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SIN AND THE CYBORG: ON THE (IM) PECCABILITY OF THE POSTHUMAN

DOUGLAS ESTES¹

Of all near-future technologies, the autonomous vehicle (self-driving car) captures the attention—both interests and fears—of Western citizens more than most. The self-driving car is a future technology that has already arrived, and it is poised to make a major mark on the social landscape in the latter half of the twenty-first century by redefining individual transportation. Even with recent accidents (including fatalities) attributed directly or indirectly to self-driving cars,² the use of this technology seems inevitable. To whatever degree society adopts this technology, it will eventually be hailed as “good,” because it will eventually reduce the number of traffic accidents (including fatalities) due to “human error.”

“Human error” is often a euphemism for a general pattern of “selfishness.” A brief look at National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) statistics reveals 37,461 fatalities in 34,439 crashes in 2016 on roads in the United States.³ Of those fatalities, 10,497 fatalities were influenced by the consumption of alcohol, meaning that almost a third of Americans killed on U.S. highways were due to drunk-driving. Similarly, almost a third of Americans killed on U.S. highways involved speeding. Beyond these two, other types of “human error,” such as various kinds of distracted driving, caused additional fatalities.⁴ While there are numerous other minor factors involved in the high number of traffic fatalities in the U.S., the fact remains that the “human error” in about half of all traffic fatalities we could better describe as “selfishness.” Driving recklessly through speeding, or driving under the influence of drink or drugs, is an action motivated by a person’s own self-interests (to get home, to get somewhere quickly) and not the interests of others. In a simple contrast, Christian belief requires that “whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7:12 ESV). Since we do not wish others to take the chance of harming us through reckless or impaired driving, we should not do this to others, either. As Paul suggests

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² Larry Greenemeier, “Uber Self-Driving Car Fatality Reveals the Technology’s Blind Spots,” *Scientific American*, March 21, 2018.

³ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, “2016 Quick Facts,” (2017): 1.

⁴ By one analysis, 94% of all traffic accidents are the result of “human error”; see *The Week* Staff, “When Will Self-Driving Cars Take Over?” *The Week*, November 17, 2018.

further, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (Phil 2:3–4 NIV). Therefore, as much of the bloodshed on U.S. roads and highways is a result of drivers looking to their own interests rather than that of others, the unfortunate suggestion is that sinfulness is as much as to blame as “human error.”⁵

Implementing the use of self-driving cars promises to reduce the number of fatalities on US roads (and based on statistics it seems hard to imagine that it will not),⁶ in part as it will eliminate selfishness—sin—from the equation. Or will it? Self-driving cars may be autonomous, but me-first humans who are prone to “human error,” selfishness, and sin will still occupy them. In fact, one could argue that self-driving cars may reduce fatalities but may slowly edge the human population to a greater degree of selfishness due to the phenomenon of human attitude change that prevails whenever certain types of new technology appears.⁷ For example, as modern air travel became increasingly safe and efficient in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the social attitudes surrounding it also became increasingly indifferent to the needs of fliers, and fliers became increasingly indifferent to each other.⁸ Social media, though not a transportation technology, is another obvious example where trolls, catfishers, echo chambers, virtue signalers, Twitter mobs and cyberbullies have taken selfishness into new worlds. In each of these cases, the potential for increase in selfishness is not a direct result of the technology itself, but is a result of humanity’s constant desire to create its own plan (whether it hurts others or not) rather than to invest in a Creator-designed plan.⁹

As the proliferation of technology increases, the rapid growth and spread of these types of technologies will bring with them the assumption of new-found freedoms from the limitations of our past (at least in the West). From this perspective, the horse was better than walking, the horse-drawn carriage was better than the horse, the automobile was better than the horse-drawn carriage, and the self-driving car will be better than the automobile. This proliferation of technology will shape our world in ways that we cannot yet imagine today. From a technological perspective, futurists wonder whether there is a singularity on the horizon where the rate

⁵ Many automobile accidents are just that, accidents; I do not equate mistakes such as errors in judgment with sinfulness.

⁶ Alvin Powell, “Checking the Progress of Self-Driving Cars,” *Harvard Gazette*, May 7, 2018.

⁷ For further discussion, Douglas Estes, *Braving the Future: Christian Faith in a World of Limitless Tech* (Harrisonburg: Herald, 2018).

⁸ For example, according to the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), in the last twenty years air travel customer satisfaction has declined 400% in the US. For discussion, with link to the ACSI data, see (<https://viewfromtheaisleseat.wordpress.com/2013/09/15/the-airline-industry-and-its-pursuit-of-the-elusive-customer-satisfaction/>). Recent trends seem to suggest satisfaction is on the upswing (or travellers have accepted a “new normal”). Further, plenty of anecdotal evidence of this can be found on social media or in tabloids.

⁹ Technology often provides the “easy out” for people to be more selfish and more hurtful than ever before.

of technology will increase so rapidly that it will hit an exponential curve.¹⁰ If this happens, there is sufficient evidence that some type of curve is in fact occurring, it is likely the curve won't be a smooth one. From a social perspective, the rapid rise in technology will likely destabilize our current philosophical systems and worldviews (perhaps in a similar way to the impact of the Renaissance or the Enlightenment), and possibly economic and political systems as well.¹¹ Already new philosophical movements such as transhumanism, posthumanism, and dataism are on the rise.¹² These related movements wed the impact of rapid technological change to their understanding of the human condition. They also often speak in ways reminiscent of a (secularized) religion.¹³ Though these philosophies promise to explain the imminent transformation of humanity in a way that people will call "good," I argue they will not succeed because they are unable to resolve an age-old problem that has plagued this stream of thought: sin.¹⁴

HUMANISM TO TRANSHUMANISM

Out of all the new techno-philosophies, the one primed for the greatest cultural impact is *transhumanism* (sometimes referred to as *techno-humanism*, *technoscience*, or *H+*).¹⁵ The first use of this term, though perhaps not the origin of the idea, traces back to Julian Huxley (1887–1975), a prominent humanist thinker of the early-to mid-twentieth century.¹⁶ Key adherents to this philosophy created an extensive explanation, excerpted here:

Transhumanism is a way of thinking about the future that is based on the premise that the human species in its current form does not represent the end of our development but rather a comparatively early phase. We formally define it as follows:

¹⁰ The classic text on this is Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

¹¹ E.g., Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper, 2017).

¹² A few working definitions: *transhumanism* is the belief that humanity will evolve through technology into a new type of human species; *posthumanism* is the belief that once the transhumanist evolution is complete, humanity will be so different from its past that it will cease to be human (and the way I use the term here, in its transhumanist sense, is in contrast to other uses of the term in other areas of philosophy); and *dataism* is the belief that for humans to evolve they must relinquish control of their lives to data.

¹³ For example, Hava Tirosh-Samuels, "Transhumanism as a Secularist Faith," *Zygon* 47 (2012): 710–34; and Linell E. Cady, "Religion and the Technowonderland of Transhumanism," in *Building Better Humans? Refocusing the Debate on Transhumanism*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuels and Kenneth L. Mossman, *Beyond Humanism: Trans- and PostHumanism* 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 83–104.

¹⁴ Of course, there are other age-old problems that will not allow these philosophies to succeed, but I chose to focus on sin because that one seems to me to be the most intractable, while at the same time most explainable to those outside the Christian perspective.

¹⁵ See for example, Mark Walker, "Transhumanism," in *What the Future Looks Like: Scientists Predict the Next Great Discoveries and Reveal How Today's Breakthroughs Are Already Shaping Our World*, ed. Jim Al-Khalili (New York: The Experiment, 2018), 96.

¹⁶ See for example, Julian Huxley, *New Bottles for New Wine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 13–17.

1. The intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.
2. The study of the ramifications, promises, and potential dangers of technologies that will enable us to overcome fundamental human limitations, and the related study of the ethical matters involved in developing and using such technologies.

Transhumanism can be viewed as an extension of humanism, from which it is partially derived. Humanists believe that humans matter and that individuals matter. We might not be perfect, but we can make things better by promoting rational thinking, freedom, tolerance, democracy, and concern for our fellow human beings. Transhumanists agree with this proposition but also emphasize what we have the potential to become.¹⁷

Transhumanists, then, are preoccupied with using technology to improve the human condition. This is, in and of itself, “good.” Within Christian tradition there is a long history of arguments that encourage people based upon spiritual convictions to use earthly means to improve the world around them. However, in contrast to this tradition, transhumanists argue technology is the singular focus on which humanity should place their ability to improve the world around them. Because of the central role technology plays in transhumanist thought, technological advancements (and their effects) are the feature of transhumanism that scholars and thinkers most often discuss. However, in this essay I want to focus on the philosophical supports that still undergird transhumanist philosophy—those of humanism. As the “Transhuman FAQ” acknowledges, “transhumanism can be viewed as an extension of humanism.”

In many ways, transhumanism is the latest incarnation of humanism. Humanism is a tall tree with many branches; it is not possible to define the whole tree concisely.¹⁸ The branch of humanism that most seems to undergird transhumanist thought is the humanism espoused by Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and Julian Huxley, and popularized in the English-speaking world by nineteenth- and twentieth-century art and literature.¹⁹ This branch springs from the area of the trunk sometimes labeled “secular humanism” as a way to distinguish it from other forms of humanism.²⁰ This is the form

¹⁷ Nick Bostrom et al, “The Transhumanist FAQ,” in *Transhumanism and the Body: The World Religions Speak*, ed. Calvin Mercer and Derek F. Maher (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1.

¹⁸ Tony Davies, *Humanism*, New Critical Idiom (London: Routledge, 1997), 2. Or, as others have pointed out, a better analogy may be a rhizome instead of a traditional tree.

¹⁹ Davies, *Humanism*, 30.

²⁰ Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, “Introducing Post- and Transhumanism,” in *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction*, ed. Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner,

of humanism that, following Friedrich Nietzsche's pronouncements on the state of our world and the death of God, promoted a "systematic counter-faith" to religion in general, and Christianity most specifically.²¹ It tends toward a one-dimensional understanding of religion, seeing religion(s) as grouped ideology that stands opposed to a modern, sophisticated, liberal, secular worldview. Thus, speaking of this kind of humanism:

Humanism, contrary to the accepted stereotype, is not the advocacy of an easy-going, benevolent, and serene attitude towards the ultimate questions, a synonym for tolerance of all points of view, it is a militant stance in the name of an absolute, called man. In ages like ours, when the meaning of religion is fading and confused, humanism appears as a fundamental and original position, agreeable to common sense and arising spontaneously from the most natural of all insights... Humanism is, consequently, a religious view, more precisely an idolatrous view insofar as it does not deny God like materialism, or a personal God like pantheism, only identifies 'god' with generic man, and more vulgarly, with mankind.²²

This type of humanism does not simply think well of humans. Rather, it puts humans at the center of the universe.²³ To do so, it must remove God from the center, a theocentric view long held by traditional religions and cultures. Finally, as a result of its victories, but more so its defeats, humanism as a whole (primarily its classical iterations, perhaps less so its secular iterations) appears to be on the decline.²⁴ In contrast, transhumanism is on the rise in the twenty-first century.²⁵ Or, perhaps a better way of putting it, transhumanism is the newest form of humanism that is moving to eclipse its progenitor.

TRANSHUMANISM TO SIN

From a biblical perspective, there are a number of immediate weaknesses with the humanist and transhumanist perspectives. First, of course, the ideology replaces a transcendent yet immanent God who creates, sustains, and redeems with a purely immanent "god" found within humanity. Second,

Beyond Humanism 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 9; and John Portmann, *A History of Sin: Its Evolution to Today and Beyond* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 181.

²¹ Thomas Molnar, *Theists and Atheists: A Typology of Non-Belief*, Religion and Reason 18 (The Hague: Mouton, 1980), 61.

²² Molnar, *Theists and Atheists*, 62.

²³ Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper, 2017), 599 Kindle edition; and Tzvetan Todorov, *Imperfect Garden: The Legacy of Humanism*, trans. Carol Cosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 30.

²⁴ This is a view commonly held among transhumanists; see for example, Robert Pepperell, *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain* (Bristol: Intellect, 2003), 158–67.

²⁵ Mark Walker suggests that transhumanism represents "the biggest question of the twenty-first century," in his essay, "Transhumanism," in *What the Future Looks Like: Scientists Predict the Next Great Discoveries and Reveal How Today's Breakthroughs Are Already Shaping Our World*, ed. Jim Al-Khalili (New York: The Experiment, 2018), 96.

this perspective denies the efficacy of the resurrection (in that it would deny non-technological resurrection in general), thereby eliminating the purpose of Jesus for our world. We could go on, but different ideologies are different for a reason; each has different tenets that are not shared. Instead, for the purpose of engaging in constructive dialogue, we turn to a tenet that is shared to some extent by both Christianity and humanism: the imperfection of people. Christian theology maintains that people are flawed primarily as a result of the fall (Gen 3), and secondarily (or equally) as a result of each individual's conscious turning away from God's expectations for their lives (Rom 3:12). The results of this rejection of God's plan is generically labeled sin, and one of the most common demonstrations of sin in humanity is selfishness (cf. Rom 12:3; James 1:4, 3:16; Phil 2:3–4).²⁶ Selfishness is an imperfect attitude of a person that encourages them to put their interests and needs in front of the interests and needs of others. Instead of following God's lead, and thinking first of others, people are tempted to put their own desires first—this self-focus is at best unhealthy, and at worst, evil. In sharp contrast to Christian belief, humanism implicitly encourages selfishness by putting the interests of the individual ahead of the interests of their community (and God).²⁷

Humanists, of course, do not agree with the biblical concept of sin, with its mythological origins, but they do recognize that humans contain flaws and do selfish things.²⁸ In one articulation of this, humans are described as driven by their desire to survive, a desire which hinders altruism and selflessness. If so, the drive for survival is an inherently selfish aspect of human nature.²⁹ The argument for this drive is implicit in both the materialistic and Darwinian currents found in recent examples of transhumanist thought. In another articulation, humanism allows that there is an “anguish of existence,” that culminates in death that contributes to the human condition.³⁰ In summary, there is some common ground between biblical and humanistic thought in the area of human imperfection on which to proceed. The difference seems to be the degree to which humans are individually affected by a drive towards selfishness and away from altruism.

The antidote for selfishness in biblical perspective is the confession of sin and the forgiveness of God, all made possible by the atoning death of Jesus, with God pouring out his love for us through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5–6). In contrast, humanism does not have a definitive antidote

²⁶ For example, see Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Scribners, 1941), 1:186.

²⁷ A great example comes from Julian Huxley's explanation of humanistic priorities: “there are two complementary parts of our cosmic duty - *one to ourselves, to be fulfilled in the realization and enjoyment of our capacities*, the other to others, to be fulfilled in service to the community and in promoting the welfare of the generations to come and the advancement of our species as a whole” [emphasis mine]. Notice how Huxley places the fulfillment of the individual ahead of the needs of others; see Huxley, *New Bottles for New Wine*, 17.

²⁸ Todorov, *Imperfect Garden*, 38.

²⁹ See for example, Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 2. In disagreement with this idea, see Bart Nooteboom, *Beyond Humanism: The Flourishing of Life, Self and Other* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 179.

³⁰ Nooteboom, *Beyond Humanism*, 35.

for selfishness, but it does offer a few different approaches. One approach is education—humanists believe that selfishness and other hurtful desires can be replaced with good through education.³¹ Another approach is social connectivity—the more a person is connected to other people, the more likely the person is to be good. While there is merit in these approaches (i.e., education and community are positive features), none of these approaches seem poised to eradicate selfishness from our world. We can demonstrate this on a very literal level: numerous people who are convicted of driving while impaired have advanced education and are prominent members of their community. More broadly, there is little evidence to suggest that humans today are less selfish than humans several centuries ago, even though humans today are far more educated than humans several centuries ago.³² Therefore, while humanistic endeavors such as education and community can discourage or deter selfishness, they cannot deal with the root of selfishness that exists within people. From a biblical perspective, this is because selfishness is a sin rooted in fallen human nature (Rom 3:9–10). It cannot easily be extracted during our time on earth (cf. 1 Cor 5:6–7). It is even less clear that technology, in and of itself, will fare any better in addressing the root cause of selfishness within people.

TRANSHUMANIST EXPECTATIONS

Among humanists, transhumanists, and Christians, there is general agreement that people can be selfish, and that this selfishness can lead to greater problems for individuals and communities. Christians see this as an aspect of the sinful nature of people, whereas humanists and transhumanists see this as an unfortunate byproduct of evolutionary pressure that can often be corrected through education, community, and related processes. In addition to these processes accepted by Christians and promoted by humanists, transhumanists argue that technology will help us to perfect the human species. Using evolutionary ideas, transhumanists believe that technology will continue to improve the human species to the point where homo sapiens will cease to exist and will become homo superior (or homo cyberneticus or homo deus or other proposed species names). For the purpose of this paper, let us grant that major technological changes are on the horizon that will deeply change the way humans relate to their world and to each other.³³ The questions that loom are: What are these technological advances likely to be? And how will these adaptations affect the nature of humanity?

³¹ Todorov, *Imperfect Garden*, 38.

³² And perhaps current generations are more selfish than ever before; see Kristin Dombek, *The Selfishness of Others: An Essay on the Fear of Narcissism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 10. Though see Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

³³ See for example, Kevin Kelly, *The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future* (New York: Penguin, 2016); Simon Young, *Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2006); and cf. Fabrice Jotterand, “At the Roots of Transhumanism: From the Enlightenment to a Post-Human Future,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35 (2010): 620.

Transhumanists often cite examples from the worlds of medicine, biology, and information as the most obvious examples of the evolutionary changes that are on the horizon. For example, some members of the scientific community believe they can use the CRISPR gene editing technology to prevent genetic diseases in humans by editing human embryos. Already, Chinese scientists have performed genetic engineering on humans, and U.S. researchers now plan the same.³⁴ Nanotechnology promises to soon beat most disease and bring us to great health and long life.³⁵ At some point in the very near future, transhumanists predict that technology will allow us to begin to upgrade the physical parts of our bodies. More than just organ transplants—themselves “miracles” of modern medicine—all of our bodies will increasingly be seen as physical containers for ourselves comprised of many unique—but replaceable—parts. In that sense, the growth of cybernetic technology will turn humanity into cyborgs.³⁶

As this begins to happen, there will be two things that occur simultaneously. First, doctors will use the miracles of modern medicine to heal people of illness, disease, and disability; and second, doctors will use the miracles of modern medicine to upgrade people. While some Christian philosophers support the first, and reject the second, arguing that upgrading people introduces hubris and a “playing-God” mentality,³⁷ I am not convinced that this will be the case in most situations. For example, many Americans already regularly use the miracles of modern medicine to “upgrade” themselves—wearing eyeglasses, or getting eye surgery (such as LASIK); having straight, white teeth, or getting dental implants. Laser eye surgery to make vision perfect and getting dental implants to have perfect teeth may not seem similar, but the primary reason Westerners do these things is that cultural standards have changed. If in the twenty-second century, cultural standards include eyes genetically-engineered to be cobalt blue, or fire red, or obsidian black, and with the ability to see in the dark, then these actions that seem as “upgrades” to us will seem normal to the citizens of that century.³⁸

Based on the trajectory of modern science, it increasingly appears that in the next one hundred years, humans will continue to become cyborgs. I say “continue” because wearing eyeglasses as I do already makes me a minimally tech-enhanced human (and if I get LASIK, even more so). Skeptics can point to the flying car as prime example of the dangers of future-casting, but one look at disabled veterans with robotic parts and soldiers wearing

³⁴ Kelly Servick, “First U.S. Team to Gene-Edit Human Embryos Revealed,” *Science*, July 27, 2017. And of as the time of writing, see Gina Kolata, Sui-Lee Wee, and Pam Belluck, “Chinese Scientist Claims to Use Crispr to Make First Genetically Edited Babies,” *New York Times*, November 26, 2018.

³⁵ E.g., Robert F. Service, “Nanoparticles Awaken Immune Cells to Fight Cancer,” *Science*, Jan 5, 2017.

³⁶ Against this idea, see the interview with Noreen Herzfeld in Douglas Estes, “Your Brain is Not a Computer,” *Christianity Today*, November 26, 2018.

³⁷ For example, Steven J. Jensen, “The Roots of Transhumanism,” *Nova et Vetera* (English Edition) 12 (2014): 518.

³⁸ For a much lengthier treatment of this argument, see Estes, *Braving the Future*.

exoskeletons reveals that cybernetics have already arrived (even if they are not exactly the way that sci-fi books and movies picture them).³⁹

Therein lies the primary problem with the transhumanist argument: that the evolution of humanity will make humanity better. Because transhumanism tends to see people as biological machines without a soul or spirit, transhumanists regard outward/biological upgrades as a part of the perfection of humanity. Yet no degree of physical updates to the human body will cause a person to be less selfish—or less sinful.⁴⁰ Perfect eyesight, white teeth, edited genes, and cybernetic organs are wonders of the age in which we live, but they do not upgrade a person's soul.⁴¹ Though I argue physical upgrades are permissible as Christians, it is clear in biblical perspective that physical upgrades do not address the selfishness—the sinfulness—of people.⁴² The warning Jesus gives to the Pharisees and the Scribes in Matthew 23:25 and Luke 11:39 is applicable: Humans cannot “clean” their externals, and believe they are clean; if they do, their insides may still be full of sin. To remove sinfulness from the internal requires an internal solution. We can argue with confidence that transhumanist philosophy will produce a world of beautiful, healthy, selfish, sinful humans.⁴³ While a few members of transhumanist and related movements recognize this danger,⁴⁴ their recognition is limited due to their inability to accept the sinfulness of people that exists deep in the souls of humans. In fact, many transhumanists do not accept that humans have souls; for them, humans are biological machines, which only encourages an external (almost Platonic) concern with human selfishness.

The danger for human society is the likelihood that the rapid increase in technology over the next century will enhance the outside of the cup at the expense of the inside of the cup. Conventional wisdom suggests that increasing externals tends to have an overall negative spiritual impact. This is coupled with the amplificatory effects of technological use: when new technology emerges, it adds to the power of human actions, both good and bad. Therefore, technology amplifies our ability to do good and bad, but

³⁹ Andrea Vicini and Agnes M. Brazal, “Longing for Transcendence: Cyborgs and Trans- and Posthumans,” *Theological Studies* 76 (2015): 157.

⁴⁰ Calvin Mercer suggests there is a “theoretical possibility,” but on this issue I am less generous, see “Resurrection of the Body and Cryonics,” *Religions* 8.5 (2017): 96.

⁴¹ One could argue that since people are fully embodied, that the perfection of our bodies (coupled with better stimuli from our senses) would therefore perfect our souls. However, I see a greater distinction between the soul, the spirit, and the body that would prohibit such transference.

⁴² Right now, the word “upgrade” seems relatively innocuous, but a time is coming when people will want enhancements that are only upgrades in a euphemistic sense. For example, in the 2018 movie *Upgrade*, a tech company “upgrades” their security personnel with in-arm weapons.

⁴³ For example, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Kenneth L. Mossman explain that “transhumanism defines the betterment of humanity primarily in material terms as improvement of the capacities of the human body;” in their essay, “New Perspectives on Transhumanism,” in *Building Better Humans? Refocusing the Debate on Transhumanism, Beyond Humanism: Trans- and PostHumanism* 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 36.

⁴⁴ Harari, *Homo Deus*, Kindle edition.

often in a way that either at best ignores, or at worst minimizes, healthy spirituality in people. In describing the different goals of Christian faith and transhumanism, Ronald Cole-Turner remarks that “for Christianity, it is to put the old self to death in order to be like Christ in his resurrection and glorification; for transhumanism and for the advocates of technological enhancement, the goal is to bring the old self to a higher life while worrying about whether it will remain the same.”⁴⁵ To put it slightly differently, from the Christian perspective, the problem is not technological enhancement, the problem is what we are enhancing. The Christian call to future society should not be to stop human enhancement, generally speaking, but to make sure emotional, spiritual enhancement is concurrent with physical (technological) enhancement.

As such, if humans do transcend their humanity and become posthuman,⁴⁶ it is likely to produce two things: a) a world that claims it is more united and at peace than it ever was before and b) a world full of people convinced of their own superiority. This superiority, however, will be one based on their own internal definition, not any external definition (e.g., God’s standard). As humans “evolve,” it is likely to amplify confusion over who really is God of our world. If selfishness is not addressed, it will likely result in far-reaching negative consequences for human populations. For example, if technological advancement eschews theological warnings and selfishness is allowed to prosper, selfishness quickly leads to other, community-level sins. Ted Peters suggests that one side-effect of externally-focused tech enhancement is the dehumanization of people.⁴⁷ If selfishness increases among a group of people, it becomes easier to dehumanize other groups due to the wants and demands of the people in the first group. I again cite the example of the rapid increase in aviation technology over the last several decades: the more efficient air travel has become, the more there has been a rise in selfishness among both the airline industry and passengers, which has resulted in an overall dehumanizing experience with air travel. From air travel it is not a large step to the dehumanization that can come through algorithmic tracking of people via facial recognition technology,⁴⁸ and from a surveillance society it is not a large step to population control leading toward eugenics. From a biblical perspective, this is logical: Sin starts small but if left unchecked continues to greater and greater damage of people.

⁴⁵ Ronald Cole-Turner, in the introduction to *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 9.

⁴⁶ There are two variations of the concept “posthuman” in vogue today; I mean posthuman in the sense that transhumanism uses it: the type of person who lives after humanity has experienced transcendence through technology.

⁴⁷ Ted Peters, “Progress and Provolution: Will Transhumanism Leave Sin Behind?” in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 76.

⁴⁸ Douglas Estes, “You Have Searched Me, Oh Apple Face ID, and You Know Me,” *Christianity Today*, April 5, 2018.

FORWARD PROGRESS FOR TRANSHUMANIST-
CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Transhumanists may not agree with Christians on who God is (a big issue), but there are areas where both tribes can work together to make our world a better place. As a starting point, transhumanists agree that human altruism can positively influence human flourishing. Altruism, though, is the antithesis of selfishness; a person cannot easily be both altruistic and selfish. Therefore, a first step would be for transhumanists to not only promote altruism but to recognize more clearly that selfishness impedes altruism. In order to do so, transhumanists must accept that selfishness is not merely a biological imperative but is rooted in something deeper in the essence of humanity. Without pushing transhumanists to accept the concept of a soul within humans, transhumanists can accept that it is not fully possible to reduce humans into neat parts where something as complex as selfishness can easily be excised by genetic engineering or a pill.⁴⁹ Transhumanists can start with a less reductionist view of humanity, and human nature, even if they want to regard these views as approximations.

Likewise, Christians can agree that technological advancement is largely a “good” for humanity, even if the tendencies of its use do not always move in a good direction. Because technology amplifies the actions of people, both good and bad, Christians may find that emphasizing the good is more productive—or at least as important—as criticizing the bad. Christian thinkers and leaders can do a better job of engaging with tech advances, especially in teaching Christians how to respond to new tech with thoughtfulness and a more biblically-informed nuance. Like humanists, Christians can continue to encourage the positive impacts of social connection and education for the improvement of the human condition throughout the world in which we live. As a result, as technology increases, the voice of Christian conviction will continue to call people away from selfishness and toward a more abundant life within God’s plan, even if it is a tech-enhanced abundant life.

⁴⁹ Akin to the suggestion of Mark Walker that happiness can be pharmaceutically enhanced or genetically programmed; see Walker, “Transhumanism,” 85–88.