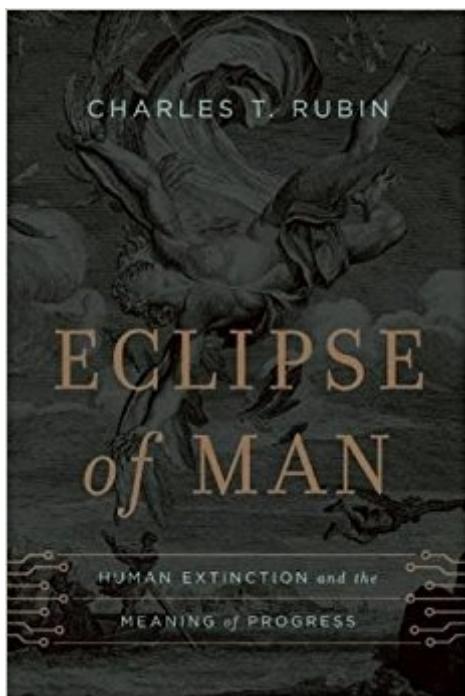


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# Eclipse Of Man: Human Extinction And The Meaning Of Progress



## Synopsis

Tomorrow has never looked better. Breakthroughs in fields like genetic engineering and nanotechnology promise to give us unprecedented power to redesign our bodies and our world. Futurists and activists tell us that we are drawing ever closer to a day when we will be as smart as computers, will be able to link our minds telepathically, and will live for centuries; or maybe forever. The perfection of a posthuman future awaits us. Or so the story goes. In reality, the rush toward a posthuman destiny amounts to an ideology of human extinction, an ideology that sees little of value in humanity except the raw material for producing whatever might come next. In *Eclipse of Man*, Charles T. Rubin traces the intellectual origins of the movement to perfect and replace the human race. He shows how today's advocates of radical enhancement are like their forebears; deeply dissatisfied with given human nature and fixated on grand visions of a future shaped by technological progress. Moreover, Rubin argues that this myopic vision of the future is not confined to charlatans and cheerleaders promoting this or that technology: it also runs through much of modern science and contemporary progressivism. By exploring and criticizing the dreams of post humanity, Rubin defends a more modest vision of the future, one that takes seriously both the limitations and the inherent dignity of our given nature.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Rubin identifies a disquieting tendency among technologically minded idealists to regard not the human condition but humanity itself as the problem" Financial Times "A thoughtful warning

about 'transhumanists' who aspire to make man immortal." &#151;World Magazine"Rubin's book... demonstrates the right way for scholars to grapple with the multifaceted questions raised by advances in biotechnology, robotics, and computing." &#151;Catholic World Report"A hugely significant accomplishment.... The transhumanist future, Rubin meticulously explains, is neither as inevitable nor as reasonable as some believe." &#151;Peter A. Lawler, Berry College"Nano-utopia ... the redesign of the body ... the biochemistry of bliss ... the immortality of an uploaded mind ... the coming Singularity. It's tempting to dismiss transhumanism as wacky. Charles T. Rubin shows why we should take seriously this most radical aspiration, and with clarity and beauty, defends the good of being human." &#151;Diana Schaub, Loyola University Maryland"More than a decade ago, Charles T. Rubin pointed out that the utopian dreams of perfecting humanity amounted to nothing less than an &#145;extinctionist project.â™ In this new book he explores some of the confusions and contradictions inherent to transhumanism, thereby helping us to understand and appreciate better what it means to be human." &#151;Yuval Levin, editor of National Affairs

Charles T. Rubin is an associate professor of political science at Duquesne University, where he teaches courses in political philosophy and about the normative aspects of policy making. He is the author of *The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Radical Environmentalism* (1998), and has written for *The New Atlantis* (where he is a contributing editor), *First Things*, *Commentary*, and other publications.

From an early age, I was fascinated by science and science fiction; who doesn't love the idea of making great discoveries, of exploring outer space, and of a future with robots and flying cars? The impulse to know more is tied to our capacity for wonder. Humans beings study the universe first and foremost because we marvel at it. For all their talk about admittedly fascinating futuristic technology, "transhumanists" seem to forget this that science is a profoundly \*human\* endeavor. Sure, science and technology can empower us, but to what ends? More specifically, if not human (and humane) ends, than what? The schemes of transhumanists have always struck me as creepy, not least because their goals are, by definition, inhumane. In this book, Charles Rubin lays this out very well, showing what the transhumanists are up to, and what's really wrong with their project. He shows that the transhumanists don't see technology as a way of building an exciting future for humanity, but as a way to replace humanity. Rather than being excited about the future, they're really just dissatisfied with who and what we are today, which leads them to all their creepy plans for human "enhancement" through technology. Maybe the best part of the book was how Rubin

compared the way transhumanists think about the future to what some science fiction writers have had to say about technology and the human future. It was a pleasure to see some new insights teased out from these authors and to see how relevant these science fiction books can be. I highly recommend this book.

With a title like "Eclipse of Man," you might expect this book to be dark and dour. But it isn't. Books about the future are usually divided into two classes: utopian dreams of science and reason creating a shining, perfect new world, and prophecies of doom and gloom telling us how pollution, technology, or war will either bring about our extinction or send us back to a new dark age. This book, although its title sounds a bit gloomy, is in fact more deeply hopeful than the utopians it criticizes. When we think about Ray Kurzweil and other transhumanists, we usually think of them as optimists. But Rubin shows how they are the real doom-mongers, that they are deeply pessimistic and anti-humanistic. The "Singularity" they envision will not fulfill human life, but eclipse it and abolish it. As someone who appreciates reading about arts and culture, I was also pleasantly surprised to find that the book wasn't just filled with stories about science and technology. Rubin draws on movies and novels and even paintings to make his argument about a future in which, quoting Faulkner, "man will not merely endure: he will prevail."

Great book. "Progress" is relative, and the author rightly points out that one man's progress is another man's hell. The transhumanist project is creepy and dystopian because it seeks to ultimately do away with humanity. We should move forward cautiously, and you should read this book.

as advertised

An interesting book and one of the few challenges I have seen to the desirability of a post-human future. The writing can at times be a little dry though. I liked the references to SF works as hypothetical scenarios... Neal Stephenson's Diamond Age is used as an example of future scenarios, but the author does include full summaries and spoilers for this and other classic SF books, so be warned.

This book describes how modern genetic science is creating a new and revolutionary scenario for

mankind's future--a trans-humanist future that reads at first like science fiction until you realize how close we already are to the biological manipulation of human beings. It is certainly a blessing to give amputees the use of wondrous new artificial limbs, to restore sight with a miraculous lens, and to transplant hearts and kidneys. But the trans-humanists see a greater and expanded opportunity to perfect all humans--major enhancements including adjustments to even the brains that make us tick. To these thinkers, we are all the "weeds" that Margaret Sanger wanted to replace with more perfect specimens. Modern medicine will sooner or later make such manipulation feasible. Charles T. Rubin warns us that "the more one thinks about how much better we could do if we designed our own bodies, the more dissatisfied we are likely to be with the present model." After all, manipulating nature has been mankind's forte since we emerged from the Stone Age. We can finally put evolution under our own control, not just to improve the natural environment, but to improve our own capabilities. The million-dollar man is right around the corner! However, there is a downside to such extreme tampering with life as we know it. The author points out that "progressive" idealists could use these new biological methods to "manage" the people in today's democracies. These activists see themselves as superior, the smartest, with the purest objectives, and therefore entitled to regulate everyone else's conduct. And, after almost 100 years of the welfare state, and the decline in marriages and families, there is a growing class of citizens who actually need regular assistance and direction. One-half of Americans currently receive some kind of governmental support! And they are out reproducing those who care for themselves. This dysgenic trend, if continued long enough, will create a majority of needy citizens, and the elites at the top will be apt to reach for drastic solutions. America has clearly been transformed from a republic to a populist democracy and the recent transformation of its people has been in profoundly negative ways. Note that the transformation is not of America, but of Americans. If our culture is changing it is because the people are changing. The path we are on is seen as an opportunity by the lazy, and as kindness by the well-meaning, but it is a growing burden for those paying the freight. In fact, it is just a variation of Orwell's and Huxley's future visions--many of us are trading our freedom for the financial support offered by a corrupt government. Armchair theorists have come up with several possible ways to govern future huge and unwieldy democracies. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* shows us the ultimate solution of what could happen if we fail to make democracy work: an elite take control by biologically and psychologically controlling the masses in a system not unlike the anthill or beehive communities. George Orwell's *1984* also shows us the control that can be managed by an elite that rules by terror and mass psychology, a step more brutal than, but based on, Stalin's

communism of the mid-twentieth century. Unfortunately, both books are dystopias, which illustrate possible horrible outcomes. They are the opposite of the futile utopian proposals, and show that the alternatives to what stable democracies offer are usually worse. Transhumanists mean no harm. Like all dreamers, they merely want to improve the human condition and society. However, the danger is that many will want to totally transform America and adjust its citizens into something "superior." As Rubin observes, man's tendency to overreach can lead to disasters, much as Icarus' flight in ancient mythology ended with a bang. Such a post-human future could lead to all sorts of change, but in the process we, as humans would no longer be human. And the changes wrought would undoubtedly be helpful to only a few and extremely harmful for everyone else. Such medical manipulation is no more than another form of eugenics, and although dressed up to appear as beneficial to mankind, would result in just another example of a dystopian future. Predictions of the future may be speculative, but they do show the need to avoid any increase in centralized authority. When overwhelming power is given to an elite, they will sooner or later be attracted to coercive schemes in order to hold onto their power.

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