

# Preface

From the stories of deities and superheroes we imagine what it is like to be strong, impervious, and immortal. However, we know that the gulf between them and us is wide. The gods take serious their birthright and guard their gifts, and we will never duplicate the strange twist of fate that created the comic book legends. As we ponder the differences we cannot help but be reminded of our human limitations. We respond to mortality with acceptance, despair, or defiance. Perhaps, what first caught my attention about transhumanity was its pure expression of defiance. Transhumanity is about emancipation and transcendence through science, engineering, and technology. It is a bold plan to alter the human condition. It is a possible future that we should take seriously.

This book is not a tribute or critique of transhumanity, instead it is an introduction to the social debate over enhancing body and mind. I present this controversy as it unfolds in the contest between transhumanists and conservationists. The former are recognized to be the vanguard of scientific utopianism. Their movement has been gaining ground over the past two decades. The conservationists make strange bedfellows, from the religious right to the secular left, but they push back with an argument to conserve human nature and to ban enhancement technologies.

I hope to reach readers interested in the social and ethical implications of technological advancements. I identify the key contested points and present the debate in an orderly, constructive fashion. This book engages the reader in the discussion over humanism, the tension between science and religion, and the interpretation of socio-technological revolutions. I trust the reader to form his or her own judgments.

I am a sociologist and I draw insights from social movement literature as well as science and technology studies (STS). I treat the transhumanity debate as a call to arms by which the contestants strive to mobilize support to shape policies and institutions. Accordingly, I describe rhetorical strategies in terms of social movement recruitment and political campaigning. Drawing on STS, I offer an analysis of science and technology claims and counterclaims.

Throughout this project, colleagues have been most supportive. I would like to thank Fran Grodzinsky, Tom Curran, Jeff Cain, and Shirley Jackson for their reading of the manuscript. Jerry Reid and Joshua Klein offered valuable responses to my presentation on transhumanity for the Faculty Scholarship Seminar Series at Sacred Heart University in 2009. Parts of [Chap. 4](#) were presented that year at the 4th International Conference on Technology, Knowledge and Society in Boston, MA and at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S) in Washington D.C. Part of [Chap. 5](#) was presented in 2007 at the 2nd International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences in Granada, Spain. I am grateful to members of the audiences for their helpful comments and suggestions. Special thanks go out to those who attended my first talk on this subject back in 2005 at the 28th Annual Northeast Popular Culture Association (NEPCA) Conference in Fairfield, CT. Their enthusiastic reception encouraged me to broaden the scope of my study. Finally, in the past few years I have invited students to discuss and debate transhumanity. I have been so impressed with their thoughtful remarks. I am confident that this generation will be able to successfully negotiate the challenges ahead.

Transhumanism and Society

The Social Debate over Human Enhancement

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