

Christianity and the New Biotechnologies

In vitro fertilisation (IVF) has opened the door to embryo experimentation, egg and sperm donation, surrogacy, embryo selection, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, embryonic cloning, animal human hybrids, mitochondrial replacement, and now, gene editing. Nanotechnology opens the possibility of ‘engineering’ minute biochemical systems at an atomic level. Cybernetics merges human tissue with mechanical or electrical devices in order to restore lost function or enhance human abilities. With retinal implants, cyborgs – part human, part machine – may be just around the corner. New drug treatments and enhancements are taking human performance to new levels, such as viagra to enhance sexual performance and modafanil to heighten concentration and memory. Humanoid Japanese robots can blink, smile, walk, talk, express anger, sing, and provide healthcare. Most of these so-called ‘advances’ have been justified on the grounds that they will prevent human suffering or lead to new treatments. What principles should we use to evaluate them from a Christian perspective?

Peter Saunders was born in New Zealand and originally trained as a general surgeon before serving with the Africa Inland Mission in Kenya and completing two years mission training at All Nations Christian College in the UK. Since 1992 he has served full-time with Christian Medical Fellowship, a UK-based organisation with 4,500 UK doctors and 1,000 medical students as members, first as Head of Student Ministries, and since 1999 as Chief Executive. His current work involves leadership training, teaching evangelism and ethics, medical mission, writing, editing, and media work. He has been a member of the ICMDA (International Christian Medical and Dental Association) Board since 2003 and is also Campaign Director of the Care Not Killing Alliance, a coalition of over 40 organisations in the UK promoting palliative care and opposing euthanasia. His wife Kirsty is a community paediatrician and they have three sons, Christopher, Benjamin and Jonathan.
www.cmf.org.uk; www.carenokilling.org.uk; <http://pjsaunders.blogspot.com/>

- I. New Biotechnologies
 - A. Robotics
 - B. Artificial Intelligence
 - C. Artificial Reproduction and Associated Technologies
 - 1. IVF and GIFT
 - 2. Embryo experimentation
 - 3. Gamete Donation
 - 4. Surrogacy
 - 5. Embryo Selection
 - 6. Saviour Siblings
 - 7. Preimplantation diagnosis
 - 8. Animal-Human Hybrids
 - 9. Three parent embryos
 - 10. Gene Editing
 - D. Stem Cell Research
 - E. Nanotechnology
 - F. Cybernetics and Transhumanism
 - G. Performance-enhancing drugs

- II. Moral Challenges of the Baconian Project
 - A. Mixed consequences
 - B. Discerning good and bad
 - C. A Pandora's Box?

- III. Science and the Christian Faith
 - A. The Faith Presuppositions of Science
 - B. Many great scientists were Christians (eg Sir Francis Bacon, Kepler, Mendel)
 - C. Many great doctors were Christians (eg Paré, Jenner, Simpson)

- IV. Biblical Foundations
 - A. Divine Stewardship (Genesis 1:26-28)
 - B. The Fall and its effects (Genesis 3)
 - C. Biblical technologists
 - 1. Jabal – tents and livestock (Genesis 4:20)
 - 2. Jubal – musical instruments (Genesis 4:21)
 - 3. Tubal-Cain – bronze and iron tools (Genesis 4:22)
 - 4. Nimrod – cities (Genesis 10:8-10)
 - 5. Bezalel and Hiram Abi (Exodus 31:3-5; 1 Kings 7:14)
 - D. Good and bad uses of technology – two case studies
 - 1. Noah's Ark (Genesis 6-8)
 - 2. Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

- V. Principles into Practice
 - A. Be like the men of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32)
 - 1. Double-listening
 - 2. Hard thinking
 - B. Don't rely on the world's principles
 - 1. Deontology and the Georgetown mantra
 - 2. Consequentialism
 - 3. Virtue Ethics
 - C. Hold on to truth and unity (John 17:17, 22)
 - D. Embrace a biblical view of humanity (Genesis 1:27)

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Redemption
4. Consummation

E. Recognise the limits for ‘flawed masterpieces’

F. Keep an eternal perspective

G. Embrace a wider love (‘Who is my neighbour? Luke 10:29)

1. All human beings are neighbours
2. The status of the human embryo

H. Don’t let ends justify means (Romans 3:8, 6:1-2)

I. Focus on the cross (Philippians 2:5-11)

1. Costly service
2. Willingness to speak the truth

VI. Summary

- A. Good Stewardship
- B. Carrying the Cross

Suggested Readings:

Barratt H. Transhumanism. CMF File No 31. 2006. CMF.

Cameron C. The Robots are Coming: Us, Them and God. 2017. CARE.

Saunders P. The Human Journey: Thinking biblically about health. 2014. CMF.

Taylor P. Three-parent embryos for mitochondrial disorders. CMF File No 51. 2013. CMF.

Wyatt J. The machine will see you now. Triple Helix 2007; Summer:12-14. CMF

Wyatt J, Taylor P. Emerging Medical Technologies: Ethical Issues. CMF File No 49. 2012. CMF.