



Review of Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto

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Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto

by Simon Young. (2006). New York: Prometheus Books.

Those expecting this book to be *the* definitive statement of transhumanist philosophy and ideas will be disappointed. "A Transhumanist Manifesto," with an emphasis on the indefinite article, is just that – an idiosyncratic, personal statement by a broad-minded, well-read "layman" – "a piano player, even!"

The book breathlessly tries to cover transhumanist art, immortality, Romanticism, Postmodernism, memetics, Buddhist *anatta*, Prometheus, genetic engineering, Star Trek, Enlightenment, evolution, ecology, humanism, socialism, liberalism, economics, ethics, homosexuality, eugenics, psychology, psychiatry, Jungian personality typology, Nietzsche's *will to power*, existentialism, Frankenstein, Superman, robots, epistemology, nihilism, science, consilience, oris, monism, schizophrenia, zombies, Descartes, uploading, egalitarianism, sublimation, Orpheus, Maslow, original sin, creative living, selfish genes, the Sermon on the Mount, Prozac, Epsilonia, libertarianism, Camille Paglia, the noosphere, the meaning of life, 'agnostoskepticism,' 'sciphobia,' 'bispectism,' 'eugoics,' and countless other needlessly neologized topics.

Much as one might praise Young for his ambition, the book is simply incapable of supporting an extended treatment of any of these topics or of forging them into a rigorously defended and explained world-view. Those looking for an explanation of transhumanism must continue to resort to the Web sites of the World Transhumanist Association and the Extropy Institute. Full-length, published works on the general topic of transhumanism are few – for example, Naam's *More Than Human*, Joel Garreau's *Radical Evolution*, or even Regis's mocking treatment, *Great Mambo Chicken and the Transhuman Condition*, of sixteen years ago.

Young's 'manifesto,' echoing the language of the failed Communist one, sets forth an overarching agenda of 24 points, after which he criticizes Bio-Luddism at length and then attempts to outline a comprehensive philosophy. Young is at his best discussing transhumanist art, critiquing postmodernism, and aiming for a unification of science and spirituality in rational ethics, unabashed 'scientism,' 'warm logic' and 'mind of God theology.' Young is least convincing when he attempts to reduce the

complexity of human personalities to four 'neurohumors' and when he advocates the casual use of psychiatric drugs to produce a single, preferred personality type. I believe someday humanity *will* understand the exact biochemistry of the brain and so be able to influence it intelligently and reversibly, but that time has not yet arrived. Until then, while neuroscience is in its infancy, it would be wise to draw back from damaging our minds. There is probably a good reason why Nature produces such a wide variety of human personalities, and personality types different from Young's could remind us why we should appreciate much of this variety.

Despite such wrong-turns, one has to admire the spirit of advocacy in Young's call to optimism, science, and using technology to advance the survival and well-being of humanity. Humans have emerged from the crisis of World War II with a deep pessimism, skepticism, misanthropy, irrationality, and spirit of defeatism. Humanity, as it were, has been knocked off its stride and saddled with immense doubt about its ability to make the world a better place, its ability to judge value, and even its right to exist. Humanity needs to recover its balance and its stride, recover faith in itself, and rekindle its flickering hopes and dreams. Young's remedy for the collective, intellectual malaise of our times recalls the prescient treatment of the same theme by F.M. Esfandiary (FM-2030) in *Optimism One* and *Up-Wingers*. Hopefully, many more laypeople will soon take up the challenge of the future with this sort of optimistic and ambitious attitude.