



By

Mark McGee

Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship by Jacob Shatzer (IVP Academic, 2019) addresses both a challenge and opportunity for Christians today.

Transhumanism is a topic of great interest in our world today. *Transhumanism* is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as “the theory that science and technology can help human beings develop beyond what is physically and mentally possible at the present time.”

The use of the word transhumanism to label a distinctly transhumanist philosophy likely occurred in 1990. However, important influences on the development of transhumanism emerge beginning much earlier, in the Renaissance. Philosopher Pico della Mirandola reacted against the standard Judea-Christian picture of a large gulf between humans and God. Instead, dell Mirandola saw a smaller distinction between the two. In his 1486 Oration on the Dignity of Man, he uses the language of ‘maker and molder of thyself’ to describe humans and charges them with the

ability to 'fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer.' While della Mirandola certainly couldn't envision the degree to which humans in the twenty-first century would aspire to shape themselves, this notion begins to move in a transhumanist direction. *TRANSHUMANISM AND THE IMAGE OF GOD, P 45*

Dr. Shatzer approaches the topic from a Christian perspective and helps us understand how to approach transhumanism in the context of Christian discipleship. He begins his book by defining and explaining the history of such terms as *artificial intelligence* (AI & AGI), *augmented reality*, *morphological freedom*, along with *transhumanism*.

Even as modern society experiences some benefits from AI (e.g. smartphones, smart home devices, smart speakers, home security and surveillance, social media feeds, music and media streaming, video games, electronic navigational maps, online banking, booking flights online), there are some concerns about the future of AI and AGI:

First, people could use AGIs for evil goals ... A second danger is that once AGIs reach a certain level of sophistication, they may be able to reprogram themselves or create other AGIs that do evil things ... How can we ensure that we do not create something that destroys us? TRANSHUMANISM AND THE IMAGE OF GOD, P 104

A key to understanding for a Christian is the issue of reality. What is real? Can we change reality?

Virtual reality expands our definition of reality and can tempt us to discard or discount important elements of human life. As we seek to answer the question, 'What is real?' we must answer not only with words but with ways of being that help us orient our lives and order our priorities. We can glean much from Christian theological sources. By exploring the doctrine of the incarnation and its implications for what it means to be human, we will come to a better understanding of the proper place of virtual reality in the life of the disciple, a place that avoids the false promises that

run parallel to the transhumanist and posthumanist visions.

TRANSHUMANISM AND THE IMAGE OF GOD, P 120

I highly recommend Dr. Shatzer's book. It is both timely and helpful for Christians to understand the challenges of Transhumanism and the opportunities we have to share the true reality found only in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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The Author

Jacob Shatzer (PhD, Marquette University) is assistant professor and associate dean in the School of Theology and Missions (STM) at Union University. He is the author of *A Spreading and Abiding Hope* and editor of a volume of essays by A.J. Conyers. Shatzer is also assistant editor for *Ethics & Medicine* and an ordained Southern Baptist minister.

From the Publisher

We're constantly invited to think about the future of technology as a progressive improvement of tools: our gadgets will continue to evolve, but we humans will stay basically the same. In the future, perhaps even alien species and intelligent robots will coexist alongside humans, who will grapple with challenges and emerge as the heroes.

But the truth is that radical technological change has the power to radically shape humans as well. We must be well informed and thoughtful about the steps we're already taking toward a transhuman or even posthuman future. Can we find firm footing on a slippery slope?

*Biblical ethicist Jacob Shatzer guides us into careful consideration of the future of Christian discipleship in a disruptive technological environment. In *Transhumanism and the Image of God*, Shatzer explains the development*

and influence of the transhumanist movement, which promotes a 'next stage' in human evolution.

Exploring topics such as artificial intelligence, robotics, medical technology, and communications tools, he examines how everyday technological changes have already altered and continue to change the way we think, relate, and understand reality. By unpacking the doctrine of the incarnation and its implications for human identity, he helps us better understand the proper place of technology in the life of the disciple and avoid false promises of a posthumanist vision. We cannot think about technology use today without considering who we will become tomorrow.

Reviews

‘Jacob Shatzer deepens our understanding and practice of Christianity by showing us how profound and perilous the influence of technology is on how we think and conduct ourselves today. Shatzer gives us a calm and comprehensive account of how the intellectual community is responding to these transformative forces, both the observers who are enchanted with the lures of technology and the critics who help us see what is at stake. Most important, Shatzer concludes with consolations that are well founded and inspire confidence.’ Albert Borgmann, author of *Real American Ethics*

‘Jacob Shatzer’s book is a superb guide for the Christian disciple who seeks to be faithful to Christ in a technology-dominant society. It is engagingly written, highly accessible, wide-ranging in its scope, and immensely practical in its application. I am pleased to recommend this thoughtful, important—

indeed, essential—work.’ Paul Copan, Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics, Palm Beach Atlantic University, coauthor of Introduction to Biblical Ethics: Walking in the Way of Wisdom

‘Jacob Shatzer demonstrates serious Christian thinking while wrestling with the seemingly overwhelming issues associated with technology and its effect on our world. Moreover, Shatzer probes the questions of how these ever-expanding technologies are influencing us. This most insightful and helpful volume raises important issues for readers about what it means to be human, what it means to be created in the image of God, what it means to function in space and time, what it means to be human in relationship with others, what it means to live in genuine community, and what all of this means for Christian theology, ethics, worship, discipleship, and the practice of authentic fellowship. Shatzer challenges readers to reflect on how technology has changed us and how it

continues to change us, recognizing that technology has both drawn us away from aspects of our past while opening up new opportunities for the days ahead. This carefully researched and well-written book calls for and deserves thoughtful engagement and reflection. I heartily recommend Transhumanism and the Image of God and congratulate Professor Shatzer on this fine work.’ David S. Dockery, president, Trinity International University/Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

‘During the remainder of this century we will increasingly have the potential to alter the future, not just of individuals, but of the entire human species. Genetic augmentation, artificial intelligence, robotics, and other technologies will either serve a truly human future or human beings will serve those technologies. According to many transhumanists, we are transitional humans on our way to becoming posthuman. So transhumanism

offers a vision of a future in which we have the freedom to escape our humanity altogether. Jacob Shatzer—a new and refreshing voice in the conversation—provides cogent analyses of the transhumanist impulse and important practical strategies for preserving our humanity against the so-called technological imperative. Nothing less than our very humanity is at stake.’ C. Ben Mitchell, Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy, Union University

*‘The adage that ‘we shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us’ takes on a new meaning with transhumanism. In this timely book, Shatzer explores how the liturgies of certain technologies can nudge us unwittingly toward a transhuman future and recommends practices that remind us what it truly means to be human.’ Derek C. Schuurman, professor of computer science, Calvin College, author of *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology**

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