part of a larger cluster of concerns for the human future as related to technological breakthroughs and possibilities. This involves artificial intelligence, computer networks, robotics, and other fields. Utopian and dystopian scenarios abound. Some fear that computers and robotic powers will dwarf that of humanity and that they will make us their slaves. Others hope that technology can overcome death itself as man merges with machine or becomes an immortal consciousness housed in successive computer networks.

Atheists are materialists who believe that personal existence ends when the brain no longer functions. The machine stops. The person dies. Other atheists who are transhumanists want to wrest immortality from mortality through technology. No God will save them, but they may save themselves. To do so, they must posit a future beyond the human to embrace the posthuman. Transhumanism is the road to the posthuman, so radically different from its predecessor species that it merits a new name. Rana and Samples define transhumanism this way:

Transhumanism constitutes a broadly defined intellectual and cultural movement that seeks to transform the present human condition through the use of science and technology. It plans to elevate humans to an exponentially greater step in evolutionary development called the “post human” state—a utopia of our own making.²

A proponent of transhumanism describes his philosophy. It is their [the transhumanists'] belief that we can and should eradicate aging as a cause of death; that we can and should use technology to augment our bodies and our minds; that we can and should merge with machines, remaking ourselves, finally in the image of our own higher ideals.³

But transhumanists, while still secular, want to transcend the human as a butterfly leaves the caterpillar behind. Historian and bestselling author, Yuval Noah Harari claims that death is a “technical problem” that can be overcome as humans (or some humans) graduate from *homo sapiens* to *homo deus* through technological ingenuities.⁴ In other words, humans can be upgraded into gods.

Transhumanism is a philosophy, not an organized body of religious believers. Transhumanists are techno-optimists who affirm that humanity's best days are ahead. The typical pessimism of atheists (you die and are eaten by worms) can turn to optimism through the alchemy of technology. Many human limits and even death itself can be therein overcome. Three significant areas of success in human betterment give the movement its spark—gene editing, human-computer interface technology, and anti-aging technology.⁵ Perhaps the sky is the limit, if we extrapolate madly.

That promise can only be fulfilled in three ways: through the radical enhancement of our bodies, the melding of our bodies with technologies (the cyborg option), and by leaving our bodies behind entirely, as we slough off our old, biologically-limited bodies and enter a realm beyond anything previously experienced. No less than the physicist, Stephen Hawking, advanced that idea as did a sociologist. “William Sims Bainbridge [described] a promise of ‘cyberimmortality,’ when we will be able to experience a spiritual eternity that persists long after our bodies have decayed, by uploading digital records of our thoughts and feelings into perpetual storage systems.”⁶ To grasp this diverse movement, we will consider its five basic principles.⁷

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF TRANSHUMANISM

First, transhumanists affirm vast *human potential* for betterment. We need not accept death as a biological given forever. Humans have the potential to transcend their very humanity as has been it is now experienced. Human nature is not static, but dynamic; humans can make themselves far better than they now are, just as humans have advanced over the ages. An early group of transhumanists were called Extropians. *Extropy* is the opposite of *entropy*. Human ingenuity, they claimed, can release us from the entropy of death and decay.⁸

Second, the hope for *radical technological progress* is a necessary plank in the transhumanist worldview. That means a quantum leap in scientific discovery and technological advancements pertaining to genetic engineering and information technology. There are also great hopes for molecular nanotechnology and artificial intelligent (AI). The goals include fantastically advanced bodily functions, heightened intelligence, and indefinite expansion of life span.⁹

Third, secular transhumanists (who are the vast majority and the leading thinkers)¹⁰ affirm *human autonomy* from God or any higher authority. Humans, as uncreated by God, are responsible on their own to find the path through the transhuman to the posthuman. As the *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973) put it, “While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.”¹¹ While the basic philosophy of transhumanism is the same as that of secular humanism, their goal is to transcend the human and humanism entirely. Both kinds of humanists are naturalists. Nature alone exists. However, they differ as to what nature may eventually afford us.

The fourth idea is *posthuman transformation*, which occurs when humanity crosses a threshold into something beyond the human, which is defined by vastly superior intellectual and physical abilities, perhaps even defeating death itself through technological enhancement and the merging of the human and the machine. This rupture in history is sometimes called “the singularity.”

Fifth, the moral philosophy of transhumanism is not governed by biblical principles, since it is atheistic and naturalistic. Nor are many biblical ideas retained in a secular form, such as the existence of an objective moral law or the cultivation of specific virtues, such as faith, hope, and love. Rather, transhumanism is driven by one or more of the following philosophies: egoism (self-interest as central), libertarianism (freedom from governmental restraint), utilitarianism (the greatest good for greatest number), relativism (subjective moral standards), and pragmatism (truth is found through what achieves desired ends for human betterment).

MATERIALISM AND MIND

Some transhumanists envision immortality or greatly expanded mortality by uploading one's mind into cyberspace. On this view, one's consciousness is somehow transferred entirely to a machine or network of machines.¹² This was the theme of the 1992 sci-fi horror film, “Lawnmower Man,” which was based on a 1975 short story by Stephen King. One incarnates from a carbon-based organism to a silicon-

based mechanism, but without losing the essentials of consciousness (thought, emotion, and will) or some manner of agency (accomplishing desired actions through various means).

Transhumanism is a materialist philosophy in which human identity is constituted entirely by material states working in particular ways. When biological states act in certain ways, consciousness occurs. When it stops working in these ways, consciousness ends. There is no separate immaterial mind or soul. If this is true, then it might be possible to transfer the material workings of the material and biological brain into a non-biological and digital identity. However, human identity is not exhausted by material states. We are both mind and body. This is called dualism. We know this from both Scripture and philosophy.

Genesis teaches that God took the dust of the earth and breathed His spirit upon it to create Adam, the first man. Thus, he and his progeny possess a soul distinct from the body. Both the human body and soul are intrinsically valuable since they are created by a good God, so to affirm the existence of the soul is not to lapse into any Platonic or Gnostic dualism that devalues the body in favor of the soul. Body and soul are both adversely affected by sin. Jesus assumed a distinction between body and soul as well. “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Further, when Jesus assured the criminal being crucified next him that “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise,” he assumed that they would both continue to exist as souls, even after their bodies would die (Luke 23:43).

Yet even without the sure testimony of Scripture, philosophy comes to the aid of dualism as well.¹³ Our mental experience of the world is not identical to any material state, although our experiences are associated with material states. The activity of my brain when I see the color red is not red itself. Nor is my feeling of sorrow identical to any brain state, although my brain changes when I am sad. These subjective experiences are called *qualia*, which means subjective states of perception, feeling, and thinking.

If, therefore, mental states are not identical to or reducible to physical states, the best explanation for this is that we possess an immaterial soul which experiences these states. And if this is true, then the soul cannot be exported to a new home in silicon. We are not software that can be uploaded to a new machine. We are souls made for biological bodies and which can, for a time, exist apart from these bodies before we are resurrected in our eternal bodies (Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15).

Transhumanism, Death and Eternal Life

Harari to the contrary, death is not a “technical problem” amendable to a technical solution. Rather, death is a universal blight inexorable by human means. However much we may improve our lot, the ultimate answer is divine, since humans got themselves into their plight to begin with. As Paul writes:

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! (Romans 5:17).

A cunning serpent tempted our first parents with the false promise that they could become apart from God’s will. Transhumanists echo the same lie by pointing to staggering technological achievements and the limitless possibilities for vastly improving the human lot. But the lie remains. Those who brought death into the world cannot defeat death by in their own fallen and finite strength. That achievement was wrought by Jesus Christ, the God-man, and by him alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Christians can confidently reject the atheistic-naturalistic worldview that is assumed by transhumanism, since there is ample evidence for the existence of God from history, philosophy, and science. I make this case at length in *Christian Apologetics* and many others have as well. However, transhumanism aspires to what God reliably offers through Jesus Christ—immortality in a perfected world. As such, it indicates the inescapable human yearning for transcendence and salvation. As the Preacher of Ecclesiastes wrote, God “has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

But having denied the Creator, transhumanism can only look to nature for redemption. This is hopeless, since the world is out of kilter, fallen, and cannot save itself. As Paul said, “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope” (Romans 8:20). The frustration of creation is ultimately only remedied by God Himself through the work of Jesus Christ.

Since God created human beings with a fixed nature in His own image, it is impossible for humans become posthumans. God creates each thing according to its kind, which establishes the innate limits of every member of that kind (Genesis 1). The apostle Paul adumbrates this principle when talking about the resurrection.

But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another (1 Corinthians 15:38-39).

Being human is good enough for humans by God's standards. This is our place in nature and before God. The pressing issue is whether one is redeemed through the work of Jesus Christ. If so, while one remains a human forever, one is born again, filled with the Spirit of God, and eventually raised from the dead in an imperishable body. This is not the transition of the human to the posthuman, but the perfection and glorification of the human being through the mercy and saving power of the one true God.

Genesis, chapter eleven, provides an archetypical cautionary tale, rooted in space-time history, about reckless human aspiration severed from God's purposes.

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:1-4).

In disobedience to God's commission that His image bearers have dominion over the whole earth (Genesis 1:16-28), these rebels rather wanted to erect a testimony and monument to their own ego, so that that they might make a name for ourselves. Therefore, God judged them and scattered them across the face of the earth. There is nothing wrong with building cities or towers, but when such is pursued apart from God's commands and guidance, they will come to naught.

Nor is there anything amiss in pursuing human betterment as long as this does not become a substitute religious quest that displaces the gospel. We should seek the technological enhancement of the human condition, but within God's moral framework. There is nothing morally wrong with a pacemaker that keeps someone's heart beating. However, no human embryos should be destroyed as a means to extend or better human life, since this is the wrongful killing of a human being (Exodus 20).

Some Christians thought that giving anesthesia to women in childbirth was unbiblical, since this was a punishment of the curse (Genesis 3:16). But they were wrong. We can alleviate some of the effects of the fall through love and knowledge. That sickness came from the fall did not stop Jesus or the apostles from healing illnesses nor should it impede the medical profession. Because we are made in God's image, we should work love our neighbor as ourselves by contributing to human flourishing. We can, to some extent, counter the effects of the fall. As Francis Bacon wrote in 1620,

Man by the Fall fell at the same time from his state of innocence and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses, however, can even in this life be in some parts repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by the arts and sciences.¹⁴

Notes

1 See Revelation 12:9, 22:2.

2 Fazale R. Rana with Kenneth R. Samples, *Humans 2.0: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theologian Perspectives on Transhumanism* (Covina, CA: RTB Press, 2019), 18.

3 Mark O'Connell, *To Be a Machine* (New York, Anchor, 2017, 2; quoted in John Lennox, *2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 88.

4 Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2016).

5 See Rana and Samples

6 Toumey, C. "Singularity." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 1, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/technology/singularity-technology>.

7 I have adapted and shortened Rana and Samples seven principles, 194-96.

8 This aspect of transhumanism seems to have dimmed a bit in popularity since the middle 1990s.

9 Rana and Samples, *Humans 2.0*, 194.

10 There are a few religious or even Christian transhumanists, but we will not address them. One group is The Christian Transhumanist Association. See Rana and Samples, *Humans 2.0*, 197.

11 Paul Kurtz, *Humanist Manifesto II*, 1973, <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto2>.

12 There are two basic ideas on how this can occur, both impossible. See Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2019).

13 See Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2022).

14 Quoted in Schaeffer, Francis A.. *How Should We Then Live?* (L'Abri 50th Anniversary Edition) (Kindle Locations 1573-1575). Crossway. Kindle Edition.



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