

REDEEMING THE CYBORGS: TRANSHUMANISM MEETS SANCTIFICATION

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*So God created mankind in his own image.
(Genesis 1:27)*

Transhumanism is the belief or theory that the human race can evolve beyond its current physical and mental limitations, especially by means of science and technology.

Artificial Intelligence and transhumanism will both be major components in world economics in the not-so-distant future. How should we as Christians respond? Should we embrace or reject them? Is there such a thing as a good path here—one we could help to push this technology towards?

In 2016, at the Code conference, Tesla founder Elon Musk made the claim, “We are already cyborgs.” This might seem like an odd statement at first glance, but anyone with a teenager who has a smartphone will get what Musk is saying. The phone is glued to their hand, and indeed it is an integral part of their life.

This might sound innocent at first, but what if the phone was literally a part of the hand? Currently, a teenager might be able to type 100-200 characters per minute with their thumbs. What if we removed this output barrier and they could control typing by thought, and thus multiply that speed by a hundred? The human mind and the computer’s processing power would blend. In the present day, calculators and spreadsheets are common tools, both for simple calculations and for complex models. What if any person could calculate the cubic root of a given 10-digit number instantaneously and without error? What if anyone could work with complex spreadsheets only in their mind through a bionically built-in computer, with no need for typing or reading? All input/output would be blazingly fast and with no errors.

In 1956, the psychologist George Miller reported that an average person can remember only seven informational elements in their short

term memory; for example, a phone number. A cheap smartphone can already multiply that storage capacity by more than a billion. What if this capacity was immediately made available to human cognition? We could have virtually limitless and precise memory with lightning-fast recollection.

Finally, when our minds have both processing support and storage support, what if we connected those embedded support computers to the internet? The split second you thought of something, you would have access to all of Google and Wikipedia on the matter. Stock trading through APIs could happen by power of thought alone. Even more interesting would be the connectivity opportunities with other people. You could grant your spouse access to your memory—literally sharing your mind. Or allow your colleagues to share in parts of your memory, effectively sharing information and thinking together with different people at different locations just by mind control.

Many fear the fast rise of artificial intelligence, but I believe the enhanced intelligence trend I just explained is a more powerful one. In the next few decades we will see human minds augmented with processing power, storage, and connectivity. We already see this in powerful laptops and smartphones that we carry around, as well as in the occasional wearable computer. When the input/output barrier is crossed, in terms of speed and connectivity between the human mind and the embedded computer, this phase in human history will accelerate.

How should God’s people react to transhumanism?

The thought of transhumanism can be scary, and there are indeed plenty of dangers for humankind in this area. One could even argue

that we're meddling with God's creation. Are we revisiting original sin by trying to become God's equal? Should we advocate not to engage in this revolution that is at our doorstep?

The industrial revolution brought about standardization of work procedures so humans could do quick, rote repetitions of basic tasks. Basically, we transformed creative human beings into machines. This was dehumanizing and therefore ultimately blasphemous. In the end, we discovered human beings are not very good machines—we constantly make mistakes if our work becomes monotonous. As a result, robots have now taken over.

One could argue that the transhumanism path turns this on its head. Instead of dehumanizing humans by turning them into machines, or doing the opposite by attempting to turn machines into humans (artificial intelligence), transhumanism seems to be exploring a third path. This path is to support and strengthen humans with the help of machines. If done right, we could even argue that we may be on a redemptive path of becoming co-creators with Christ in restoring what's lost and in cultivating and strengthening His creation. The classical disciplines of our faith are meant to connect and open us to the Holy Spirit's work by grace. In the same way, these new

tools could help support a believer in the daily walk with Christ when doing the good works He prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

As with any other tool, it basically comes down to our motivation: Do we use it for good or for bad? The added danger of transhumanism is that it goes to the core of our identity and our consciousness, so we need to be aware. Two good questions to guide us are these: Does it honor people? Does it ultimately bring glory to God?

We must also be aware how this can magnify differences between the privileged and the non-privileged. This shift also challenges the value of a human life. Is our value connected to our level of function? High function holds merit because it can help us serve, but our value should be found in Christ and in Him alone.

I will conclude with this word from Romans 12:2:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.