

McKibben, Bill. *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*. New York: Owl Books, 2003. 271 pp. \$14.00.

Introduction

What would it be like to come home after a long day at the office to find your wife coming to meet you in the driveway, delighted with your late arrival. She informs you that dinner is almost ready, hands you your favorite drink, tells you that she is proud of you for working so hard, and beckons you to follow her to the bedroom while dinner finishes. All of this seems almost normal and almost desirable. Only almost though, because such a reaction triggers the inescapable thought, does she really love me, or is this just the most recent manifestation of Sally's pre-programmed design? Even though every word, action, and indication is positive and pleasurable, is my Sally 2000 really saying these things or are these merely echoes of the circuitry re-installed last week?

This was the scenario posed by Ralph Davis when he introduced the subject of advanced robotics and artificial intelligence to my freshman philosophy class. Dr. Davis, "a Buddhist in the winter and a nudist in the summer" and a Billy Graham crusade "convert," made the argument for such a reality and asked, if such a development was sensibly realistic, what was incongruous or unethical about it? Having no categories to understand this notion or Christian response to repel this vision, my reaction at that time was simply to dismiss the notion and pretend that something like this was an existential impossibility. Such naïveté is no longer tenable. As Bill McKibben's book points out, this specter is no longer left for science-fiction novelists or skeptical philosophy teachers, it is increasingly discussed by educated and energetic

proponents of transhumanism. The possibility of SALLY must be addressed, and such is the subject that I would like to consider.

Who is a candidate for baptism: Robocop or the Terminator?

Bill McKibben's book introduces genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and advanced robotics as an unholy Trinity that together have the potential to bring about new kinds of life, and as his book explains, a new meaning to humanity. His wide research and extensive data indicate that given enough time, Moore's law (68-69) will allow scientists and researchers to engineer increasingly advanced robots until they hit their mark of human-like and superhuman-like creatures. Conceding that such a being might exist by the end of the twenty-first century, how should faithful, Bible-believing, human pastors respond to such a horror? If human-robots exist, what are our pastoral responsibilities with them? Ought we baptize an emotobot (74)? While McKibben does not trespass on the wetlands reserved for theologians, such questions must be addressed, and with increasing specificity as this technology advances.

In the days to come, the definition as to what makes a someone a human must be more clearly defined. Until the twentieth century, the gender debate was unnecessary because male and female were normative and universally accepted. Such is now not the case. Thus, faithful Christians must contend that God's design for humanity is complementary. In the twenty-first century, the debate may be even more fundamental. With life-like robots on the horizon, the definition of human will certainly be challenged and thus biblical defenses and definitions must be employed to clarify.

Such measures may seem far-fetched, but nothing less than the gospel is at stake. God came to redeem his *Imago Dei*. Hebrews 2:16 restricts salvation from angelic beings. Hebrews 2:14, 17 restricts salvation from robots and all other 'beings' not formed in the likeness of God.

Genesis 1-2 recounts the creation of mankind, Genesis 3 the fall of mankind into sin, and Genesis 3:15 – Revelation as the eternally wise plan of God to save for himself a people through the “seed” of a woman. Human-like robots subvert this cause and obscure *who* – not what – it is that God made and who it is that he is going to save.

Any clarity on this matter now, may soon become difficult to swallow for those who imbibe the techno-utopian vision of robotic progress and whose children will grow up being trained to treat life-like robots as playmates. Distinctions must be made. You can speak to and perhaps even enjoy the conversation with a robot, but that “being” is not human and thus not redeemable. Jesus incarnation was in the flesh, not in circuitry. Consequently, no matter how “human” robots become, they are excluded from the benefits of salvation.

In a world that breathes pluralistic, inclusive air, this will make the gospel even more exclusive. One can almost hear the retort, “If God is so loving, why would you deny the blessings of salvation to my Sally 2000?” This would become increasingly complicated if, as in the opening illustration, robots became so advanced that they were relationally and sexually compatible with humans. The temptation would come to the 40-year old Christian virgin, to simply order a SALLY 2000, one that came with spiritual receptivity and gender complementarity programmed from the beginning. Could a pastor perform such a wedding? No! But will such clarity be available in 2075, in a culture that has transcended iPod touch screens to cerebral selection of the latest hits and cochlear implants to listen to them?

Life was God’s invention, and even if man is able to manufacture it, the moral imperative is to say, in McKibben’s language, “Enough!” Yet, even if this problem seems clear now, the problem I encounter even as I script this paper is one of affections. While the Holy Spirit has conformed emotions within me to hate abortion, I have no such feelings one way or the

other towards advanced robotics. Such is the dilemma of this science-fiction novelty. It is not just a mental quandary, “What should I think about this?” It impacts emotions as well, “What should I feel about this?” It is at this level that I have the greatest concern for biblically-illiterate Christians moving into the dawn of advanced robotics. Will we have the religious affections to deny ourselves the pleasures of the techno-utopia? And how will we develop these in our people? A commitment to proclaiming the whole counsel of God’s Word is the only sure response, and we must do that now and not wait. Preparing our people to encounter the SALLY 2000, and say while it is better to marry than to burn with passion, it is still better to burn with passion than to marry a non-human.

Further issues arise concerning the dignity of life and the protection of the ill-born. In a world where man can be manufactured, will we have to flee to Egypt to protect our down syndrome child? Will easy access to a life-long mate with a lifetime guarantee trump the thought a gift of singleness? All of these things and more must be considered, but at the heart of the matter, we must maintain that humanity is not something we can make, but something God bestows.

One final question is, “How human do you have to be?” McKibben contends that these technologies threaten to disintegrate the meaning of humanity and if explored and accepted will only blur the line between human and non-human. His observation and concern is correct. The defining line may still be debated or need more research, but I think the issue is one of origin more than percentage. To answer the titular question above, “Who can be saved, Robocop or the Terminator?” I think that the answer has to be the Detroit police officer. For his origin was natural and not synthetic. The issue is similar to that of abortion. The formation of an embryo is the beginning of life, human life, and if the Robocop began as a living soul, than he will be

standing at the judgment giving and account, even if he piece-by-piece replaced himself with cloned parts. However, the artificial intelligence that began as a microprocessor and added flesh, as in the case of the Terminator has no living soul, even if they can recite every Baptist hymn and quote the Old Testament in Hebrew. Life is from God (Gen 2:7; 1 Sam 2; Deut 32), and no man has that kind of power, save one, Jesus Christ.

So in the end, the reality of robots may be imminent, but the truth of the gospel is eternal. Jesus Christ came to save sinners, even those who create the monstrosities of the coming century, but he did not come to redeem creatures springing out of the minds of men. This must be held, affirmed, preached, and counseled or the purity and power of the gospel will be lost. It is an exclusive gospel, only for humans, only by one human—Jesus Christ.