

# Book Reviews

a theological response to some aspect of human enhancement. In my opinion, the Christian public would benefit more from a second book by this author that seeks to make the central ideas more accessible to the nonspecialist, perhaps drawing on emphases in her first and final two chapters.

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**REACHING FOR IMMORTALITY: Can Science Cheat Death? A Christian Response to Transhumanism** by Sandra J. Godde. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022. 98 pages. Paperback; \$18.00. ISBN: 9781666736748.

This short book considers what it means to live in a world in which transhumanism has taken root. Written from a Christian perspective primarily for a general Christian audience, it is nonetheless also for others who, the author hopes, will be “inspired by the invitation of Christ to find true and everlasting life in him” (p. xiv).

Exploring the importance of embodiment (especially from a biblical perspective), the nature of personhood in the technological future, as well as the convergences and divergences between transhumanist and Christian visions, Sandra J. Godde—an artist and lecturer in Christian Studies at Christian Heritage College in Brisbane—takes up the following guiding questions: “Will cybernetic immortality ever trump the Christian hope of resurrection from the dead and the life of the world to come?” and “Is [transhumanism] desirable for human flourishing, or consistent with faith in biblical redemption?” The overall objective, here, is “to resource Christians to think deeply and respond to the transhumanist agenda regarding death and immortality” (p. 6) as advances in technology continue to form us as human beings (pp. 18–19).

The author begins with a quick and very general overview of transhumanism, summarized as “man improving himself by merging with technology” (p. 2). Godde pays particular attention to technological immortality and to the larger question of what, exactly, we ultimately desire for ourselves as individual human beings and, collectively, as a species.

In the first chapter, Godde speaks to how transhumanist ideas have infiltrated popular culture, “endowing technology with a religious-like significance bordering on worship” (p. 8). As cases in point, the author goes on to highlight a number of movies and literary pieces, hardly any of which are favorable depictions of technological use by human beings. In the chapters that follow, she goes on to compare and contrast Christian and transhumanist worldviews, looking primarily at

the nature of humanhood and creatureliness, the value (or not) of being limited, eschatology, deification, the concept of the *imago Dei*, and the necessity (or disposability) of the body.

This last point frames much of the discussion. The Christian tradition’s affirmation that “we are our bodies” (with emphasis here on the centrality of the body in Christian teaching on the Incarnation and the Resurrection) is completely at odds with the transhumanist quest to technologically transform the biological body (or, very simply, to do away with it altogether). Working toward a more perfect, as it were, expression of the *imago Dei* is quite different, the author notes, from striving to become *Homo cyberneticus* (p. 19).

Although the penultimate chapter (“Towards a Christian Ethical Framework”) does not really take up the constructive, balanced, or critical ethics discussion that I was hoping for (the title itself suggests that the chapter was meant to be preliminary), it offers a helpful list of those aspects of human nature that we ought to preserve and defend. This is great fodder for Christian readers, who will want to continue mulling over the question of what is valuable and indispensable about being human.

The overall brevity of the book (there are only about 73 pages of text), which is punctuated by some degree of repetition, means that the author does not dive into a rigorous analysis of the pressing and important questions that she asks throughout. For example, I would have liked to read a more nuanced representation of the diversity that exists in transhumanist thought regarding a number of issues raised here; I would have liked a deeper engagement with how transhumanists handle the concept of the “transcendent and intangible soul,” especially if it is, as the author says, “the essence of who we are” (p. 10); and I would have liked to learn more about Godde’s understanding of how, in the Incarnation, Christ validates “the good design” of the unenhanced human body (p. 26).

The author’s aim, here, is to introduce Christian readers to the conversation, which she does in an insightful and accessible way. In the end, she wants to help equip the Christian reader to think about the big, existential questions that are brought to the fore in the pursuit for immortality that is shared by Christians and transhumanists alike. Although Godde is unreservedly critical of transhumanism, I very much appreciated her perception of transhumanists as a “new breed of fellow travellers who also see a promised land” (p. 2).

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