

larger societal structures that disadvantage individuals with mental illness and make it difficult for them to obtain services and find places to live. The book also addresses the stigma—a word not far removed from “stigmata”—still faced by many diagnosed with mental illness. Although the stigma is tangible, the underlying condition is often invisible. Borchard speaks of her own childhood struggles with severe clinical depression and suicidal ideation, which she frequently hid from those around her: “If you had to fill out a form to qualify for valid reasons to hurt, you could definitely place a checkmark next to ‘starving to death’ or ‘victim of child abuse.’ Whatever was going on inside my head as a young girl, though, failed that qualification” (xvi).

Each chapter, each station of the cross, tells a vivid story. As a teenager, Cal was refused admission to his local Catholic high school because of emotional and intellectual disabilities, but his faith never wavered. Like many, Walter struggles with caring for

and loving someone with a mental illness. Allison’s schizophrenia includes a paranoia that often prevents her from seeking and accepting treatment.

I sometimes wondered who the target audience for this book should be—individuals with mental illness, mental health professionals, caregivers, or believers? As I continued reading, however, it became clear that these stories can benefit a reader from any of these groups. Perhaps not infrequently, one person belongs to all four. *Fifteen Steps Out of Darkness* is very accessible and deeply personal. Each chapter includes a more or less explicit reflection on the mystery of suffering, and the authors do not hold back their feelings or the sense of injustice that is roused in them through their work.

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***Eclipse of Man:
Extinction and the Meaning of Progress***

by Charles T. Rubin

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Charles Rubin’s account of transhumanism offers an honest overview of the roots and development of this movement. A more extensive review would include more remote philosophers like Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and René Descartes (1596–1650), but Rubin focuses on proximate philosophers who more directly influenced transhumanism. Rubin begins by comparing transhumanism with the general Christian mindset. While they appear to have similar outlooks—namely, they acknowledge man’s physical and moral limits and want to enhance his potential—they do not share the same solutions. While Christianity is aware of the limits of man,

especially in his post-lapsarian state, it resorts to supernatural means and explanations as well as morally licit material means to address these problems. The merely material solution of transhumanism is too limited. Its central idea is that man must be fundamentally changed or transformed, forced to evolve through the manipulation of nature by the analytical sciences, if he is to survive. The beatitude of eternal life promised by Christianity does not enter transhumanism’s vision of immortality.

Rubin starts his deconstruction of transhumanism with the Frenchman Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794).

A mathematician and Enlightenment philosopher, Condorcet was convinced that the progress of reason had advanced too far for any future lapse into barbarism to occur, but he was still chagrined at how little progress had been made to increase human happiness. For Condorcet, happiness required that illness and injury be erased. Man would still inevitably die, but his life span could be lengthened and pass by without suffering.

This vision would find a more negative interpreter in the Englishman Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), who attacked Condorcet’s depiction of progress. As a political economist, Malthus believed that finite resources limit what humans can hope to accomplish. Because human reproduction always races ahead of available food, our future holds great misery and scarcity. These ideas influenced many fields, including biology. For instance, Charles Darwin (1809–1882) adapted Malthusian ideas to help explain evolution as a natural phenomenon caused by competition for limited resources. The transhumanists, Rubin explains, reconcile and assimilate these ideas by advocating the end of humanity.

Such an end of humanity became more explicit in Englishman William Reade’s (1838–1875) *The Martyrdom of Man*, which put human beings within a larger narrative of natural history. Reade believed that there is a natural imperative for higher abilities and capacities to grow out of lower ones. This claim does not apply only to human beings. It is a characteristic of life itself, indeed, a characteristic of matter, which he regarded as inseparable from the mind. The ability to assist in our own improvement and transcend what we are today is crucial to both Reade’s picture of the future and today’s transhumanist theories. In the natural order of things, the individual human life has limited potential, precisely because by nature we are parts of a whole with potentially greater significance. However, Reade claimed that with our intelligence we can move beyond our limits, and religion, namely Christianity, shall eventually become obsolete. Here we see the antipathy of transhumanism toward Christianity. At the same time, Rubin explains that the title

of Reade’s book—*Martyrdom of Man*—indicates that the author was well aware of the tragic side of his progressivism.

The Russian philosopher Nikolai Fedorov (1829–1903) bitterly disagreed with Reade’s belief in a tragic conflict between the present and the past. Rather, Fedorov’s vision ends not with the triumph of the current generation over the previous one, but with the resurrection of our hallowed patriarchs. Resurrection did not suffice for Fedorov, because the Earth shows signs of decay and fragility and may be wiped out by a sudden disaster. Therefore, he proposed that space exploration, specifically colonization, is the means of bringing order to the chaos of purposeless nature. Also considering space colonization, Nicolas Flammarion (1842–1925) articulated the “assumption of mediocrity,” that is, there is nothing special about Earth’s place in the universe, so life is likely to exist elsewhere. He argued that extraterrestrial life will probably be different from life as we know it, perhaps with a different chemical basis and very different capabilities. *A propos* science fiction and space exploration, while Rubin does not specifically mention C. S. Lewis’s (1898–1963) famous space trilogy, a good Christian apologist will keep it in mind because, unlike H. G. Wells (1866–1946), Lewis was suspicious of the potential harms of such exploration.

The last thinkers Rubin considers are J. B. S. Haldane (1892–1964) and J. D. Bernal (1901–1971). Haldane agreed that the material progress of man would be limited if human beings remained on Earth but suggested that extensive space travel would cause an evolutionary change resulting in something no longer human. Bernal projected the future in three areas: the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world focuses on our power in relationship to the material world, especially in the conquest of space. The flesh focuses on our power over life, particularly our own bodies, and herein lies the prediction that mechanical and chemical enhancements will render the natural human body obsolete. Man will be nothing but a disembodied brain. Everything else will be artificial and replaceable. Perhaps mankind

will have a larval stage, Bernal suggested, during which he lives as a natural man for the first twelve years of life before transitioning into a painful chrysalis wherein he becomes more machine, capable of endless customization—a logical conclusion of Cartesian *res extensa*. And the devil? Here, the reference is to our power over our own psyches. Years later, Bernal admitted that this chapter was influenced considerably by Sigmund Freud. The main question is whether scientific progress will overcome the problem posed by the new, Freudian assertion that the intellectual life is not the vocation of the rational mind, but a compensation, a perversion of more primitive, unsatisfied desires.

Rubin shows that the idea of progress changed quite a bit from Condorcet's optimistic expectation of an increasingly humane society to Bernal's pessimistic vision of humanity's self-manufactured extinction. Condorcet's unwillingness to explore the possibility of immortality was not shared by his successors. Once combined with Malthusian pessimism, the exploration and colonization of space became the target of Condorcet's successors, and adaptation represented the means of the final radical eradication of biological man. This shift corresponds well with the ascension of Darwinism. If our predecessors were not human and if evolutionary processes are ongoing, then it is possible, if not necessary, that our descendants will not be human.

Through the remainder of the book, Rubin shows how we are rapidly moving toward this transhumanist vision. Man's materialistic attempt at progress ultimately destroys him, and Rubin lays out this argument in the body of the book. In chapter 3, he talks about nanotechnology, submicroscopic particles that can improve the effectiveness of a number of products, from sunscreen to cancer treatments. Not surprisingly, this technology appeals to the transhumanist imagination, and its potential to alter radically individuals is reflected in films like *The Terminator* and *Transcendence*.

After going through the threats posed by nanotechnology, Rubin begins chapter 4 by stating, "Dehumanization is central to contemporary transhumanism" (120). The

argument of using cutting-edge medical techniques as therapy for the injured or deformed quickly becomes lost in the rush for enhancement. If we may improve those who have been slighted by nature or misfortune, why may we not improve on the natural design itself? This is what we have seen with in vitro fertilization and other such technologies. What begins as a response to a health concern soon becomes inhumane. Here Rubin should have been more critical of Francis Bacon's aphorism that "knowledge is power" or René Descartes's anthropological distinction between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa* that seem very much related to such thinking. Something may be technologically good, but if the metaphysics is Ockhamist or Leibnizian and the morality is Machiavellian or Hobbesian, one cannot be surprised if people are viewed as pieces of a puzzle. One cannot marvel at the willful force of the contemporary emotive barbarism decried by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*.

However, Rubin does address this implicitly. At one point, he talks about memory control. At first, certain drugs would be used to head off a tragic emotional event. Taken either before or immediately after a traumatic event, the drugs could prevent a memory from being formed. A major theme is that of shame. In a transhumanist worldview, shame is as close as one is likely to get to sin. Worldly embarrassment preventing one from genuine progress is the novel sin of humility against the new god of evolution. If shame could be erased, man could live in happiness and peace. Rubin brings up a point about such a process: forgetting memory does not change disposition. Even if the "I" is a momentary, fleeting, and evolutionary existence, dispositions are relatively constant. Erasing memory makes one vulnerable to what one has forgotten by hindering the ability to learn from one's actions. Most likely, the individual is still inclined toward such actions, and far from freeing a person from painful memories, amnesia enslaves him to repeat them in an endless cycle. While transhumanists hail the supposedly inevitable progress of technocracy, they refuse to acknowledge that unenhanced persons will

inevitably use enhancements in unenlightened, selfish, and abusive ways.

Transhumanists are essentially interested in making something other than man, for to be merely human is to be defective. It is unimaginable and almost perverse that someone would choose to be human if given the choice to be anything else. Most striking, this is very similar to what we read in science fiction novels, which appear less fictional than we would at first believe. It is part and parcel of a way of thinking that goes beyond not only God but man himself, proving that when God is removed from the picture, eventually man—created in his image and likeness—will soon be removed as well. From a theological perspective, this is clearly the diabolic dream of eliminating the image of God, which the demons most envy.

“When appealing to common sense, transhumanists promise a better world in humanly comprehensible terms. However, their own assumptions lead them to abandon those promises in favor of willful change toward incomprehensible outcomes,” Rubin explains in his opening words to the last chapter of *Eclipse of Man* (163). He criticizes how progress becomes “the sheer accumulation of

information, a kind of hoarding mentality that is based on the belief that you never know what might come in handy someday.” Clearly, from this we cannot marvel at the belief that efforts to restrain science or technology on ethical grounds represent a threat to progress: “After all, if progress is mere accumulation, then of course restraint *is* a threat” (164, original emphasis). Rubin shows that there is a kind of betrayal in the transhumanist mantra and the idea of progress itself. Science was given pride of place in our society because it was thought that the freedom of scientific pursuit would enable greater human well-being. When we cease to ask questions about human well-being, however, natural science seems to lose its purpose. Transhumanism’s goal of human extinction, which uses science against humanity, is another good reason to be concerned about the misuse of freedom in a world that applauds relativism and questions eternal truths.

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***The Culture of Death:
The Age of “Do Harm” Medicine, 2nd ed.***
by Wesley J. Smith

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An eighty-nine-year-old Purple Heart recipient has profound dementia and has forgotten how to feed himself. He is not dying. A thirty-two-year-old former high school football star suffered a serious traumatic brain injury following an ATV accident. He is not dying. A twenty-five-year-old mom underwent a routine emergency caesarian section and delivered a healthy baby. She subsequently experienced a post-operative cardiac arrest resulting in a persistent vegetative state. She

is not dying. Because of their inability to feed themselves, each has his or her nutrition and hydration maintained by means of a feeding tube without complications. These patients are totally dependent on others for their care. Yet in all fifty states, it is legal to discontinue their fluids and nutrients, resulting in their deaths within seven to fourteen days. These are examples of legal euthanasia. The *Declaration on Euthanasia* defines *euthanasia* as “an action or an omission which of itself