

# Transhumanism: Humanity 2.0?

Transhumanism is an emerging worldview that promises to fundamentally transform the human condition through enhancement technologies such as genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and AI, even aspiring to overcome the ultimate limitation: death. In this seminar we take a deep dive into the understanding of human nature that underpins this ideology, and set it side by side with a Biblical understanding of what it means to be human, asking where there might be some points of contact but also where the deep dividing lines lie.

**Max Baker-Hytch** received his PhD in Philosophy from Oxford University in 2014 and subsequently held two postdoctoral research fellowships, one at Oxford (2014-15) and one at the University of Notre Dame (2015-16). Since 2016, he has been Tutorial Fellow in Philosophy at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford University and a member of the Faculty of Philosophy at Oxford University. Max is also a speaker affiliated with The Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. He has published scholarly articles on various topics at the intersection of analytic philosophy of religion and epistemology. He is currently working on an academic book on divine hiddenness.

## I. Introduction

In this session, we'll explore transhumanism and its worldview by examining its metaphysics and comparing it with the Christian account. Although transhumanism is not all that well-known, it is increasingly present in our culture through films/TV, institutions like Singularity University, and influential entrepreneurs like Elon Musk.

## II. Enhancement Technologies

Enhancement technologies are already merging human biology with machines through implants and "cyborg" technologies. This includes pacemakers, artificial heart valves, cochlear implants, and even implanted chips that allow remote control of objects. Germline editing is less controversial when it targets single disease genes, but some argue for going further to target complex traits like strength and intelligence, despite potential unforeseen consequences. Some advocate for "liberal eugenics" where parents select the best traits for their children. Cryonics and nanotechnology offer the possibility of reviving the dead and manipulating matter at tiny scales, respectively. The most ambitious idea is mind-uploading, which involves transferring human consciousness from biological hardware to computer hardware allegedly leading to ultimate immortality.

## III. A Cosmic Metanarrative

Ray Kurzweil's Singularity hypothesis presents a cosmic metanarrative where the ultimate goal is for intelligent life to take control of the entire universe through technology. This is a naturalist view of the universe's evolution from inanimate matter, to life, to intelligent life that reflects on its existence and directs the universe's history. Through technology, the pace of evolution has accelerated, leading to a glorious future where the universe is at our fingertips. Humanity faces a choice to seize this opportunity or waste it. According to Kurzweil, we can imbue the universe with God-like properties through our technological advancements.

#### **IV. Human Nature: To Overcome Nature**

Transhumanism presents a unique secular worldview that exalts human nature and sees us as having a moral obligation to overcome limitations. Transhumanism's favorite myth, Prometheus, embodies this narrative of human advancement. Transhumanism believes that immortality is possible for all beings and that the essence of who we are is not tied to our biological form. In principle, our pattern of information could exist in a more durable medium like silicon.

#### **V. The Biblical Portrait of Human Beings**

The Biblical view of humanity being made in the image of God has been understood in broadly three ways: substantive/ontological, functionalist, and relational. These views need not be in competition; rather, the image of God can be seen as a vocation that requires certain capacities and deep relationality. However, the image of God has been marred in all three dimensions: mortality affects our capacities, we fail to live up to our vocation, and our relationships have been distorted and fractured. The New Testament presents Christ as the image of God; being conformed to him will ultimately repair the image of God in us.

Transhumanism is gaining popularity due to its resonances with the Judeo-Christian narrative, which includes the idea that humanity has cosmic significance, but that something is preventing us from fulfilling our potential. Transhumanism proposes a dramatic transformation to achieve everlasting happiness, but it inverts key aspects of the Christian story. Its potential to gain traction in the post-Christian West stems from its ability to take some of the most striking aspects of the Christian story and situate them within a secular framework.

#### **VI. Two Contrasting Visions of Paradise**

Both transhumanism and Christianity are eschatological worldviews; they both have a vision of a brighter long-term future. The difference boils down to two fundamentally different stories about the means by which paradise is achieved. I'll try to capture this with the following four pairs of contrasts:

##### **A. Manmade utopia//new creation**

Transhumanism holds that only physical energy and matter exist, and that humans must take control of their destiny since there is no God to help. This leads to an optimistic view of scientific progress as the solution to humanity's problems. However, the pursuit of everlasting life is ultimately futile due to the eventual dissipation of all energy in the universe. Christian eschatology acknowledges the new creation, but it requires divine intervention to reverse the "bondage to decay" in contrast to transhumanism's reliance on technological progress.

##### **B. Transformation of capacities//transformation of character**

Transhumanism sees human biology as a work-in-progress and technology as a means to make us better. Christian anthropology, however, recognizes the problem with humans as the fracture and distortion of relational structures. Character transformation, rather than technological enhancement, is necessary to address the fundamental issue of self-centeredness. Enhancements may only amplify our selfish tendencies and pose risks.

#### C. Self-preservation//self-sacrifice

Achieving technological immortality would require vast amounts of resources, making it a privilege only for a few. Theologian Brent Waters argues that transhumanism has a "survivalist anthropology," which could harm intergenerational relationships. Some transhumanists exhibit an obsessive desire to avoid death, but Christian theology suggests that true eternal life is achieved through giving to others, not self-preservation.

#### D. Grasping at divinity//self-emptying

Paul says that Jesus Christ showed radical self-giving love through his humility and obedience even to the point of death (Philippians 2:5-11). This contrasts with transhumanism, which seeks to become divine. By emulating Christ's humility and self-sacrifice, humans can overcome the fear of nonexistence that drives transhumanism and instead find liberation through sharing in Christ's death and resurrection.

### **Recommended reading:**

Michael Burdett, *Eschatology and the Technological Future*  
John Lennox, *2084*