

Chapter 2

Transcend or Transgress?

Certain passages from C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* [(1959) 1969] inspire me today as they did when I happened upon my first sociology course many years ago. In the first chapter, *The Promise*, Mills identifies three sets of questions posed by the classic social theorists such as Karl Marx and Max Weber. It is the third set, especially, that I find most insightful:

What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of 'human nature' are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for 'human nature' of each and every feature of the society we are examining?

Underlying these questions are three premises:

- Subject and social world (or biography and history, as Mills puts it) are interrelated.
- Human nature is flexible.
- What prevails today, systems and subjects, will not prevail in the future.

Karl Marx studied the capitalist system with concern for worker alienation and class conflict. Max Weber wrote about rational management and social control. The contestants in the transhumanity debate are from diverse backgrounds and on a number of issues they do not see eye to eye, nevertheless, like Marx and Weber all accept the premise that the human subject is influenced by social/technological forces. It is obvious that the transhumanists see human nature as changeable, but the conservationists' call for preserving it belies a similar attitude. Arm-chair philosophers? Hardly. They, too, are activists and are engaged in this debate because for them the future of humanity is at stake.

In an article published in *Christianity Today*, entitled "The Techno Sapiens Are Coming," C. Christopher Hook (2004:36) begins by warning, "When God fashioned man and woman, he called his creation very good. Transhumanists say that, by manipulating our bodies with microscopic tools, we can do better. Are we ready for the great debate?" After identifying a few transhumanists and quoting their

more dramatic lines (such as “biology is not destiny...chips are destiny” and “the age of the human is drawing to a close”), he asks and answers the rhetorical question, “Are these ideas the musings of a small band of harmless techno geeks? Unfortunately not.”

Leon Kass describes transhumanists as a social movement vanguard :

In leading laboratories, academic and industrial, new creators are confidently amassing their powers and quietly honing their skills, while on the street their evangelists are zealously prophesying a posthuman future. For anyone who cares about preserving our humanity, the time has come to pay attention (2002:4).

We should question this particular rhetorical strategy and not assume commensurability between researchers and transhumanists. For the most part scientists and engineers are involved with what Thomas Kuhn (1962) calls “normal science,” that is, contributing incrementally to established lines of research. They are busy with the day-in and day-out routines of administering projects, running labs, and securing grants. Funding is more readily available for research related to the detection, understanding, and treatment of pathologies and, understandably, researchers often present their work and findings in terms of potential therapies (not enhancements). With some notable exceptions, for instance James Watson, most are not flamboyant and are far too prudent to make political waves.

Furthermore, although it is tempting to cast scientists and engineers as Dr. Frankensteins, some researchers have found that experts, as compared to non-experts, are not more likely to throw caution to the wind. For example, Isaac Rabino (2003) found that human genetics researchers had similar attitudes about genetic testing as that of the general public with regard to supporting paternalism when dealing with the test results of children, favoring voluntary testing over compulsory testing, and opposing disclosure to insurers and employers. Lennart Sjöberg (2002) found that experts and non-experts, alike, worry about tampering with nature and novel risks.

Whether or not scientists and engineers favor engineered transcendence is debatable, but we know for sure that the transhumanists *explicitly* propose it. They are the visionaries. This is evident right from the start with Julian Huxley’s coining of the term transhumanism:

The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps *transhumanism* will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature (1957:17).

Transcendence: Cosmic, Personal and *Civitas*

Diversity exists in any movement so it should come as no surprise that there are different versions of transcendence espoused by transhumanists. I will present three versions: cosmic, personal, and *civitas*. I will present each according to its

expression by a prominent figure in the transhumanist movement, however I want to make clear that with selective sampling and refinement I am actually proposing ideal types. Following that, I will present the conservationists' rebuttal to claims of transcendence: that radical bio-social change will bring about fatal transgression.

Cosmic Transcendence

Of the bizarre states that cosmologists describe, the singularity is striking. It is posited to be a feature of a black hole, which itself is a *very* strange phenomenon. A black hole is born when a collapsed star forms a region of space with an extraordinarily intense gravitational field. Under such conditions, all matter flows through a single point, or singularity. The initial state of the universe, prior to the Big Bang, is also described as a singularity. Laws of time and space do not operate within a singularity. Ray Kurzweil used this concept as a key metaphor and title for his 2005 book, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, to characterize a point in the future when socio-technological change will be beyond anything we have ever known and standard theories of human development will fail. He predicts that breakthroughs in one cutting-edge field, for example, neuroscience, genetics, robotics, and computer science, will spur innovations in the other fields. Convergence will help produce exponential growth in the *rate of change* that will make Alvin Toffler's future shock look like a stroll in the park.

Physicists explain that matter passing through the singularity of a black hole is dramatically affected. In Kurzweil's model, as humans pass through the technological singularity an accelerating evolutionary process working on intelligence will yield new beings. He makes it clear that there will be as little in common between posthumans with evolved intelligence and standard humans as there is between bacteria and *Homo sapiens*. He predicts that these super beings will harness stars and eventually operate on the scale of the universe or universes. Generations of humans that forego this evolution, in comparison, will be hopelessly primitive.

In the social sciences it has been pointed out that grand theories, such as Herbert Spencer's social evolution theory, lose sight of human actors. Kurzweil's evolutionary theory is even more sweeping than Spencer's, suggesting stages of civilization freed of bodily *and* earthly constraints. With cosmic transcendence, human actors recede as anachronisms.

Personal Transcendence

Max More, in promoting an actor-oriented approach to transhumanity, has openly expressed impatience with epic scales, and has targeted the singularity for scorn:

The Singularity idea has worried me for years—it's a classic religious, Christian-style, end-of-the-world concept that appeals to peoples in Western cultures deeply. It's also mostly nonsense...The Singularity concept has all the earmarks of an idea that can lead to cultishness, and passivity. There's a tremendous amount of hard work to be done, and intellectually masturbating about a supposed Singularity is not going to get us anywhere (quoted in Hughes 2004:173).

For more, transcendence is primarily a personal experience, a process of self-transformation. This is best expressed in his *Principles of Extropy* (2003) which he crafted while serving as chairman of the Extropy Institute. In defiance of entropy as experienced by individuals as disease and decline, he recommends the bold application of enhancement technologies for *extropy*: “seeking more intelligence, wisdom, and effectiveness, an open-ended lifespan.” (2003) Essential to transcendence is one's will to advance and one's intolerance for passivity. One must embrace rational thinking over faith that constrains and one should challenge traditional notions of human limitations. Believing in perpetual progress and being proactive and optimistic vis-à-vis science and technology leads one “creatively and courageously to transcend “natural” but harmful, confining qualities derived from our biological heritage, culture, and environment.” (2003) He values an open society through which individuals may self-direct and voluntarily cooperate to secure advantages.

More [(2000) 2006] finds in Friedrich Nietzsche's overman a prototype for transhumans. He quotes this passage from *Zarathustra II*: “And life itself confided this secret to me: “Behold,” it said, “I am *that which must always overcome itself*. Indeed, you call it a will to procreate or a drive to an end, to something higher, farther, more manifold; but all this is one...Rather would I perish than foreswear this...”

In calls for moratoriums or for the relinquishment of advanced technologies, More sees stagnation. In the bold self-application of enhancement technologies he sees, instead, a great opportunity to engage the creative spirit of the overman.

Civitas Transcendence

James Hughes, a former secretary of the World Transhumanist Association, offers a vision of transhumanity in his book, *Citizen Cyborg* (2004), which is meant to be consistent with secular humanism and the Enlightenment project of using science and technology for the collective good. His training as a sociologist shows through with his attention to social and political systems. He advocates improvements to minimize social injustice, promote social solidarity, and safeguard human populations. Like Max More, he finds cosmic transcendence so abstract and future distant to be a distraction for immediate concerns, but he also finds fault with the libertarian streak of the extropians. Hughes distrusts the free market, opposes unchecked individualism, and believes that a safe passage to a transhuman civilization requires ethical standards, public oversight, and some regulation.

I use the Latin term, *civitas*, which denotes citizenship and also planned settlement, to describe Hughes' vision of transcendence. He foresees the progression to a more just, equitable, prosperous, and peaceful world through democracies that encourage citizens to utilize safe and effective enhancements. Because they are augmented by biotech, nanotech, and neurotech, *cyborg citizens* will be more capable and energetic citizens and be able to contribute more to community and society. A virtuous spiral develops such that as enhanced citizens become more socially productive, societal goods increase, as more individuals share in this bounty, their quality of life increases and, in turn, they contribute more to the common good.

As a way to promote egalitarianism, Hughes proposes social welfare programs designed to assist those who can't afford enhancements. He also agrees with a policy recommendation by Nick Bostrom (2005) that "positional enhancements" that benefit an individual at the expense of others should be discouraged or banned. Hughes is quite aware of how the counter tendencies of selfishness/altruism, self-centeredness/empathy, and conflict/cooperation can be influenced by social institutions, social groups and culture. However, he also entertains the possibility that these tendencies are rooted in biology. He favors Mark Walker's suggestion that more research be conducted "identifying the genes and neurochemical necessary for empathy and cooperation, encouraging noncoercive screening and therapy to ensure that all citizens have them, and giving incentives for people to select for them in children and amplify them in themselves" (251).

To the extent that this policy is aimed at shaping the human population, he is recommending a form of eugenics. Hughes, however, distinguishes this policy from discredited totalitarian practices in that it is voluntary and is not motivated by prejudice. It is meant to achieve a greater good, namely, to develop cyborg citizens better suited for democracy. Whereas Kurzweil values science and technologies for the lift that they might provide for superior intelligences, and More values these as resources for the overman, I see Hughes following Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte and embracing science and technology for the purpose of social engineering. Granted, he would not have this done in a heavy handed way and he defers to "cognitive liberty," nevertheless he imagines a transhuman future in which "pro-social feelings" are a requirement for public service employment and all are under an "ethical obligation... to enhance ourselves, to become better people and use our powers to do good" (256).

Compromise between Versions

In my account above, I note contested points between the three models of transcendence. However, it is possible to reduce tension if certain accommodations are made. For example, those attracted by personal transcendence could imagine cosmic transcendence taking place at time well after an initial phase of recognizable self-transformation. The sticking point is over the expected or desirable rate of change.

The libertarian streak in personal transcendence can be muted a bit by social pragmatism. Hughes makes the case that without public support transhuman technologies will be delayed or banned, and the public will accept enhancement technology only if it is safe, broadly available, and democratically accountable. Seen this way, self-interest in transcendence will depend on accommodating collective goals. Max More (2005) appears to concede this point in a policy position paper in which he recommends a “proactionary principle” that retains the freedom to innovate but adds, for example, openness/transparency: “Take into account the interests of all potentially affected parties, and keep the process open to input from those parties.”

Transgression

Regardless of the version espoused, transhumanists envision a progressive series of technological innovations and enhancements with every new stage of transhumanity being better than the last. In contrast, conservationists warn of transgression, or a point of no return from which humanity will suffer a most grievous, irretrievable loss. Although conservationists may not make a distinction between the three versions of transcendence, I have distilled the respective critiques and present them below.

Critique of Cosmic Transcendence

Max More is not alone in his accusation that Kurzweil’s singularity is a high-tech version of Christian eschatology. Conservationists also see in cosmic transcendence a quasi-religious theme that contradicts the ostensibly secular, scientific basis of Kurzweil’s work. To explain the comparison, it might help to contrast Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s vision of the Omega Point with more militant versions of Christian eschatology.

John, in the Book of Revelation (New Testament), reports a vision of divine intervention and judgment, with Jesus Christ returning to earth to save the righteous and vanquish satanic forces. Countless times throughout the centuries, Christian groups have anticipated Armageddon. More recently, Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye, have popularized this scenario with their *Left Behind* series, which by 2008 had sales surpassing 65 million copies. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s vision is very different. He believed that all elements of the universe are imbued with spirit and are involved in an evolution of consciousness. Human beings represent an important stage in this development because of their self-consciousness. He expected ever higher levels of consciousness will emerge out of increasingly complex human-world interactions and eventually the Omega Point of supreme consciousness will be reached. Far different from the anthropomorphic

warrior and judge of Revelation, Jesus Christ/God is imagined by Teilhard as an elemental, universal force behind the evolution of consciousness, drawing humanity closer through ever-more complex manifestations.

There are significant similarities between Kurzweil's vision of the future and Teilhard's eschatology including an emphasis on consciousness, an evolutionary theory that provides for superorganisms (emergence of complexity from more basic forms), an exceptional role for humanity but also its superannuation, and the culmination in universe consciousness. The differences, however, should also be noted. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin describes consciousness in terms of spirit whereas Ray Kurzweil emphasizes information, computation, and intelligence. He and other transhumanists describe the evolutionary process in secular terms, for example, natural selection, Moore's Law of exponential increases in processing power, and technological innovation, so that there is no need to introduce divine agency.

Kurzweil doesn't consider singularitarianism to be a religion, although he acknowledges that it provides "new perspectives on the issues that traditional religions have attempted to address: the nature of mortality and immortality, the purpose of our lives, and intelligence in the universe" (2005: 370). He speculates about the divine with respect to the saturation of the universe with intelligence, but he treats it as an open question whether posthumans with god-like powers will find an eternal God.

Critics operating from faith traditions charge that Kurzweil's model of cosmic transcendence lacks an accounting of God's involvement with individuals and humankind. They take exception to the elevation of science and technology as the agents of history. Michael DeLashmutt (2006) writes: "Though a posthuman eschatology wrestles with similar themes present within Christian eschatology, a Christian eschatology is ever aware that the fulfillment of its hope lies in the hands of the God who is in control of history, in contrast to a posthuman eschatology that places the onus of control upon human technologies." In the encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, Benedict XVI asserts that

Francis Bacon and those who followed in the intellectual current of modernity that he inspired were wrong to believe that man would be redeemed through science. Such an expectation asks too much of science; this kind of hope is deceptive. Science can contribute greatly to making the world and mankind more human. Yet it can also destroy mankind and the world unless it is steered by forces that lie outside it... It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love... If this absolute love exists, with its absolute certainty, then—only then—is man "redeemed", whatever should happen to him in his particular circumstances (2006:26–27).

Elaine Graham (2003) warns of "hyper-humanism":

Such talk of humanity as in some degree self-constituting via its own technologies, of being capable of influencing the course of its own development is to fall prey to what we might term 'hyper-humanism': a distortion of modernity's faith in the benevolence of human reason, producing the hubristic belief that humanity alone is in control of history (2006).

She believes that humility before God and creation is especially necessary in the near future as more and more powerful technologies become available. With humility comes caution, reflection, and prudence. This disposition may prevent catastrophes. Bronislaw Szerszynski (2006) fears that technologies misconstrued as angels for humanity may become demonic: “the irony is that the denial that technologies belong to God seems ultimately to give them not to us, but to *themselves*—to render them demonic, and to place humanity under their thrall.” Alan Padgett (2005) is pessimistic as well:

The dream of a happy and harmonious techno-secular future is based on false hopes in infinite energy, infinite human potential, infinite human progress, and complete human good will. Such a techno-secular dream, even if it comes about, will self-destruct after a few centuries, inevitably smashing on the rocks of our finitude and sin.

Transgression is imagined within a Judeo-Christian tradition that, as with the stories of Adam & Eve’s original sin, the Golden Calf, and Tower of Babel, warns not to put humanity or its creations above God. Pride goes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18).

Whereas these critics see problems with transhumanism being insufficiently attuned to divine grace and God’s plan, secular critics find fault with it for being too influenced by Christian eschatology. David Noble, in particular, has advanced the thesis that Western science and technology were inspired by Christian millennialism and these institutions remain essentially religious endeavors directed today by men motivated by a quest for transcendence. According to Noble, the intellectual movement began in Europe in the Middle Ages among monastic orders such as the Benedictans and Franciscans with Erigena, Roger Bacon, and Francis Bacon, among others, calling for the development of technologies to better achieve these religious goals: (1) to recover the powers of dominion that had been lost with the Fall of Adam, (2) to allow man to better appreciate his likeness to God the Creator, and (3) to use the powers to wage a successful campaign (deemed imminent) against the Antichrist and his forces. Noble asserts that Newton, Boyle, Priestly, Faraday, Maxwell, Babbage and many other notable scientists and technologists were believers and, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the fields of nuclear physics, space exploration, artificial intelligence, artificial life, and genetics were launched by men inspired by Christian eschatology. Allegedly, religious and non-religious scientists and engineers in these fields today continue to be obsessed with the quest for perfection: “Often displaying a pathological dissatisfaction with, and deprecation of, the human condition, they are taking flight from the world, pointing us away from the earth, the flesh, the familiar” (1999:208).

In summary, critics of cosmic transcendence may disagree whether the roots are Christian or humanist, nevertheless they find fault with its techno-utopianism and its impatience for human limitations. Noble’s recommendation: “disabuse ourselves of the other-worldly dreams that lie at the heart of our technological enterprise, in order to begin to redirect our astonishing capabilities toward more worldly and humane ends” (6).

Critique of Personal Transcendence

Critics often accuse transhumanism of promoting excessive individualism. This charge, however, somewhat misses the mark with cosmic transcendence, nor does it apply to social-political transcendence with its communitarian leanings. The apt target is personal transcendence.

As described previously, More's account of personal transcendence is fashioned after Nietzsche's overman, but of course there are other possible models, for example, the "self-made" entrepreneur and the conquering heroes of antiquity such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. As with these other models, personal transcendence makes the self the overriding project of one's existence and as such it requires a significant preoccupation—how to best utilize resources, how to maximize potential, etc.

According to religious critics, as self-absorption increases there is a corresponding decrease in the tendency to enter into rich reciprocal relationships with others, especially if self-sacrifice is required. There is also a tendency to treat one's environment in terms of use value. What if God is encountered through a reverence of creation and through "I-Thou" relationships (Martin Buber's term), as many theologians assert? What if self-abnegation is necessary to open oneself to the divine? William Schweiker (2003) asserts that "The daring task about speaking about the divine aims to articulate realms of value beyond human preference and power. And it seeks also to evoke a love of life rooted in the reality of the living God."

For many believers in the Abrahamic faiths, human nature is God-given (according to Genesis), passed down securely through generations, and designed for a higher purpose, for example to be endured as a pre-condition for God's grace and redemption or, more optimistically, embraced—bearing the likeness of God allows for a meaningful relationship with the divine. John Jefferson Davis asserts that

All of God's creation, including the human body, is *good* (Gen. 1:31; Tim. 4:4) and as such is worthy of care and respect. Human beings occupy a unique place in creation, being made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26), and consequently human life has sacred value and is to be accorded the greatest care and protection...(70).

In this light, enhancements pose a serious threat. Mark Hanson (1999) writes that "[w]ithin a Protestant understanding of our nature, the disvalue occasioned by enhancements might consist... in the loss of recognition of the providence of God working through the contingencies and weaknesses of our human form."

There is a sense of daring and excitement associated with personal transcendence. The self is emboldened, tested, and augmented through enhancements. Those who question this process must advise, instead, self-restraint and self-sacrifice. I imagine that this is not an easy task. Individuals must be persuaded to believe in an apparent paradox, that something is gained through selflessness and something is lost through self-fulfillment. It requires, most of all, relying on a model of character development that Leon Kass, for one, admits is a bit old school.

The four cardinal virtues from Greek philosophy are prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. Islam recognizes those, as well as, righteousness, respect, sincerity, and honesty. Christianity adds faith, hope, charity, and love. Buddhism's Divine States are loving kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity. Practicing these virtues requires self-restraint and generosity towards others. Vices, for example, pride, avarice, and gluttony are typically described as manifestations of selfishness. Although the following is a very simplified formula, excellence of character or proper living is said to be achieved through practicing virtue (which is self-effacing) and avoiding vice (selfishness).

Is personal transcendence consistent with this formula? "No," assert the critics of transhumanity. It is egotistical, too grasping, and may result in new forms of injustice. Living a good life accepting of human mortality, on the other hand, has intrinsic value and it helps promote the greater good. Worried about overpopulation that may occur with elongated life spans and increased demands placed on natural systems, Bill McKibben sees finite living as the choice consistent with conservationism.

Transhumanists treat death and decline as major impediments to overcome. Simon Young (2006) bluntly states, "Death is, to me, an obscenity" (15) and he refers to illness, disability, and senescence as "biological slavery" (41). One's existence, in his view, takes place only within life's frame. There is no afterlife. Conquering death is a way to extend life's frame. In terms of the overman, moreover, the will is strengthened through death's conquest.

Clearly, this understanding of and approach to death is at odds with that of most religions. Rather than treat it as the tragic end of the person, death is understood as a passageway to a better state of existence—the absence of suffering, peaceful co-existence with others, a more perfect union with the divine. John Paul II (1981) relates suffering and death in terms of Jesus' crucifixion. By accepting these, as did Jesus, we also "carry the cross." This is an act of homage as well as a vital exercise in one's spiritual development.

Bill McKibben explicitly rejects the transhumanist premise that increased longevity is a necessary condition for self-fulfillment. He argues that the standard human lifespan is sufficient time to lead a fulfilling life, and that finitude actually makes life more precious. Life extension and enhancements will dilute human experience and undermine character development as individuals will dodge true adversity. Personal accomplishments will ring hollow for the enhanced. According to McKibben, the "grander questions" regarding human existence "can only be usefully answered by people, whose bodies eventually start to sag, by people who love and who grieve and who celebrate, by people who mourn and who know that they will someday die" (2003:226).

Critique of Civitas Transcendence

James Hughes charges that “Left bioLuddites” have turned away from their roots in the Enlightenment: “They have given up on the idea of progress guided by human reason, and, afraid of the radical choices and diversity of a transhuman future, are reasserting mystical theories of natural law and order” (2004: xiii). Conservationists counter that engineered transcendence will backfire and undermine the humanist project.

Martin Heidegger [(1954) 2003] alleged that with modern technology there is a particular revealing and ordering of being that treats people as a “standing-reserve” to be exploited. In his *Case against Perfection*, Michael Sandel warns that enhancement engineering also entails a disposition of mastery that works against the Enlightenment ideal of liberty: “willfulness over giftedness, of dominion over reverence, of molding over beholding” (2007:85). The social theorist, Jurgen Habermas (2003), is particularly concerned with preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) and biotechnologies that allow for the selection or modification of a child’s genes. Habermas warns that a designed child will not be an autonomous agent and will not be perceived as such.

Can a child have true autonomy if parents genetically design his or her capacities and proclivities? Maureen Junker-Kenney believes the answer is no:

Genetic enhancement exemplifies a total reversal of the preconditions for autonomy: The offer of pre-implantation enhancement and selection constitutes the victory of parents’ projections over the otherness of the child. In co-creating the specificities of its reality—sex, bodily features, character predispositions—it is being denied the singularity that is based on an unmanipulated originality (2005:12).

She asserts that the parent that designs his or her child would gain unprecedented influence over the child. Habermas writes that from the child’s perspective, this is “permanent dependence” and “[f]or this poor soul there are only two alternatives, fatalism and resentment” (2003:14).

The questionable legal and moral standing of designed humans raises this dilemma for the polis: If granted citizenship these individuals may not be trusted as jurists, voters, and public officials but if denied political rights the promise of inclusion will be denied. Modern states operate pluralistically by recognizing human commonality. Although Hughes believes that this system can accommodate transhumans, Habermas insists that it cannot.

Francis Fukuyama claims that time and time again regimes have attempted to control subjects through systematic social control mechanisms only to be thwarted in the long run by unruly human nature. He asserts that there are “natural desires, purposes, traits, and behaviors [that] fit together into a human whole” (2002:12) and that these “deeply rooted natural instincts and patterns of behavior reassert themselves to undermine the social engineer’s best-laid plans” (2002). In effect, human nature stymies tyranny. Accordingly, tampering with human nature is very risky: “Human nature shapes and constrains the possible kinds of political regimes, so a technology powerful enough to reshape what we are will have

possibly malign consequences for liberal democracy and the nature of politics itself” (7).

He treats Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* [(1932) 1969] as a cautionary tale. In that imagined world the state utilizes reproduction and gestation conditioning technologies to produce biological castes that provide the foundation for a very successful rigid social stratification system. Even if enhancement technologies are not dictated by the state but driven by consumer choice and the free market, Fukuyama worries that social inequality will increase and future rulers with superior enhancements will maintain insurmountable advantages over the ruled. Social and political mobility, so important to liberal democracy, will be restricted.

Conservationists reject Hughes’ recommendation to use transtechnologies to help individuals become better citizens. Bio-social engineering, however well-intentioned initially, will eventually be used by the powerful to perfect domination. The critics of *civitas* transcendence take a position similar to Bill McKibben—don’t risk this venture when what we have is good enough.

Transcendence nor Transgression?

In closing, I believe that the transhumanists and the conservationists do us a service by imagining the fate of subjects in a transtechnological world. Later in this book I’ll introduce the debate over specific risks, but this frank exchange about the future of humanity is most satisfying in light of C. Wright Mills’ questions. Nevertheless, we might consider the possibility that neither transcendence nor transgression will occur. Imagined futures need not diverge so much between the utopian and dystopian. A consistent skeptic would likely agree with Dan Quisenberry, the famous baseball pitcher, when he said, “The future is much like the present, only longer.” New sociotechnical ensembles may emerge that are muddled and mixed. Perhaps it is not ascension or fall that we can expect, but continued struggle.

Transhumanism and Society

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