



**A Review of Ronald Cole-Turner.**  
***Transhumanism and Transcendence:***  
***Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement.***  
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## **WHAT IS AT STAKE?**

**W**hat if a friend tells you that it is ethical to enhance your body beyond normal human capacity using technology? What if someone wanting to join your church believes technology is part of God's plan to save the world? What if you have to weigh in on public policy regarding issues surrounding biotechnology? Questions like these, once relegated to the late night realm of Science Fiction, are now common, and Christians must be increasingly biblical and bold in answering them.

The book *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* is a collection of essays responding to the view that technology can fix all of humanity's problems, including death itself—i.e., “transhumanism.” The contributors seek to understand transhumanism on its own terms and to provide a Christian response. Editor Ronald Cole-Turner explains that each contributor varies in his or her position on “how far” transhumanism may go and still be within ethical boundaries.

While this book is not focused on evolutionary theory, the chapters are all influenced by the idea, and so Cole-Turner provides clarity to the reader that all the contributors hold to evolution (193–94). The editor summarizes each chapter in his introduction. More broadly, the book runs from a select history (chapters 2 and 3), to specific issues (chapters 4–10), to Christian theology in general (chapters 11 and 12). As to focus and content, even chapters 4–10 are used to discuss mostly theoretical ideas regarding transhumanism and transcendence. From this simple outline, it is evident that conservative Christians will have reservations about this book. But let me list this books strengths and then some areas of concern.

## STRENGTHS

There are a number of well-done pieces in this volume. Any successful debate requires each side to understand the position of the other, and the contributors have met this requirement admirably. Around half of each chapter is devoted to understanding transhumanist thought, in which the authors show what many transhumanists believe. For example, many understand human life as defined by consciousness alone; childbearing is assumed to be a burden; and some or all emotions should be eliminated. One writer, Gerald McKenny, even attempts to break down the different types of transhumanists (just as one might categorize different Christian denominations). It is important to understand that all transhumanists do not think alike.

A specific strength is the ability of these authors to take their understanding of the transhumanist worldview and demonstrate inconsistencies within it—like winning a court battle using the other side's evidence. For instance, some groups think it would be a good idea to suppress the emotions of soldiers in order to protect them from post-traumatic stress disorder. However, contributor Michael Spezio points out the opposite effect emotional control enhancement would have on soldiers. Technology that neuters emotions would "likely render them unable to respond *relationally* and thus effectively to injuries sustained by fellow war fighters, not to mention their inability to deal adequately with civilian life" (158, emphasis original). These types of arguments are helpful, especially as it concerns drafting public policy. In essence, the contributors first respond to transhumanists "on their own turf." In this way, transhumanists themselves can benefit from the book, in addition to considering how the gospel of Jesus Christ is itself a response.

## AREAS OF CONCERN

The book's purpose is to provide theological answers to issues related to transhumanism, and it is here that there are a number of weaknesses. The Bible speaks to any worldview offering ultimate salvation to the world, but the Bible must be interpreted rightly with sound hermeneutical principles. Due to some of the theological positions of the authors, this book will provide limited help in defining a local church's stance on transhumanism.

An example of weakness in the book is the way it speaks inconsistently of God as creator. On the one hand, the book highlights the use of being made in the image of God (174). This assumes the relevancy and authority of Genesis 1. On the other hand, the book sometimes operates under the assumption that "Redemption trumps Creation and Fall and therefore permits some latitude for enhancement" (55). This drives a wedge between Genesis and today's question of technological enhancement. This inconsistency is analogous to interpreters who, on the one hand, dismiss one argument from creation as normative (1 Tim 2:9–15), while on the other hand affirm another argument from creation (1 Tim 4:1–5). Moreover, while theistic evolution is not the focus of the book, it may also hinder seeing Genesis as directly relevant for transhumanism.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

Reading this book provides us with many additional questions for the conversation. Here are some of them: Humanly speaking, how does one's view of biological gender inform the ethics of biotechnology? Can human relationships be computerized? Why are technological resources directed towards

the body if rationality is the essence of personhood? Philosophically, what is the relationship between free will and the "inevitability" of technological advancements? Theologically, how does technology address the problem of evil and keep free will intact? Some of these questions may already be asked of technology in the church today, but certainly this book increases the number of questions that are swirling about this issue today.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

This book is a good example of how one can learn from others who do not share the same worldview. The contributors are courteous, academic, and seek to build bridges for conversation. It cannot be stressed enough for each side on every issue to seek to understand the meaning of the other before responding. Yet, many of the Christian responses in this essay are not consistent with a conservative reading of Scripture.

The book briefly mentions the issue of idolatry (173–74), but a book responding to transhumanism would do well to give an entire chapter to this topic. Discussion on Isaiah 44:6–28 could be a good starting place. In the end, we can gladly affirm that science has potential to benefit humanity, but it cannot save. Salvation belongs to the Lord and not to men who play god. *Transhumanism and Transcendence* is a fascinating read in exploring the logical conclusions to a purely scientific (i.e., naturalistic) worldview, but it is not sufficient to engage the increasing predominance of (bio)technology in our world. A more robust, biblical treatment is yet needed.