



"What we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument."

—C.S. Lewis

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## **The Specter of Transhumanism**

*Maximum Ride* is a popular science-fiction/action-adventure series, ultimately to be eight books, written by novelist James Patterson. These books, aimed at teens, are loosely based on two novels for adults, *When the Wind Blows* and *The Lake House*, also by Patterson. The central conceit in all ten books is that a secret biotechnology laboratory, after many horrible failures, successfully "created" several human-bird hybrids through some sort of genetic engineering. The resultant children—highly intelligent, exceptionally strong, and able to fly due to their having wings—are neither truly human nor truly birds. They are presented as beyond human, better than human. Modern bioethicists would call them posthuman or transhuman.

This idea of evolving or transforming beyond humanity is on a great many minds these days. It is suffused throughout popular culture in books, movies, and television shows. Whether it is accidental enhancement giving Peter Parker spider abilities, succumbing to the bite of a vampire, or growing the next super-race in a test tube, imaginative minds are dreaming about the next

step in human development. No matter what the source of the enhancement, there always seems to be an underlying admiration of the resulting superpowers.

We could just laugh these matters off as far out manifestations of the minds of sci-fi writers who drink too many Red Bulls and get too little sleep. Unfortunately, the idea of transhumanism has reached beyond the imagination to the potentially practical, and highly placed and influential people are taking it seriously. Dr. Thomas R. Horn writes in "[The Hybrid Age](#)":

An international, intellectual, and fast-growing cultural movement known as transhumanism supports this vision, as does a flourishing list of U.S. military advisors, bioethicists, law professors, and academics, which intend the use of genetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology and synthetic biology (Grins technologies) as tools that will radically redesign our minds, our memories, our physiology, our offspring, and even perhaps—as Joel Garreau, in his bestselling book *Radical Evolution*, claims—our very souls.

The Brookings Institute, a leading Washington, DC, policy think tank, has published a book, *Constitution 3.0: Freedom and Technological Change*, in which the authors tackle various issues that "by the year 2025 could stress current constitutional law. The resulting essays explore scenarios involving information technology, genetic engineering, security, privacy and beyond." The American government, specifically the National Institute of Health, is planning for that day, granting \$773,000 to Cleveland's Case Law School to begin developing guidelines for policy on "genetic enhancement," as they call the next step in human evolution. Even *National Geographic* speculated in 2007 that [the world](#) would witness the advent of "human non-humans" within a decade. A website, [Transhumanist Resources](#), provides an idea of how extensive transhumanist ideas have permeated today's world.

Back in 2004, the editors of *Foreign Policy* asked eight foreign policy intellectuals, "What ideas, if embraced, would pose the greatest threat to the welfare of humanity?" Francis Fukuyama, Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford

University, author of [\*Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution\*](#), and a former member of the George W. Bush's President's Council on Bioethics, chose to write about [transhumanism](#). He classifies it as "a strange liberation movement" that seeks "nothing less than to liberate the human race from its biological constraints."

The idea, he admits, is intriguing and attractive. Who would not want to be better, stronger, faster, smarter, and/or healthier than we are now? And is not the story of humanity—under the evolutionary way of thinking—one of change and progress for the better? He writes:

The seeming reasonableness of the project, particularly when considered in small increments, is part of its danger. Society is unlikely to fall suddenly under the spell of the transhumanist worldview. But it is very possible that we will nibble at biotechnology's tempting offerings without realizing that they come at a frightful moral cost.

Fukuyama concludes his article, "If we do not develop [a humility concerning our humanity] soon, we may unwittingly invite the transhumanists to deface humanity with their genetic bulldozers and psychotropic shopping malls."

There is also a fear that the public will have little or no say about "progress" in transforming humanity. A June 9, 2008, article in *Wired*, "[Top Pentagon Scientists Fear Brain-Modified Foes](#)," suggests that military expediency may drive research on these lines:

There's concern in some corners of the U.S. military about "enemy activities in sleep research," neuro-pharmaceutical performance enhancement, and "brain-computer interfaces." And it's not coming from the Pentagon's scientific fringe, or from some tin-hat kook with a Defense Department badge. The celebrated scientists on the Pentagon's most prestigious scientific advisory panel, JASON, are the ones worried about adversaries' ability "to exploit advances in Human Performance Modification, and thus create a threat to national security."

In other words, some see a kind of arms race heating up—not over nuclear, chemical, or biological weaponry, but over creating better soldiers, ones that can stay awake longer, perform better, and directly interface with weapons technologies. Who can tell what kind of being will be unleashed upon the world as a result?

While these advances may still be years away, the potential for them is becoming more likely all the time. How long until cloning and genetic engineering are done on human beings—or are secret labs or the proverbial mad scientists already experimenting on these things? Will some pharmaceutical corporation come up with a pill that will enhance strength or agility or the ability of one or more of the senses? Will engineers find a way to meld computers or robotics with human tissue to make a cyborg of sorts? People are working on projects that may lead to these kinds of "advances."

[God](#) does not tell us whether He will allow such things to happen or not, but when He saw what was happening at Babel, He said, "Indeed the people are one . . . and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them" ([Genesis 11:6](#)). Even back then, He had to take drastic action to keep mankind from "progressing" to today's potential and beyond. Perhaps this time, He will send His Son to stop the madness.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[What's So Bad About Babylon? \(1997\)](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Considering the Tower of Babel and the Babylonian system, mankind must stop trusting in its towers—anything that we place our trust in apart from Almighty God (wealth, status, achievement, military prowess, scientific inventiveness, etc.), giving us an arrogant, self-centered sense of security and well-being. Babylon constitutes the fountainhead of instruction that, like strong drink, impairs the ability to function properly while creating the illusion of doing better. A mere increase of knowledge (without the

accompanying revelation of God) is useless, leading nowhere in terms of solving mankind's real problems. The fruits of Babylon have created a spiritual, social, and ecological crisis which threatens all life. God forces us to make a choice in favor of life and permanence, rejecting the way of death and impermanence.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Fooling With the Code](#)**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Science has ventured into the field of genetics, an area traditionally considered part of God's exclusive domain as Creator. What does God think about this intrusion? Will man create life? How will God react?

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