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Reaching for Immortality

Can Science Cheat Death?

A Christian Response to Transhumanism

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Author Sandra Godde is no time traveller. But in recent years, when hitting *send* on her final manuscript for *Reaching for Immortality* (2022), she wouldn't have been surprised by a conversation between artificial beings in a future 2025 science fiction series called *Alien: Earth*. Godde would have appreciated the scene from episode one, where two lifelike AIs are in conversation with a scientist, played by Australian actor Essie Davis. The human researcher was trying to describe to the two humanlike beings just who and what they were.

“The body is a vessel for the mind, a human mind, on its path to endless life,” the scientist said, adding that, “Simulating the human experience is critical.”

The younger of the AIs—*Wendy*, newly manufactured and mildly puzzled—asked a simple but profound question: “So what am I? If I’m not human, what am I?”

The other AI—artificially aged with a shock of white hair—replied with quiet assurance: “Whatever you want to be.”

Penned before this dialogue, Sandra Godde's *Reaching for Immortality: Can Science Cheat Death?* feels like a contemporary companion guide to the complexities of artificial intelligence. Citing film and popular culture is a fitting reference, given the author's use of such media from the opening pages of her book. Godde charts the rise of technologies that regard the human body as a mere container for the brain, seeing a future in which "transitional humans" are on their way to "becoming posthuman." Her thesis begins with the well-argued observation that we are being plied with a popular culture diet of life beyond finite bodies and organic minds.

Her argument begins with a deep dive into transhumanism via human storytelling, especially in film and print. Keeping with the eschatological predictions of what comes next, Godde highlights the differences between transhumanists and Christians. In this context, she reminds the reader of the gulf between seeing a human body as a "disposable commodity" and the scriptural depiction of "eternity of the human person."

The contrast between two "mutually exclusive visions for the future of humanity" is the recurring theme of *Reaching for Immortality*. Three of the six chapters are devoted to Christian anthropology, and what Godde describes as the benefits of living in limited, mortal bodies. Firstly, she argues that embodiment is inextricably linked to bearing the image of God, *imago Dei*. From here, Godde makes the point that a Christian cannot argue that one's body is merely a "biological machine," but indispensable as embodied beings destined for restoration at resurrection.

The frail, imperfect, mortal human body dominates Godde's focus. Rather than presenting it as a glitch of life, it is a "glorious feature." It reminds us that we are not the product of a production line, nor the output of a billionaire's hobby. By contrast, a transhumanist regards the body as the principal imperfection of life, imposing "intolerable restrictions" on what a human can do. The technologists would say they have good reasons to regard human bodies as problematic:

pain, illness, death, to name three. For a Christian, such flaws in the body have an answer in the form of “union with the Messiah, Christ Jesus, whose atoning death has already rippled throughout the cosmos, beginning a healing of the entire creation.”

Rather than being a mere compare-and-contrast book, Godde builds the case for what she calls a set of pillars that preserve and uphold the “dignity and integrity of the human person.” Using the verb, “uphold,” each of the four pillars seek to firstly reiterate the position that humans bear the *imago Dei*, followed by a recognition of dominion over AI. Furthermore, human beings possess an indispensable “unity of person,” exercising moral, ethical leadership of societies. Ultimately, Godde argues, AI should serve humans for their benefit, justifying regulations for human flourishing.

Had Godde been able to time-travel to the set of *Alien: Earth*, she would have struggled to gain a voice on set, such is the weight given to transhumanist ideas in popular culture. Her pillars call for “active resistance to the hollow promises of cybernetic immortality,” and would certainly be criticised by a transhumanist as mere howling at the Moon. Moviemakers and streaming show-runners already portray their artificial protagonists with a messianic-like mission that overcomes the frailties of the human body. And yet, *Reaching for Immortality* stands as a valuable, well-argued critique of the gospel espoused by what Evgeny Morozov labels the technological “solutionists.” Sandra Godde’s call for resistance is prescient, if not already being drowned out by its opponents.