
Pro Rege

Volume 20 | Number 1

Article 4

September 1991

Invasion of the Computer Culture: What You Need to Know About the New World We Live In (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

De Jong, Dennis L. (1991) "Invasion of the Computer Culture: What You Need to Know About the New World We Live In (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 20: No. 1, 38.
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol20/iss1/4

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Book Reviews

The Invasion of the Computer Culture: What You Need to Know About the New World We Live In, by Allen Emerson and Cheryl Forbes (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press) 1989. 189 pages, paperback, \$8.95. Reviewed by Dennis L. De Jong, Assistant Professor of Computer Science.

Allen Emerson and Cheryl Forbes investigate three questions in this book: (1) How does the "computer mentality" view intelligence? (2) How does the computer affect those of us who come in contact with it and use it? (3) What finally distinguishes humans from machines? Emerson and Forbes combine their own observations with the ideas of others, to develop a Christian perspective on these questions.

The authors summarize "computer mentality" as "... a world view inspired by computers and artificial intelligence. It sees intelligence and mind as dynamic streams of data, which it seeks to create or simulate." Allan Turing initiated these ideas in the 1940s when he changed the question from "Can a machine think?" to "Can you tell the difference between the machine's response and the human's?" We now identify the latter question as the Turing Test of artificial intelligence.

Emerson and Forbes discuss artificial intelligence in Chapters 2: "Searching for a Smart Machine," 3: "The Computer and the Brain," and 4: "Creating Intelligence." The computer mentality accepts the possibility of artificial intelligence, because it believes in the symbolic nature of intelligence. Those holding to the computer mentality are motivated by "... a materialistic view of the cosmos." For them, "... hope lies in scientific breakthroughs and technological advances." They think that "by showing that creatures can re-create the most complicated part of creation, they can thereby show that they have no need for God" (55).

Second, *The Invasion of the Computer Culture* reveals how computers can dominate our lives, particularly in the way we talk, think, and interact with

others. For example, the authors describe the work of Sherry Turkle who observed and interviewed 200 children and 200 adults. Turkle found that working with computers and playing video games causes children to think profoundly about life, people, themselves, and God. Children think about the computer in psychological terms, yet most do not believe that computers "think."

Third, Emerson and Forbes examine what finally distinguishes humans from machines. To begin with, the meaning that humans communicate via language is a distinguishing factor. In fact, the authors consider natural language as an important characteristic of God's image bearers. Although machines can "say" words, they do not comprehend them. Even more important, God's image bearers must know evil, because it lies in the human mind and heart.

Allen Emerson and Cheryl Forbes wrote *The Invasion of the Computer Culture* for a general audience, but it also speaks to computer specialists and educators. I found it both timely and powerful. The discussion of the effect of computers on people of all ages made a deep impact on me. Others will find the discussion of artificial intelligence interesting. In this "Computer Age," when we see machines imitating more and more human activities, will there always be a characteristic that allows us to distinguish man from machine? The authors focus on our ability to know evil; I would add that we are God's agents, able to respond to his love and grace.

I recommend this book to readers who wish to know more about the impact of the computer on today's society.

Shaping Character: Moral Education in the Christian College, by Arthur F. Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans) 1991. 82 pages, paperback, \$7.95. Reviewed by Nicholas V. Kroeze, Vice President for Student Affairs.

The purpose of this book is to affirm the integrality of values and of moral and ethical education in the Christian college. Holmes addresses the issue that moral education must be distinguished from indoctrination and "moralizing that simply inserts moral injunctions at every opportunity" (8). Rather, this aspect

of education must bring students to a higher analytical stage where issues they think through and act upon a firm set of principles.

To show how we should understand moral education, Holmes assesses how the current environment relates to three factors: (1) the present ethical climate,