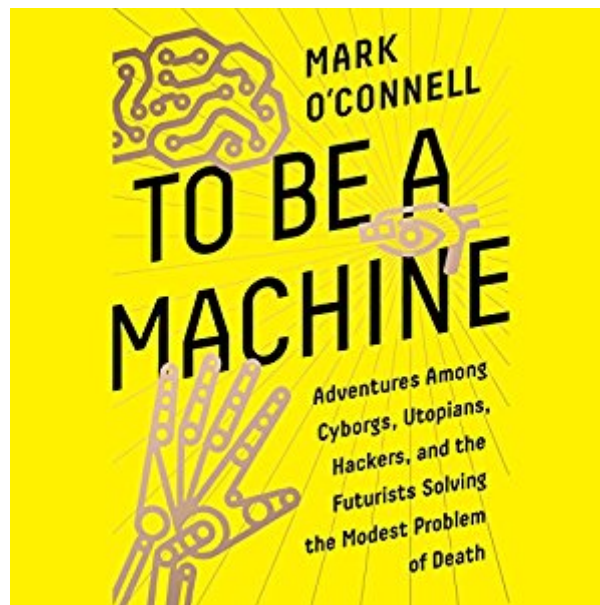


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To Be A Machine: Adventures Among Cyborgs, Utopians, Hackers, And The Futurists Solving The Modest Problem Of Death



Synopsis

Meet the visionaries, billionaires, professors, and programmers who are using groundbreaking technology to push the limits of the human body - our senses, our intelligence, and our lifespans. Once relegated to the fringes of society, transhumanism (the use of technology to enhance human intellectual and physical capability) is now poised to enter our cultural mainstream. It has found adherents in Silicon Valley billionaires Ray Kurzweil and Peter Diamandis. Google has entered the picture, establishing a biotech subsidiary aimed at solving the problem of aging. In *To Be a Machine*, journalist Mark O'Connell takes a headlong dive into this burgeoning movement. He travels to the laboratories, conferences, and basements of today's foremost transhumanists, where he's presented with the staggering possibilities and moral quandaries of new technologies like mind uploading, artificial superintelligence, cryonics, and device implants. A contributor to *Slate*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, O'Connell serves as a sharp and lively guide to the outer limits of technology in the 21st century. In investigating what it means to be a machine, he offers a surprising, singular meditation on what it means to be human.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Not quite finished but so far I like it. It is scary and I'm an electrical engineer with many years experience. It's coming.....

A great read. Tender and terrifying at the same time.

O'Connell kind of misses the point of transhumanism. A lot of so-called transhumanist thinking now, as I write this in 2017, tries to anticipate what people in more technologically advanced societies in the 22nd Century and beyond would probably call "health care." Thomas K. Donaldson makes this argument in an essay you can find on the website of the Alcor Life Extension Foundation, titled "24th Century Medicine." In other words, transhumanism sounds weird in the current context more because of its timing than because of the content of its ideas. For example, many current medical procedures would have sounded like science fiction not that long ago. I recently went through a round of cardiac diagnostics myself, one of which involved an injection of an artificial radioactive isotope which emits gamma rays, just to get images of my heart vasculature both before and after a stress test on a treadmill. Fortunately the gamma rays didn't turn me into the Hulk or something. :) If you could have gone back a century ago to describe to the medical experts in 1917 what modern medical imaging can do, apart from the primitive X-ray photographs they had at the time, they would have dismissed it as the wildest fantasy. As a friend of mine who follows the medical literature says, the Singularity in medical imaging has already happened, and we have only started to notice it. O'Connell also tries to connect at least some transhumanists' hangups about their bodies with ancient religious beliefs like Gnosticism. I know quite a few transhumanists through my friends and acquaintances in the cryonics movement, and while I suppose you can find one here or there who feels uncomfortable in his instantiation, I don't get the impression that transhumanists feel that way about their bodies in general. Zoltan Istvan, to whom O'Connell devotes a whole chapter in his book, apparently spent his youth having action-adventure experiences as he sailed around the tropics in a sailboat that make him sound more like Indiana Jones than any stereotype about a transhumanist nerd who feels uncomfortable in his own skin. You can find the video on YouTube where he uses a snowboard to slide down the slopes of an active volcano on a South Pacific island, to see a sample of the kinds of things he did back then. O'Connell also seems to have an issue with the dominance of white men in transhumanism, despite the early contributions of the Iranian transhumanist F.M. Esfandiary and the more recent work of the Egyptian-born transhumanist Ramez Naam and the Jewish transhumanists like Ray Kurzweil and Eliezer Yudkowsky. Russia also has its own, independent version of transhumanist philosophy that started around 1900, and that has seen a revival lately, called "Cosmism." Russian women seem somewhat well represented in the current Cosmist movement, and some of them have shown up in the U.S. as scientists pursuing graduate study or scientific research into the biology of aging. O'Connell could have written a more comprehensive book if he had talked to some Cosmists to show that transhumanist ideas

transcend Western parochialism. I've gathered that some people in East Asian countries have also shown an interest in transhumanism, but they haven't raised much awareness of their existence in Western countries yet. Still, the framing of transhumanism as an expression of alleged white male privilege signals something about transhumanism's potential importance. Social-justice obsessives, apparently including O'Connell, target a white male social space when they see wealth or power accumulating there, so that they can try to invade it and engage in rent-seeking under the phony pretexts of "inclusiveness" and "diversity." Notice that white men dominate sabermetrics, for example, but that the social-justice warriors have ignored it so far because no one cares about a bunch of white male nerds who study baseball statistics, despite the success of applied "moneyball" techniques in some areas outside of the sport like in predicting the outcomes of elections. If sabermetrics starts to attract some serious money, and it acquires the reputation as a nexus where society's white male movers and shakers gather to exert their influence over society, then I predict that we will hear calls for sabermetrics to become more diverse and inclusive. On the whole, O'Connell's book doesn't impress me, and I keep looking for a better survey which explains what transhumanism really means.

I recently read a lot of book involving transhumanism and the overcoming of our biology that "obliges" us to die. This book is one of the most complete: starting from implants, going through brain emulation, Kurzweil and the singularity, gives us a good and clear vision of what it is all about. Interesting. Di recente l'argomento transumanista sta salendo alla ribalta e con esso tutto quello che implica il superamento della nostra mortalità, quanto meno in termini biologici. Questo libro mi sembra uno dei più completi a riguardo: partendo dagli impianti e passando attraverso la simulazione neurale, Kurzweil e la singolarità offre un riassunto degli argomenti ed una visione chiara del tutto. Interessante.

I borrowed this book from the library, finished reading it on a flight home today, and just ordered my own copy to store on my shelf. The basic format is the author Marc O'Connell, a journalist, exploring the phenomenon called Transhumanism. He does this by meeting some of the movement's prime movers, spending time with them, describing significant moments in their conversation and very much including his own feelings and attitudes about the positions espoused by these frontiersmen on the leading edge of the anti-Deathism movement. His descriptions of the people and the settings are engrossing and bring the entire enterprise to life. As it happens, I wrote a science fiction novel, Mindclone, that explored many of the same issues, so consequently, I have read many of the same

books he read, and met or been in the audience with a number of the Transhumanists interviewed in this outstanding book. I recognized those descriptions as both accurate and penetrating. One of the distinct pleasures of this book is Googling the individuals and organizations he talks about and verifying his reporting. But beyond that reporting--and what makes this book outstanding and of much greater significance than a mere exploration of an offbeat scientific movement, is his own human response to the issues that are explored, and how those various viewpoints relate to his own life and (for one example) how he had to deal with his 3-year-old son's questions about Death. This was a deeply satisfying and engrossing book. Highest possible recommendation.

In addition to the fascinating and often outrageous material (and personalities) he covers, Mark is a fantastic writer with an understated but wicked sense of humor that provoked out loud laughter in me. A trip to the uncanny land of transhumanism, this book is also a meditation on what it means to be human. Science writing at its best delivered by a very entertaining writer. Keep an eye on Mark O'Connell!

This is an amazing read..... the best brain candy you can find..... his articulation of such a profound topic are beautiful..(for lack of a better definition) laugh, cry, and learn without being left behind by his intelligence. He is writing about the most profound, and current, topics facing civilization, and you still can't put the book down. I love the skepticism and criticism of modern-technological advances,put this one in a bomb shelter or time capsule, so that someday it can be appreciated. perhaps by evolved cyborg descendants. :)

The singularity is coming but are we prepared for it and indeed, what does it mean to be human now and how will that change when technology becomes more enmeshed with our world and psyches? The author has traveled around the world it seems to ask these question from those at the forefront of the cyborg revolution. The answers he has found are in the main disconcerting and perhaps cause more philosophical conundrums than one might expect. The future links into the past and our very notions of what it really means to be "human."

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