

STEVE FULLER, VERONIKA LIPINSKA:
THE PROACTIONARY IMPERATIVE: A FOUNDATION
FOR TRANSHUMANISM,
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Though this book completes a trilogy exploring “Humanity 2.0,” it also stands, and may be read by itself. This book is well written, highly informative and provocative. With *The Proactionary Imperative: A Foundation for Transhumanism*, Steve Fuller and Veronika Lipinska have constructed a timely and truly foundational resource. I would not be surprised to see this book as required reading for multiple courses (both undergraduate and graduate level) and multiple chapters (not just the *Proactionary Manifesto*) anthologized.

There are a number of ways to enter various arguments, the sociology and the social epistemology of the book. Below I indicate three main approaches to the book.

The Theological Approach. Be it called “intelligent design” or not, Fuller and Lipinska hold that the rational intelligibility of nature provides humans with insight into the processes of natural creation. In fact, Fuller, standing on the shoulders of the history and philosophy of science, argues that theology may be one way to motivate science. Yet, reading this book in isolation from the larger Humanity 2.0 project, one may regard a key notion being employed, i.e. “theomimesis” too narrowly. Stated with the least amount of controversy, the notion holds that the human species is unique among animals in its relation to God. Stated controversially, it refers to the practice of understanding our intellectual power as capable of taking over, and perhaps “enhancing” God’s creation. First on the list of creatures to enhance, for transhumanists, are humans.

Though this book does not dwell on the possible ways how to understand theomimesis, it would be wrong to say that the depth and complexity of the issue escapes Fuller and Lipinska. For example, in July, 2012 at the presentation of the Philosophy of Religion section of the Tyndale Fellowship hosted by the University of Cambridge (available on *YouTube*), Fuller discusses various interpretations of theomimesis along two different dimensions.

First, it is possible to understand human intellectual capacities in relation to God in terms of the distinction between the local and the global. In other words, though humans may have the capacity to discover the mysteries of nature locally, humans may

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fall short of the capacity to understand the relation between local discoveries and the more global ecology. Second, it is possible to interpret a human intellect as different from God's in terms of either degree or kind. That is to say, the strong theomimesis position holds that the difference between the intellectual power of God and that of humans is merely one of degree, and the weak theomimesis position holds the difference to be one of kind. Hence, the ultimate point one should take away from the discussion of the "theological approach" to the proactionary imperative is that taking the exception with the notion of "theomimesis" too hastily will preclude one from recognizing the foundational nature of the book for the transhumanist movement, and it is the opinion of the reviewer that even critics of transhumanism stand to gain from appreciating the foundational nature of the book.

The Political Approach. In a review titled "More, or less, than human?" a professor of bioethics Carl Elliott noted, "*If the authors [Fuller and Lipinska] are aware of how their plans might sound to vulnerable populations, to disabled people or ethnic minorities, they don't give much evidence of it.*" He goes on to reference of the Tuskegee experiment and the Nuremberg Code, noting "*the real issue is who exactly is expected to take those risks, and under what circumstances.*" Moreover, Fuller and Lipinska do openly acknowledge, "*Yes, this is eugenics*" (p. 128). It is not that these emotive issues, which may or may not be best captured with the label 'political', are not worthy of discussion. They are. The foundational nature of the book should be appreciated as proactively depicting an emerging context in which to consider these important issues and questions.

Similar to "theomimesis" the issue which might divert politically minded readers from reading the book as foundational is that of 'eugenics'. Taken out of context, one may not appreciate that Fuller and Lipinska see this book as responding to the already extant eugenics research proposals and projects. For example, in characterizing the Proactionary as a part of "the Proactionary-Precautionary binary" they note, "*Perhaps the most sophisticated version of the problem is in evidence at the European Commission (EC), which treats the precautionary principle as a normative anchor for European Union legislation*" (p. 100). Further, they indicate the EC's call for "responsible innovation" is philosophically grounded in the "precautionary principle." They note that the call for such an innovation is directed at "*areas most central to the transhumanist agenda – nano-, bio- and info- sciences and technology*" for two main reasons. The first is due to the precautionary principle "standing in international environmental law," and the second is "*its conformity to the conventional understanding of welfare-state action as aiming to protect (rather than promote) people*" (p. 100). Further, "*Taken together, these two reasons create a presumption that we should always worry about who will be harmed before who will benefit – regardless of the exact nature and number involved in both cases*" (p. 100). Fuller and Lipinska conclude, "*While superficially a humane policy, the privileging of harm over benefit is 'humane' only if you believe that, above all else, disruption*

to your default way of being is the worst thing that can happen to you" ([emphasis in original] p. 100). Hence, a "right" or a "duty" think theomimesis here, "to science" may guard against citizens, being "(paternalistically) shielded from opportunities" which though perhaps "risky" may lead to "a substantially better state of being" (p. 100). According to Fuller and Lipinska, "a more proactionary approach to welfare" would, among other things, "*teach people about the risks they already take*" (p. 111).

The Foundational Approach. Notice that when Fuller and Lipinska say "this is eugenics" they also clarify what they mean by it. It is "*neither the classical state-authoritarian version nor today's laissez faire 'designer baby' fantasy that would allow anyone to enhance themselves and their offspring as they wish*" (p. 128). It is as if, given the current policy situation and historical push for humans to "capitalize" on their own being, it may be imperative to be proactive regarding who will "own" your genetic information.

Fuller and Lipinska argue "*by giving genes legal recognition and legal worth we are acknowledging that protection needs to be afforded*" (p. 121). They note, "*Here is the crux of the matter: patents allow for exclusivity of use by the 'inventor' and can potentially deprive an individual from whom the genes have been extracted. However, the reverse logic should be applied*" (p. 121). That is to say, "Once we establish that genes should be patented, society must decide who can own a patent and what restrictions on it can be placed;" further, "*Not allowing genes to be patented opens doors for abuse: no regulation means that no laws can be invoked when abuse occurs*" ([emphasis in original] p. 121).

Hence, they argue for a "new legal concept" and "propose *hedgenetics* to encapsulate a collective right to gene ownership compatible with the duty of genetic stewardship" (p. 122). Just as a "hedge" in a hedge fund is designed to offset potential losses, *hedgenetics* is proposed to help the gene patent holder guard against potential shifts in the value of their genetic information. Whereas "precautionary policymakers aim to prevent the worst possible outcomes, proactionary ones [aim] to promote the best available opportunities" (p. 26). The proactionary imperative, then, is not a call for eugenics in a vacuum. Rather, it is perhaps a call for the best possible kind of eugenics in the context of its inevitability. For example, some may be persuaded of the timeliness of Fuller and Lipinska's work considering the issue of population increase and various justifications for population control, or what Gregory Sandstrom has called "the risk of a new technocentric misanthropy ... part of the libertarian techno-elite's push for a new eugenics."

To conclude, insofar as one reads *The Proactionary Imperative* in the context noted above, one can see the visionary nature of such proactive society and social epistemology. However, there may be two concerns worth highlighting in regard to the foundational approach. First, it may be asked whether the movement toward *hedgenetics* should necessarily be a two-step process. If so, then it causes a new concern and namely, after the first step of agreeing to allow genetic information to be patented, might the process be diverted resulting in individuals being capi-

talized but not being able to own their inherited genetic information? Second, some scholars, such as Sandstrom, see the eugenics advocated by Fuller and Lipinska as “a new kind of democratized eugenics.” As “democratized” is applied, a number of concerns may arise, out of which I will indicate only two. On the one hand, it is not clear if individuals agreeing to their own capitalization would also agree to have the control of their genetic-information-commodity directly susceptible to the influence of the popular opinion. On the other hand, though some existentialists might embrace being proactive, some existentialists might object to the very idea of capitalizing oneself. That is to say, even in the face of choosing one’s best eugenics future, some philosophers may choose martyrdom.

Fuller and Lipinska’s *The Proactionary Imperative* is an interesting read. As far as it draws our attention to the important timely questions, weaving theological, biological, and political-legal narratives, including a “manifesto” for a proactionary position in an emerging context of eugenics, it will ensure its significant impact. Truly foundational, the provocative nature of this book will help readers ask important and proactive questions.