

Forcing Change



Critiquing Religious Transhumanism: *Redux* **An Evangelical Christian Critique of Religious/Christian Transhumanism**

By Carl Teichrib

Note: The January 2014 edition of *Forcing Change* published a draft essay that was to be submitted to the Mormon Transhumanist Association (MTA). It was a rough version, a starting-point, with the goal of finalizing a Christian critique of “religious transhumanism” that would be published by the MTA. After discussions between the assigned MTA editor and myself, including constructive challenges and topical suggestions, a revised version was finalized and accepted. That completed essay is being reprinted here for your interest and use.

Besides shortening the essay from the January version by condensing historical examples of “Christian transhuman,” this edition expands on Genesis 3 and the Fall-of-Man. It also digs deeper into the question of “grace,” as presented by the Apostle Paul, in light of “works” as found in the Book of James. This is an issue of considerable importance in Mormon circles, and it is relevant to the discussion of “religious transhumanism.”

Finally, it is important to note that the original intended audience is the Mormon Transhumanist Association, an organization comprised of both Mormons and non-Mormons who are sympathetic to religious transhumanism.

P.S. For readers who may not be familiar with transhumanism, I have provided a list of *Forcing Change* editions on page 3 that can be downloaded from the FC member section. These reports will help you to better understand this movement and worldview.

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Carl Teichrib, Editor

As an evangelical Christian contemplating what to share with the Mormon Transhumanist Association, I considered the more obvious paths of likely debate and interest. I thought about the bio-ethical arguments, the concern that technology may negatively influence values and social norms, and the provocative topic of “what it means to be human.” However, each of these talking points are in no way exclusive to concerned Christians. Religious and secular transhumanists wrestle with these same themes. I was therefore compelled to explore the core tension between the two camps of religious transhumanism and evangelical Christianity. The main tension doesn't lie in technology or science *per se*, nor does it rest on bio-ethical or techno-social concerns. The core strain rests on the view of *salvation*.



Both sides recognize that humanity is limited and hampered by our present natural condition, that we suffer, and that death is the ultimate enemy. Transhumanism seeks immortality and salvation from the fallen human state, and looks to achieve this through human endeavour. This is a technical-material salvation, and in the case of religious transhumanism, it usually incorporates a spiritual element or quality. Conversely, evangelical Christianity sees salvation – a spiritual rebirth and future bodily resurrection – as coming from outside our fallen human enterprise. This salvation comes solely through the finished work of God-in-flesh, Jesus Christ.

In order to understand the evangelical perspective I will present a rough and short survey of the historical/evangelical position. In doing so I recognize that the MTA audience, and other transhumanists, will not be in agreement with the text. However, grasping the tension requires that we explore the context.

Before doing so, three points need to be considered. The first demonstrates that followers of evangelical and orthodox Christianity are not opposed to science,¹ for I have encountered some in the transhumanist community who feel Christians have done little to advance the human condition from a material/technical position. The second offers a general reference when considering the broad scope of what could be labelled as Christian transhumanism, and the third recognizes that historic Christianity looks to an endpoint marked by resurrection and immortality. In this way, Christianity shares a thematic vein with some transhumanists.

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1. Historical Christianity is not opposed to achieving human betterment, longevity, expanding capabilities, striving for medical breakthroughs or overcoming human problems through technology. David F. Noble, an historian of science and technology who taught at Toronto's York University, recognized that Western science is rooted in Christian thought and philosophy.² The French sociologist, Jacques Ellul, also noted the important role of Christianity in the modern context of technical advancement, as did the American cultural-historian and Christian thinker, Francis A. Schaeffer, who not only recognized Christianity's influence in the Scientific Revolution, but the part it played in progressing art and culture.³

Although Noble, Ellul, and Schaeffer acknowledged schisms and shortcomings in respect to the Christian influence upon science, the larger context remains firm: The Judeo-Christian worldview played a monumental role in forwarding modern science for the bettering of the human condition. Indeed, while the perceived cleft between science and religion is frequently bantered in the public square, the fact remains that Christians

Forcing Change and Transhumanism

Over the years, *Forcing Change* has been on the cutting edge of researching the transhumanist movement and worldview. Here's a list of *Forcing Change* editions tackling the subject. All of these reports can be downloaded in the membership section of *Forcing Change* (www.forcingchange.org).

Volume 7, Issue 6: *A New Spirituality for a New Humanity* - This report covers the Global Future 2045 International Congress, arguably the most audacious transhumanist events of 2013.

Volume 7, Issue 4: *Transhumanism and Mormonism* - A report from the 2013 Mormon Transhumanist Association conference, and a look at how transhumanism and Mormonism link up.

Volume 6, Issue 4: *The Doctrine of Man* - A guest writer tackles the subject through a Biblical lens. We also explore the transhuman theme as found in the entertainment industry.

Volume 5, Issue 7: *Looking Backward to Our Techno-Future* - Explores the transhuman idea as it crops up in esoteric societies and modern culture. This report is a good introduction, a jump-in point to understand the background and underlying spiritual aspects of this movement.

Volume 5, Issue 1: *Spiritualization of Science* - Although this edition explores other facets of social change, the transhuman theme nevertheless exists as the spiritualization of science is considered by a guest writer. This edition provides an important contribution to the broader picture.

Volume 4, Issue 10: *The Rise of Techno-Gods* - This is the first direct report on transhumanism published by *Forcing Change*, and the main essay highlights key observations from the 2010 Mormon Transhumanist Association conference on "Transhumanism and Spirituality."

See also: **Volume 4, Issues 7-8:** *Technocracy and Engineering a New World* - Neither edition deals with transhumanism directly, but both provide historical overviews of a parallel worldview; technocracy, the idea that society should be engineered by technicians and a scientific elite.

and adherents of theological thought⁴ have been and are an important part of the scientific community. This is true historically and in today's context; From Pascal to Isaac Newton to Michael Faraday to Werner Heisenberg to Francis Collins of the Human Genome Project, to synthetic chemist and nano-tech engineer, James Tour.⁵

Furthermore, Christianity has a long and unprecedented track record of human betterment through the establishment of countless hospitals, schools, orphanages, safe houses and shelters. Likewise, it formed the foundation for many universities. Think Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Brown and Dartmouth. Generations of Christians have followed the command of Jesus Christ to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39), exemplifying the calling of the New Testament book of James to live with "faith and deeds." The bottom line is that many Christians, spurred through a Biblical worldview, have done much to advance human betterment through science, knowledge, and action.

2. Religious transhumanism and Christian transhumanism are labels with potentially broad expressions, making the task of establishing identity an interesting and sometimes perplexing task. Under the banner of "religious transhumanism" we can find an assortment of ideas and movements, spanning recognized faith traditions to obscure branches of mystical philosophy to trans-religions such as Terasem.

"Christian transhumanism," an extension of "religious transhumanism," may include one or more of the following dimensions,

A) Individual advocates of transhumanism who place their view of technical human advancement within a Christian-orientation or identity.

This sweeping categorization could include such historical personalities as Nikolai Fedorov (1829-1903) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). Fedorov couched his ideas of technical human ascension in a mix of Russian Orthodoxy, scientific futurism, and alternative spiritual beliefs.⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, the controversial Catholic mystic who wrote of a coming "Trans-human" and "Ultra-human" conception, envisioned a psychic unity with the "Cosmic Christ" alongside technical-scientific achievements.⁷

Here it must be noted that a claimed Christian orientation does not mean an orthodox view is adhered to. In fact, the nature of Christian transhumanism – with the examples of Fedorov and de Chardin as classic examples – would be considered outside the norm of traditional Christianity.

B) An organized religion, sect, branch or faith-based movement that attaches a Christian persuasion or label to beliefs of human-induced ascension.

"Mormon transhumanism" as a faith-based movement within a Christian asseveration could fit this context. However, claims of a Christian designation does not necessarily mean the declaration is universally accepted or beyond contesting. For example, in a 2012 Pew Research report it was demonstrated that 97% of Mormons consider their faith a "Christian religion," at the same time a sizable percentage of evangelical Protestants (47%) did not hold to this view, and even more Protestants, 66%, said that "Mor-

monism and their own religion are very or somewhat different.”⁸ Furthermore, Protestant/evangelical theologians and apologists routinely take the position that Mormonism is a *unique religion* based on Joseph Smith's message, while pointing out fundamental differences with orthodox Christianity.⁹ Thus, the example of Mormon Transhumanism represents the perplexity of labeling, as Mormonism itself is considered distinctive by a sizable percentage of orthodox/evangelical Christians.

C) Finally, Christian transhumanism may include those who have openly opposed orthodox Christianity yet employed Christian sentiment within arguments for human development. A broad brushstroke is required for this classification, and it is being included for historical purposes. The illustration below exemplifies this paradoxical classification.

Henri de Saint-Simon (right), a 19th century social thinker, would fit this categorization as one who considered the notion of God “outworn” yet envisioned a “New Christianity” - “to pronounce anathema upon theology, and to condemn as unholy any doctrine trying to teach men that there is any other way of obtaining eternal life, except that of working with all their might for the improvement of the conditions of life of their fellow man.”¹⁰ Saint-Simon predates the modern idea of “transhumanism,” and he was noted for a low view of historical Christianity. Nevertheless, his conception of a new society derived through science and managed by engineers, borrowing sentiments from Christianity, and placing salvation in the hands of humanity, affords Simon a place within the distant-murky timeline of “Christian transhumanism.”



Obviously, nuances/complexities exist as we try to define “Christian transhumanism.”

3. Evangelical Christianity looks to a future point of bodily resurrection, immortality, and perfection. This is a transformation away from the flaws of our present human condition, Biblically understood as the result of sin (turning from God's order – see Romans 5:12-22). It is a condition marked by disease, moral failings, troubles and death. Thus, a future and final enhancement is anticipated, as Christians await the promise of Jesus Christ who said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26a).¹¹ Job, the Old Testament personality who lived many centuries before Christ, spoke of the promise of redemption with great anticipation,

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth;
And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How
my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27).

Salvation that comes from Christ lifts people up from the way of sin and death, and brings us back to the way of Life. First through spiritual salvation and then, at an appointed time, through physical translation.

Surface commonalities do exist between traditional Christianity and religious transhumanism; the recognition of the flawed human condition, the hope of a better existence, and - depending on the version of transhumanism - the anticipation of immortality. Both transhumanism and evangelical Christianity have been couched as having future-perfect aspirations and visions of “salvation,” and this is where the core tension is located.

Dr. Brent Waters, a fellow with The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, wrote in his essay, “Whose Salvation? Which Eschatology?,”

“For transhumanists humans have fallen short of achieving their true potential, whereas for Christians humans have not yet become the kinds of creatures God intends them to be. In response both agree that humans require release from their current condition. For transhumanists this release is attained through technological transformation, whereas for Christians humans are transformed by their life in Christ.”¹²

This is the primary point of tension; Salvation. Transhumanism places salvation, in this case the ascension of fallen humanity, chiefly within a physical transformation. Some branches of transhumanism, mainly religious groupings, include a spiritual component. Regardless of variation, the goal of human perfection by becoming “more than human” through technology and science rests upon the work of fallen humanity. Evangelical Christianity, on the other hand, views salvation as something derived from outside of our capacity. To understand the evangelical dynamic better we will explore this in a short 5-point survey. Please understand that this is only an abbreviated review, as rooms have been filled with books over these points.

Traditional Christianity: An Evangelical Survey in Four Points

1. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” Genesis 1:1. Here, the identity of the one who created is expressed; God did it. Furthermore, in Genesis 2:4 we are given the more precise title of *Yahweh Elohim*, the personalized name for the God of the Israelite people. *Yahweh Elohim* is thus the Creator.

In Genesis 1 we find Yahweh introducing Himself to His creation. This is not an abstraction, but implies a relational setting among real and existing entities: God wants to be known. Because *identity* is being communicated, a meaningful relationship between Creator and the creation is possible. God is not an abstraction.

Identity in Genesis 1 and 2 also demonstrates legal ownership. As Creator, Yahweh, and no one else, has the first and final legal claim to the universe. This ownership aspect is seen in Deuteronomy 10:14, “Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it.” This ownership extends to people

too, placing *God above humanity*; “Know that the Lord [Yahweh] is God; It is He who made us, and not we ourselves...” (Psalm 100:3).

His creative capacity is also demonstrated in the Genesis account. Yahweh did not use pre-existing material to fashion the “heavens and earth,” materials that could be recalled or revoked by another. Rather, as Genesis tells us, He spoke all things into existence. Psalm 33:6 says; “By the word of the Lord [Yahweh] the heavens were made, and all the host them by the breath of His mouth.” God is seen here as thinking the thought, speaking the thought, and through His power engaging in creation.

Dr. Yehezkel Kaufmann, past Judaic and Biblical scholar with Hebrew University, put it this way.

“Nowhere do we find that the cosmic elements – e.g., earth, heavens, sun – were fashioned out of pre-existing stuff... the Bible has no need of a pre-existent realm. To be sure, the biblical God fashions some of his creatures out of matter already at hand. But this matter is not alive, charged with divine forces; it neither opposes nor participates in creation.”¹³

God spoke-and-breathed matter and life into existence. How this *technically* came about remains a mystery, and the complexity and scale of creation causes us to marvel. Considering God's ways King David penned the following, “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:3). The Apostle Paul writes, “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?” (Romans 11:34). God's greatness and positional authority are unmatched, confirming uniqueness in the universe. This is amplified in Isaiah 44 where Yahweh declares that He is Israel's Redeemer, “I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God... Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.”¹⁴

Isaiah 45 states this in unequivocal terms, “And there is no God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; There is none besides Me. Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the Earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”¹⁵

Finally, the New Testament brings a fuller understanding of God's salvific claim. Jesus Christ [*Yeshua* in the Hebrew, meaning “Savior” and “Liberator”¹⁶], who parallels the claim of Isaiah 44 as “the First and the Last” in Revelation 22:13, is God manifested in the flesh (John 1:1,14) – deity who literally participates in the nature of humanity with the purpose of redemption – and is subsequently acknowledged as Creator.

“For by Him [Jesus] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” (Colossians 1:16-17).

John 1:3 affirms this position; “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

2. In Genesis 1:26-27 we find that Mankind is created in God's image. This does not imply equality with Yahweh, but the language expresses the positional uniqueness of humanity in comparison to the rest of nature. It also gives us a hint about how God relates to us. John 4:24 tells us that God is spirit, however, numerous Old Testament metaphors, analogies, and examples are used that employ human physical characteristics for God. In doing this we can see how God, a spirit, is making a connection with us through what we understand. When God talks about His “right hand,” we can relate.

But it is in the New Testament where we find the most profound implication of God's revealed image, His incarnating within a human body for the purpose of salvation as Jesus Christ.¹⁷ Moreover, Jesus Christ is given the title “last Adam” and the “heavenly Man” (1 Corinthians 15:45,49), both titles that bear witness to the Genesis 1 concept of “God's image” and the restoration of the relationship we had with God before our Fall. As the Apostle Paul noted, we who are in Christ Jesus “shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.”¹⁸ Finally, in language reminiscent of Genesis 1, Jesus Christ is upheld as the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), *par excellence*.

Being made in “God's image” also reflects some of His characteristics; love and empathy, moral consciousness and righteousness, rationality, and the capacity to enter into relationship. God's “likeness” imparted within mankind is communicating a transcendent quality meant to reflect His goodness, love, and righteousness. A meaningful relationship between the Creator and humanity can thus take place, as exemplified in the events of Genesis 2 where God communes directly with His people.

Because of the fact that we are created in God's image, mankind's value is not ultimately gauged by human standards; economic classifications, political edicts, or technical measurements. Created in the likeness of God, each person has intrinsic and eternal value, and it is in this we discover the foundation for human dignity. Ideally our technical and scientific endeavours should thus be aimed at upholding and advancing this fundamental vision of human worth.

3. God is the author of love, and choice is required if love is to exist. For love without choice is bondage. In Genesis 2 an option is placed before Adam and Eve, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the choice is open to partake of it or obey God and abstain. However, with this choice comes a warning; If you eat of it, you will die. The rationality for this seemingly harsh consequence has a logical consideration. As God is Creator and therefore legal holder of life, to intentionally choose a path other than His is to enter the way of death.



In Genesis 3 humanity is faced with a tempter, variously called Satan or the Devil. While artistic interpretations of this adversary have spanned the gamut from a

medieval-inspired monster to a comic-book figure with horns to a suave businessman, 2 Corinthians 11:14 tells us that he comes as an “angel of light.”

In Genesis 3 the tempter offers justification to disobey God's earlier command, reversing God's warning; “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”¹⁹ Three interlocking aspects come together in this pitch. First is the prospect of enlightenment. Next is the promise to be “like God” or “as God,” and last is the subsequent empowerment through knowledge, which is perceived as the “gaining of wisdom.”²⁰ All of this is presented as a positive development, to be as God, as Yahweh's warning of death is pushed aside.

The information presented to Eve and Adam by the tempter was a half-truth. Yes, they would attain the knowledge of good and evil, a fact God Himself recognizes in Genesis 3:22. Note that Adam and Eve *did not* lack knowledge prior to eating the fruit, for they were presented with God's moral will *before* the encounter with the tempter and were making knowledgeable choices (Genesis 2:15-25). Moreover, Eve demonstrated moral knowledge prior to intentionally disobeying God's directive (Genesis 3:2-3). Thus, their pre-fall existence was not one of ignorant bliss, nor were they innocent of sexual relations as some have suggested, as procreation and becoming “one flesh” was instituted in Genesis 1:28 and 2:24. Rather, their pre-fall existence was couched in moral obedience to God's order. But that changed with eating the fruit.

What the “knowledge of good and evil” is has been debated in theological circles, although the core meaning of this knowledge may rest on something very basic: To know and experience autonomy outside of God's established order and provisional wisdom. It was a choice solidified in an action, and humanity immediately attained the knowledge that previously was known only in the heavenly realm – following the lead of an angelic tempter who had blazed the trail in pride.

Yes, in eating the fruit their “eyes were open” to a knowledge they were not privy to before. This, however, was not a blessing but a curse. Fellowship with God was broken, and humanity was distanced from true wisdom. Death, not the angelic false promise of immortality, was set in motion. Likewise, relational animosity, pain and toil, entered into our now-mortal existence.

Neither did human-ascended deity, to “be as God,” come to fruition. God recognizes that they had become “as one of us” in Genesis 3:22, but the context is in the knowledge of good and evil, not in becoming a deity. Moreover, God stated this as a *fait accompli*. In other words, Adam and Eve's fall was not a progression but a completed act of disobedience. They had deliberately stepped outside of God's order and now sin and death was embedded in humanity's spiritual and physical existence, the very opposite of perfected Godhood.

Proverbs speaks into the error committed. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). Romans 5:12 fleshes it out with a di-

rect link to the Genesis account. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

Since the Fall of Man, humanity has striven to regain that which was lost. We have done this through rituals, techniques, religions and esoteric teachings, endless cycles of good works, burdens of obligations, personal enlightenment, and the unending weight of attempted but failed acts of self-perfection – including the dream of technological perfectibility.²¹ The claims that Man can become God through evolutionary self-discovery and/or initiatory experiences are legion,²² often with angelic or other-worldly revelations acting as the catalyst to inspire another repetition of the same promise.

4. Two thousand years ago God entered humanity's domain through Jesus Christ, literally God-in-flesh among men, as the antidote to our problem of sin and death - “manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

This “taking away our sins” and *abolishing death* “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). It required that Jesus Christ Himself, the Savior and liberator, experience separation and death. This was foreshadowed in the sacrificial system of the Jews for hundreds of years beforehand. But something more was needed than just the experience of death, for anyone can die. Rather, death itself needed to be overcome. Jesus Christ, as the author of life, would need a bodily resurrection – to be free from the grave and corruption. In this act of physical resurrection, the fullness of God was revealed as God the Father raised Jesus (Romans 10:9), Jesus raised Himself (John 19:19-22), and the Spirit raised Him; “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11).

As the Book of Hebrews relates, this act of Jesus Christ was a finalizing work. For how else could anything be added? The Old and New Testament repeatedly tells us that there is no one equal to God, no one who matches His holiness. Instead, we find out that to God our “righteousness are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6) and that we have *all* sinned and fallen short of His standard (Romans 3:23). We are, therefore, unable to justify ourselves in our own power.

However, even in this sacrificial act of Christ, a choice is presented. And here we *do* have a part to play in salvation. As Adam and Eve fell from God's order by actively taking that which was forbidden, we must now engage in a parallel opposite by surrendering our will of self-autonomy – our attempt to save ourselves, be it through works or systems or technique. This humbling admittance is an act of repentance, premised on the belief that Jesus Christ as Creator and now defeater-of-death provides salvation. We therefore anticipate the restoration of immortality, holiness and perfection, and live out our faith with this promise in mind.

5. The importance of “faith and works,” as hinted at in the above paragraph, is important to explore in more detail. Usually this discussion is associated with the New Testament writings of Paul and James. But we already see a foreshadow of repentance

versus works with King David in Psalm 51. David, confronted with sin, realized that what God wants isn't ritualistic sacrifices, which were performed daily by the priests, but "a broken and contrite heart – These, O God, You will not despise." This opens to grace: unmerited favor.

A striking example of unmerited favor and salvation takes place at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Placed between two convicted thieves, Jesus began to receive curses from one thief. The other criminal, recognizing his own lost situation, called out in fear of God and asked Jesus to remember him "when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

It is notable how Jesus Christ *did not* respond. He didn't say to the thief, "first, get down off your cross and go do good works," or, "go find a technical solution to your problem of death," or, "too bad you weren't baptized," or, "sorry, you need to be part of the priesthood and perform your obligations before I can accept you." Instead, Jesus said, "today you will be with me in paradise." The language here is important too, for Jesus is not telling the thief that he will make it "partway to paradise" or to a certain level of salvation or exaltation. Rather, the thief will enjoy full fellowship with Christ.

The thief could do nothing of works to save himself. All he could do was the one thing required, to fear God and have a contrite heart. To recognize that we cannot save ourselves and must rely on Jesus Christ as the only Savior is humbling, and difficult, for it runs counter to the sin nature embedded in us since the Fall – our desire for autonomy outside of God's order. The teaching that salvation is out of our hands is a vexing thought, and it has haunted and infuriated humanity for millennium.

But what about or works?

As Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us; "For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."



Romans 4 provides extra insight.

“For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as [King] David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin’.”

But evangelicals do recognize that works does play a vital role in the demonstration of a living faith. The Book of James (2:20-24), like the Romans passage above, gives the example of Abraham as one who exhibited faith with deeds. Noah too exemplified this faith-works dynamic (Genesis 6:9-22); Hearing God's message of warning and believing God, Noah then acted with works in accordance to his faith. In the Noah account God communicated judgement and provided direction, sealed Noah and his family, and ultimately provided salvation. Noah didn't rescue himself by simply building a boat. He believed and trusted God for deliverance from the coming calamity, and then worked in accordance to God's directive. Noah and Abraham both demonstrated faith and action, and we see God's grace extended to them.²³

Ephesians 2:10 helps put grace and works into perspective: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

So how do evangelicals reconcile the writings of Paul, who peached “grace alone,” and James, who penned that “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24)? We would argue that the contrast is largely a matter of original audience and the intent of the message, and that the apparent contradiction isn't as divisive as we've made it. For example, Paul himself acknowledged the *importance of works as evidence of grace* in Ephesians chapter 2. In Ephesians, Paul was writing to further strengthen the faithful, and he called them to walk “worthy of the vocation” (Eph. 4:1) – offering moral and spiritual instruction for what *not to do* and what *to do*. Paul was reminding the believers of the grace that saved them, and that good works should now follow. He said something similar to the Galatians in that faith needed to express itself with works of love (Gal. 5:6), it could not just be an intellectual belief.

In writing to the Romans, Paul was expressing the theology of salvation to a mixed Gentile-Jewish church audience, as there was a known conflict between these believers over law and grace. Here, Paul emphasized the requirement of grace over the “works of the law,” but noted that the law wasn't and isn't nullified – it just doesn't save. Rather, the law, and the inability for anyone to uphold its high standard, demonstrated the need for a Savior who was perfectly righteous. And their hope was to be placed on

the one who could measure up to the standard of the law, Jesus Christ. Repeatedly, Paul brings out that God's righteousness through Jesus Christ is the basis of salvation, and in the process reminded them that God shows no favoritism to what man judges as being "good," for "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). It is important to note that what he wrote to the Romans and Ephesians didn't contradict the importance of good works, it placed works in the right order in relationship to salvation.

Turning to the Book of James, it is important to understanding the audience. James tells us that these people were *already believers*. That is, James recognized that they were saved and he repeatedly referred to them as his brothers, and based on the language and style used in the book, it is clear these were Jewish converts to Christianity.

The purpose of his letter is also evident; To encourage these believers to live their faith in a morally upright and tangible way, for the text powerfully infers that these Christians had not put their faith into practice but were struggling with un-Christlike behavior. James was combating an intellectually expressed faith that lacked evidence of a changed life, as seen when he rightly said; "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is only one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!" (James 2:18-19).

James is making his own point, just as Paul did, as both were tackling different yet connected problems around the issue of works and grace. Paul was combatting the error of having faith in an object; law and works. James was battling the error of eliminating good works while claiming to be a believer.

Dr. Douglas J. Moo, New Testament scholar at Wheaton College Graduate School, has this to say,

"Understood in their own contexts, and with careful attention to the way each is using certain key words, it can be seen that James and Paul are making complimentary, not contradictory, points... what can be done is to understand the point each was making from within his own sphere of thought and word usage, and then bring them together. When this is done a unified, theologically coherent picture emerges."²⁴

Dr. Moo continues, "The difference between Paul and James consists in the sequence of works and conversion: Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works."²⁵

The Book of Hebrews comes to mind when contemplating the role of works and salvation. In chapter 10 we discover, like King David did as found in Psalm 51, that religious sacrifice and temple work was insufficient. However, the author of Hebrews noted that one who is perfect, Jesus Christ as Redeemer – being above the angels and creation, and above all systems of religion – was willing to be the final sacrifice. This would be, literally, the final and only "good work" that would save humanity. Jesus Christ "of-

ferred one sacrifice for sins forever... For by one offering He has perfected those who are being sanctified.” (Heb. 10:12,15).

Here, then, is the tension: Transhumanism and religious/Christian transhuman thought focusses on what humanity can do through science and technology to advance salvation or achieve it via technique. Conversely, evangelical Christianity holds that salvation, resurrection and perfection are found outside our technique. Transhumanism metaphorically repeats the Genesis account of taking the fruit (or in this case engineering the fruit), a technique to supposedly gain godhood through the autonomy of our work. The other evangelical camp recognizes that stepping out of God's order caused sin and separation, and that as fundamentally fallen we cannot lift ourselves out of this self-imposed trap. The salvific act must come from beyond humanity, that is, the domain of “God alone.” Therefore, if an “angel from heaven” preaches “any other gospel,” thus pulling away from the “grace of Christ” as Galatians 1:8 tells us, we are to flee this “other gospel” – be it a message of salvation from the *angel of technology* or the *angel of good works*.

Although evangelical and conservative Christians may, in critiquing transhumanism, find themselves discussing and debating ethical considerations – even finding common ground with ethically concerned transhumanists over medical breakthroughs – the fundamental and underlying salvific tension remains in play. **FC**

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Endnotes:

¹ This does not preclude that some historical and contemporary aspects of Christendom have, indeed, battled with scientific thought. The controversial and complex case of the Roman Catholic Church and Galileo – himself a believer in Scripture – is often cited. And while the evolution/creation/intelligent design issue is used by many critics of religion to demonstrate scientific illiteracy by Christians, it must be noted that some religious and secular scientists do question the theory of macro-evolution on *scientific grounds*. For example, famed nano-tech engineer James Tour, while questioning creation and admitting to not being a theologian, likewise publicly admits his disbelief of macro-evolution from a scientific standpoint. While Dr. Tour's situation is interesting, his disbelief of macro-evolution is not unique.

² This Christian-technology theme makes up the bulk of his book, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (Penguin Books, 1999).

³ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Vintage Books, 1964), pp.32-38; Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Then Shall We Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Fleming H. Revell, 1976), see chapter 7 regarding Christianity's impact on the Scientific Revolution.

⁴ This does not imply that all were or are in agreement on every theological and doctrinal point, but that each identify in a serious way a Christian perspective and/or identity, and that Christianity was/is a fundamental part of their lives.

⁵ Tour, as a scientist who openly proclaims his Christian faith, wrote a fascinating article on the question of Evolution/Creation. His article is titled “Layman's Reflections on Evolution and Creation: An Insider's View of the Academy,” and can be found at the James M. Tour Group website; www.jmtour.com. Furthermore, Tour recently gave his testimony at Georgia Tech's Veritas Forum, where he detailed his work with nanotechnology and then answers, in a provocative way, a question on the issue of evolution/creation. This lecture can be viewed here; <http://youtu.be/PzrxTH-UUdI>.

⁶ For more on Fedorov and Cosmism, see George M. Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and his Followers* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (Harper Colophon Books, 1969). See chapters 19 to 22.

⁸ *Mormons in America: Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society* (Pew Research Center/The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, January 2012, study directed by Luis Lugo), p.10-11. Side note: The polling discovered that Catholics are more inclined to accept Mormonism as a Christian faith.

⁹ Recognizing that my Mormon friends will likely disagree or disfavor the positions made, I am nevertheless listing these generally-gearred sources as a starting point to consider the differences, criticisms, and arguments. A very short and basic view of differences between Mormonism and Christianity can be found in the online pamphlet, “Seven Differences Between Mormonism and Christianity,” (http://mormoninfo.org/files/tracts/Eng_Differences.pdf). An online source with many articles and essays demonstrating differences is the Mormon Research Ministry (www.mrm.org). For examples of contested aspects of Joseph Smith's teachings, see the video production, *The Bible vs. Joseph Smith*, based on an open discussion between Joel P. Kramer, an evangelical Christian, and Greg Gifford, a generational Mormon (Produced by Living Hope Ministries/SourceFlix, 2010). Finally, a dated but important source of critical review comes from Dr. Walter Martin's classic Christian apologetics text, *Kingdom of the Cults* (Bethany House Publishers, 1985), see chapter 6.

¹⁰ Henri de Saint-Simon, “New Christianity,” *Social Organization, the Science of Man and Other Writings* (Harper Torchbooks, 1952), p.105.

¹¹ Daniel 12:1-3, John 6:40, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Revelation 20:4-6, along with many other Old Testament and New Testament passages, speak to resurrection.

¹² Brent Waters, “Whose Salvation? Which Eschatology? Transhumanism and Christianity as Contending Salvific Religions,” *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Georgetown University Press, 2011), p.164.

¹³ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (University of Chicago Press, 1960), p.68. This quote is a composite of two sections. The first is found on the top of page 68, and second in the middle of the same page.

¹⁴ Isaiah 44: 6,8b.

¹⁵ Isaiah 45:21b-22.

¹⁶ See Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Recovering Jesus: The Witness of the New Testament* (Brazos Press, 2007), p.106. Neufeld is an Associate Professor at Conrad Grebel University College.

¹⁷ See John 14:9, Col. 2:9, and Hebrews 10:5.

¹⁸ I Corinthians 15:49.

¹⁹ Genesis 3:4b-5.

²⁰ Genesis 3:6.

²¹ See, David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology*.

²² A few examples: Theosophy, which received its revelations through communications from shining and otherworldly Perfected Men, teaches that man becomes God through group initiatory processes and spiritual evolution; Levi, who received etherial visions and thus was able to decode his revealed book, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, teaches that man becomes God; *The Urantia Book*, a massive compilation of messages from “celestial personalities” teaches that man becomes God through spiritual evolution; The esoteric teachings of the Golden Dawn, which invokes angelic encounters through rituals, teaches that man can become “More than Human” - a divine and Perfected Man; The Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Cross, acknowledging and transmitting the teachings of otherworldly Masters, points to human perfection and that man can arise as a cosmic Master through initiatory experience and spiritual evolution; Elizabeth Claire Prophet received angelic visitors and celestial messages proclaiming man is God; and the New Age Movement is rife with examples of angelic and cosmic visitations and communications, continually proclaiming man is God. Finally, Mormonism fits with this *modus operandi*, as Joseph Smith's teaching of man/God emerges from his angelic-divine encounters. Interestingly, when examining the Bible we see angels proclaiming two primary messages; the fallen angel of light promising man's divinity through special knowledge, and righteous angels pointing to the only God (two examples of the latter: The angels at Jesus birth as found in Luke 2, and the angel of Revelation 22 telling John not to worship him, but “only worship God!”).

²³ I want to thank James Carroll of the Mormon Transhumanist Association for pointing me to Noah's situation in a 2013 email. Although we disagree in part, I appreciated his criticism and his selection of the Noah event in our correspondence.

²⁴ Dr. Douglas J. Moo, *James* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), pp.45-46, 46.

²⁵ Dr. Douglas J. Moo, *James*, p102.

H.G. Wells and the World State

To understand the present and to contemplate the future requires that we explore the past.

H.G. Wells was one of the most influential visionaries of the early twentieth century. His many books inspired multitudes of men and women who, like Wells, looked to a “World State” as the savior of humanity. Although he wrote often of a World State, Mr. Wells’ optimism for the future of mankind waned due to the destructiveness of World War II. Nevertheless, his desire for what he called an “Open Conspiracy” – a movement of organizations and people seeking the establishment of a world collective – was forefront in his thinking.



Here are ten telling quotes from Mr. Wells on advancing the Open Conspiracy and its anticipated outcome: The World State.

1. **“The idea of a world commonweal has to be established as the criterion of political institutions, and also as the criterion of general conduct in hundreds of millions of brains. It has to dominate education everywhere in the world. When that end is achieved, then the world state will be achieved...”** – H.G. Wells, *The Salvaging of Civilization: The Probable Future of Mankind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), p.21.
2. **“We must be prepared to see an Association of Nations in conference growing into an organic system of world controls for world affairs and the keeping of the world’s peace, or we must be prepared for – a continuation of war.”** – H.G. Wells, *Washington and the Riddle of Peace* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), pp.215-216
3. **“It [a new world order] needs only that the governments of Britain, the United States, France, Germany, and Russia should get together in order to set up an effective control of currency, credit, production, and distribution – that is to say, an effective ‘dictatorship of prosperity,’ for the whole world. The other sixty odd States would have to join in or accommodate themselves to the over-ruling decisions of these major Powers.”** – H.G. Wells, *Journalism and Prophecy, 1893-1946* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1964, compiled and edited by W. Warren Wagar), p.214. This quote was first published in 1931.
4. **“A world revolution to a higher social order, a world order, or utter downfall lies before us all.”** – H.G. Wells, *Journalism and Prophecy, 1893-1946* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1964, compiled and edited by W. Warren Wagar), p.252. This quote was first published in 1939.

5. **“I am for world-control of production and of trade and transport, for a world coinage, and the confederation of mankind. I am for the super-State...”** – H.G. Wells, *A Year of Prophecy* (Toronto, ON: Tyerson Press, 1924), p.86.
6. **“The world needs something stronger than any possible rebellion against its peace. In other words it needs a federal world government embodying a new conception of human life as one whole.”** – H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History, Volume III – Modern History* (New York, NY: Triangle Books, 1940 edition), p.1170.
7. **“Now the most comprehensive conception of this new world is of one politically, socially and economically united... To this end a small but increasing body of people in the world set their faces and seek to direct their lives.”** – H.G. Wells, *The Open Conspiracy: Blue Prints for a World Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), pp.27-28.
8. **“The world state must begin; it can only begin, as a propaganda cult, or as a group of propagandist cults, to which men and women must give themselves and their energies, regardless of the consequence to themselves... The activities of a cult which sets itself to bring about the world-state would at first be propagandist, they would be intellectual and educational, and only as a sufficient mass of opinion and will had accumulated would they become to a predominant extent politically constructive. Such a cult must direct itself particularly to the teaching of the young.”** – H.G. Wells, *The Salvaging of Civilization: The Probable Future of Mankind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), pp.37-38.
9. **“The character of the Open Conspiracy [the movement towards a world collective] will now be plainly displayed. It will have become a great world movement as widespread and evident as socialism or communism. It will largely have taken the place of these movements. It will be more, it will be a world religion.”** – H.G. Wells, *The Open Conspiracy: Blue Prints for a World Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), p. 163.
10. **“The establishment of the world community will surely exact a price – and who can tell what that price may be? – in toil, suffering and blood.”** – H.G. Wells, *The Open Conspiracy: Blue Prints for a World Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), p.193.

Forcing Change

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