Vol. 3, no. 4 (Winter 2004-2005)

<u>*Futurist Book Group Discussion*</u>

Digital Soul

by Thomas Georges
Westview Press, ISBN 0813340578

Synopsis of the October 2004 Futurist Book Group meeting; summarized by Ken Harris

On October 6, The Futurist Book Group had its liveliest meeting yet at **Politics and Prose**. The group discussed ***Digital Soul*** by Thomas Georges, a provocative inquiry into the issues humanity increasingly will have to face as machines become more and more intelligent and capable. It asks very detailed questions about the true nature of humanity and intelligence. A former Bureau of Standards Research Scientist, Georges believes we are well on our way to a future in which machines will dominate human beings. He points out that they are continually gaining the ability to do things that used to be thought possible only for humans such as playing championship chess. This gives him the basis for attacking the traditional teaching of all religions that there is a human soul that is distinct and apart from the physical and chemical human body, and he does so at great length toward the end of the book. Georges believes advance human planning can avert the dangers of a future in which machines would harm humans. Harm is certainly possible because machines will gain intelligence in ways that will become increasingly difficult, and eventually impossible, for humans to understand, and machines will find ways to protect themselves against hostile action by humans such as shutting the power off. This advance planning will involve deciding what legal rights intelligent machines will have and developing ethical codes for human-machine and machine-machine interaction.   However, readers are left with the impression that humanity is drifting, for good or evil, toward a machine-dominated future without this advance planning. Readers may enjoy the references in the book to science fiction, which George shows is now becoming science fact.