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# The Revolt Against Human Nature

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Are you ready for the posthuman future? That is the frightening question posed by Wesley J. Smith in his new book, Consumer's Guide to a Brave New World. Smith, Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute and special consultant to the Center for Bioethics and Culture, has written another book that demands the attention of every thoughtful Christian.

We are living in an age of radical transformations in science, technology, and worldview. Standing at the center of the worldview now dominant in our society is an affirmation that human beings have the right, if not the responsibility, to "improve" themselves in every way. In a culture that celebrates youth, attractiveness, and achievement, the idea of personal improvement is now being stretched beyond what previous generations could have imagined.

"It is a natural human desire to manipulate our bodies to look better, feel better, and age better," Smith explains. "We not only wish to be free of disease, but also deeply desire to remain youthful in appearance and physical vigor."

With "Botox parties" and cosmetic surgery now becoming routine, many Americans simply assume that personal enhancement is a basic right. Now, some want to push beyond natural biological barriers in order to achieve even greater "enhancements" in the future. We now face the undeniable truth that at least some of our fellow citizens are ready to use genetic enhancements, cloning technologies, and germ line engineering to achieve what some now call a posthuman future.

Genetic modifications and germ line therapies differ from previous technologies of personal enhancement, Smith explains. Plastic surgery—even something as radical as what are called sex change procedures—affect only one individual's body. Nothing from those surgeries impacts the genetic inheritance passed down to subsequent generations.

All this changes when genetic modifications and germ line technologies enter the picture.

"What if a father could insert a gene to transform his daughter into the concert pianist he always wanted to be, or an atheist do likewise to ensure that his children would be genetically predisposed (if it proves possible) to shun religious belief?" Smith asks, adding, "And what if these modifications passed down the generations?"

Existing medical technologies would not yet allow these developments. Nevertheless, with the successful cloning of other mammals, the completion of the Human Genome Project, and the creation of transgenic human-animal hybrids, science fiction is likely soon to become science fact.

Smith warns that all this could lead to what some now call a posthuman race. Others are now pushing for what they call transhumanism, which Smith warns is now "organizing with the intensity of a religious revival."

Once confined to academic debate and the literary world of science fiction, these proposals are now taken seriously by scientists, medical doctors, and ethical observers. As Smith notes, "While transhumanism is relatively new, the idea that we should apply the full array of new technologies to remake the natural human order has been bubbling up in radical bioethics and academic philosophical discourse for decades."

The late Joseph Fletcher, infamously known as the father of situational ethics, was, Smith reminds, “a devoted believer in an anything-goes approach to Brave New World innovations.” Believing that no natural limits were sacred, Fletcher became a prophet for a new social revolution that would redefine humanity with the goal, Smith warns, of creating a race of “superior people.”

Taken alone, that one comment should be sufficient to prove that we are entering a new age of eugenics. Some of the greatest moral horrors experienced by humanity during the twentieth century came in the form of eugenic arguments, experiments, and procedures. Determined to create a new master race, the doctors of Nazi Germany invented new and diabolical forms of eugenic engineering and eventually participated in efforts to eliminate inferior races by genocide.

Less well remembered is the fact that many Americans also supported eugenic movements. Following Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger’s dictum, “more children from the fit, less from the unfit,” American eugenics advocates generally limited their proposals to the use of contraception for those considered unfit to reproduce and incentives for the “fit” to breed.

Given the calamitous landscape of the twentieth century, one might think that the ideology of eugenics would have been thoroughly discredited and socially discarded. To the contrary, a new form of eugenic ideology has now emerged. As Wesley J. Smith explains, this new form of eugenic advocacy “can be summarized in that word that trumps all others: Choice.”

Smith cites Philip Kitcher, author of *The Lives to Come: The Genetic Revolution and Human Possibilities*, as arguing for a “laissez-faire eugenics” which would allow persons to “create their own versions of optimal human life—a prospect that Kitcher naively assures us will work out just fine because there will be a ‘universally shared respect for difference’.”

When the ideology of choice is translated into momentum for a new eugenics movement, we are in big trouble. Reckless confidence in new scientific technologies is often translated into a sense that every new technology shifts from what is possible to what is necessary. As Smith warns, some now argue that America should begin experimenting with new eugenic technologies simply to counter any similar move made by a foreign nation.

Many of the proposals now taken seriously by the scientific establishment are simply breathtaking. Gregory E. Pence promotes human cloning as a means to allow parents to pass down a “wonderful genetic legacy” to future generations. Gregory Stock, director of the Program on Medicine, Technology and Society at the UCLA School of Medicine, argues that human beings should be free to redefine themselves and their offspring. As Smith explains, “This could include inserting animal DNA into human embryos, inserting or removing chromosomes, inserting artificial chromosomes into a genetically engineered embryo, or perhaps altering human capacities through nanotechnology.”

As Stock sees it, this may mean that the human species will branch off in different directions. Reproduction would take place in laboratories, since biological reproduction through human sex would lead to unpredictable outcomes. In this new posthuman age, parents would order their children like designer products and would, like all informed and demanding consumers, insist upon the latest chromosomal enhancements.

Gregory Pence goes so far as to argue that children will one day be chosen as we now choose pets. “When it comes to non-human animals we think nothing of trying to match the breed to the needs of the owner,” Pence asserts. “Could people be chosen the same way? Would it be so terrible to allow parents to at least aim for a certain type, in the same way that great breeders . . . try to match a breed of dog to the needs of a family?”

Wouldn’t all this lead to a deep unfairness in terms of competition among human beings? Some advocate a form of “egalitarian eugenics” that would require government support, Smith explains, “to ensure that all parents have an equal choice to participate in the coming genetic arms race.”

This is nothing less than an audacious attempt to redefine what it means to be human. As Smith understands, “The deeper one delves into the posthuman agenda, the clearer it becomes that dissatisfaction with natural humanity lies at its heart.”

Behind the eugenics movement stands a fundamental hatred of humanity. “These people and kindred would-be

enhancers think that human life has no special meaning in itself,” Smith explains, “but that the value of any life—animal, human, posthuman, machine, space alien—depends upon the individual’s measurable capacities, particularly his or her level of cognition.”

Inescapably, vital worldview issues are at stake. “Transhumanists embrace extreme materialism and scientism,” Smith understands. “Driven by an ethos of radical individualism that countenances no restraints and disdains moral limits on personal behavior, believing that they possess the wisdom to improve the human species, longing desperately for corporeal immortality, transhumanists expect to mount a rebellion against nature that will, in the movement’s eschatology, result in the literal re-creation of human life.”

East of Eden, human beings have been frustrated with the limitations of our nature. The first sin was, after all, an attempt to defy God’s authority by claiming for human beings what had been forbidden. That first sin has spawned a legacy of continuing and accelerating efforts to transcend the human condition. Dissatisfied with our bodies, we want to defy aging and turn ourselves into beautiful machines that will never age, fail, or die. Pushing the limits of cognitive ambition, some demand the right to enhance human consciousness—whatever the cost—in an effort to maximize human performance. In this age of radical and revolutionary technological advancements, many of our fellow citizens would gladly trade the long-term risks of germ line engineering for the immediate gratification of genetic enhancement.

Wesley J. Smith is profoundly correct when he identifies the root problem as a basic hatred of humanity. The prophets of these new technologies point to a utopian vision of posthumanity. As advertised, their vision would include no one who is, in their eyes, genetically substandard, or even unenhanced. Some go far as to predict a new two-class structure for human society, with the genetically superior ruling over a genetically inferior class of workers and servants.

All this represents a Promethean effort to transcend human nature, redefine humanity, and be as gods. We have heard all this before, of course. This is the ancient song of human moral disaster set to a new technological tune.

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