



Man After Man: An Anthropology of the Future

Dougal Dixon, Philip Hood (illustrator), Brian W. Aldiss (Foreword)

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An Anthropology of the future. Foreword by Brian Aldiss.

Man After Man: An Anthropology of the Future Details

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From Reader Review Man After Man: An Anthropology of the Future for online ebook

Timothy Snowberger says

Although the art can be a bit strange and awkward at times, it's still fascinating to consider how our species might evolve given different challenges and the passage of time. If you come away with nothing other than the thought of how we might change, this book has done its job.

David Hoag says

I first glimpsed this gem in a public library ages ago. Then, in a second hand bookstore window in Victoria, I saw it again. I tracked it down on the internet and finally downloaded it. The pictures really sell the book and speculative biology is easy fodder to shovel into my mouth. The writing was pretty dry, but I appreciated the sizeable effort that must have gone into writing the next million years of the future.

Katia M. Davis says

This book was very fanciful. I can see how the author may have developed some of the ideas, but the majority seemed incredibly far fetched, essentially an extreme devolution of what was left of humanity...back to the trees and primordial slime...I spent half my time rolling my eyes, especially considering the small time frame for such changes...200 years, 300 years by which stage we will be swimming in the ocean, unable to breathe air but circulate water around our mouths and pectoral gills to gather oxygen. Of course these skills were given a helping hand by civilisation when it still existed by way of genetic engineering. All I can say is Dixon has an incredible imagination.

Nick says

This is the least scientifically plausible Dougal Dixon book I've read, but I still enjoyed its wonderful weirdness. It gets more implausible as it goes on, but then again the plausibility of various forms of future "homo" evolution is pretty much an epistemic black hole.

The book tells very pessimistic story of the future in which earth falls apart due to environmental destruction. Mankind engineers some basic freakish variations of itself to help build spaceships, and before leaving they seed the planet with a bunch of varieties of "homo", (including the poor people who couldn't buy tickets to Alpha Centauri). Seriously advanced intelligence doesn't really make a comeback, except in the aquatics who end up collapsing on themselves anyway.

Some animals like the seekers and socials, eventually develop warlike tenancies and develop basic tribal statism, but refuse to progress any further.

From the perspective of a history and economics fan, I find this fairly implausible. Even if intelligence is

ultimately self defeating in the long run of a species, the incentives facing an individual organism within one lifespan would force it to make use of intelligence, not eschew it like the travelers/memory people do. These species basically decide to become primitivist terrorists who destroy and pillage any traces of technology or civilization when they find it.

He underestimates the value of individual minds which can specialize in certain labor tasks, and then cooperate and/or trade with one another. See the following quote: "It is not in the interest of the hive as a whole for anyone to show an individuality, and so it was lost generations upon generations ago. Now and again, however, it surfaces once more, and under the influence of these throwbacks hives begin to experiment with new and different ways of living, which nearly always end in failure. The progressive hive dies, turns to dust, and the neighbouring hives absorb its territory." This seems super unbelievable to me. I'd expect the first species to discover the division of labor, and to make use of technology to very quickly dominate all the rest. This is exactly what humans did.

However, eschewing technological societies does allow for him to focus more on the biological angle rather than the anthropological angle. This is probably good as it allows the book to stay mainly a speculative zoology one, rather than an anthropology one as the title deceptively suggests.

The book itself is much more text heavy than previous Dixon books, but given the different format of this book that is useful. By that I mean: previous Dixon books examined a cross section of various species at one point in time. In this one he examines the evolutionary lineage of a single over a long period of time. So having a lot of text allows you to trace multiple evolutionary lineages without having a wholly unreasonable amount of illustrations.

Anyway, I didn't think it was as good as *The New Dinosaurs*, or *After Man*, but it was highly enjoyable nonetheless.

Yael says

Dougal Dixon's books on speculative biology are among my favorite reading material. Illustrated lavishly in color with pictures of possible future species or species that might have existed today if not for this or that cosmic catastrophe are worth collecting as much for their beauty and humor as for the scientific information and science-fiction texts they contain. This book, however, also had one extra, added attraction: it culminates in an event which, set a couple of million years in our future, turns the Earth and humanity's Earthly descendants into something right out of a 5-star work of horror.

What is our future? What evolutionary pathways will our species take as time goes on? What will our descendants be like in a thousand years, ten thousand years, a hundred thousand years, a million years? How will our future evolution affect other creatures on our planet?

The book begins with the premise that we are a species "outside evolution," supported by highly advanced technology that shapes nature to fulfill our short-term requirements. (Actually, we *aren't* "outside evolution" -- natural selection still operates on all of us, as can be quickly determined by talking with anyone who has suffered an iatrogenic disease, a mugging, a miscarriage due to unexpected side-effects of a prescription medication, the business end of some warlord's campaign, a drive-by shooting, etc. Selective pressures are still there, and survival of the luckiest is the name of the game. The only thing that has changed is the nature of particular selective factors, which have shifted radically in the last ten thousand years or so, not the fact of

natural selection itself. Do not ask for whom Darwin's Bell tolls -- it tolls for thee, regardless of whom thou art, even me. But don't let that spoil the story.) Dixon asks if old age, illness, and bad luck can be held at bay forever? The result is *Man After Man*, a richly illustrated anthropology of the future. It shows several possible evolutionary paths for humanity: on other worlds; in space, that is, a gravity-free environment; under water, in the oceans; and on the soils and sands of Earth's surface. A select group of humans in outstanding condition leave Earth for colonies on worlds of other stars. Others, supported by ingenious technology that counteracts their increasingly deteriorated genotypes and physiology, remain on Earth, the lords of life there.

Trying to find a way to free themselves from the immobility and weaknesses conferred on them by their genes and necessitated by the type of technology used to care for them, the stay-at-home humans develop bio-solutions in the form of organic life-support systems into which they fit snugly. These systems enable them to move and work the way their able ancestors did, by their own initiative and metabolic power. Still others, who have not succumbed to the genetic weaknesses of the technocrats, have developed a way of life much like their Neolithic forebears, living in small settlements, growing their own crops, raising bees for honey and pollination, making their own tools, and otherwise living as independently as possible from the machines upon which their cousins have become fatally dependent. But the process of Earthly evolution doesn't stop there.

The Hiteks -- *Homo sapiens machina diumentum* -- decide that they will replenish the Earth with new creatures to replace older species that had died off due to human activities. Accordingly, using advanced bioengineering techniques, they create the Plains-Dweller, *Homo campis fabricatus*, with a large belly accommodating the enlarged digestive tract of an obligate herbivore, teeth configured to eat grass, long legs and feet configured somewhat like those of a dog to enable fast running, and blade-like calluses on its fingertips that can be used as weapons as well as tools, for protection and food-gathering. The ancestors of the Hiteks had created aquamorphs, humans genetically modified to live and work underwater on various tasks important to the world economy; and vacuummorphs, humans genetically modified to live and work in space, in gravity-free environments, without protective spacesuits, and the ability to retain huge amounts of oxygen to reduce the number of times they would have to return to their space-based homes for another breath while working outside. Those same ancestors had also shared the Earth with "quatties," normal humans living in the ruins of once-proud cities, and other people not dependent on advanced technology, some of which had given rise to the unmodified humans of 500 years in our future who keep bees, grow their own crops, and live apart from high-tech culture. Now the Hiteks want to go their ancestors several times better, starting with their engineered plains-dweller. That engineered species is followed in quick succession by the Forest-Dweller, *Homo silvis fabricatus*, the Tundra-Dweller, *Homo glacis fabricatus*, and the Temperate Woodland-Dweller, *Homo virgultis fabricatus*. An advanced version of the older and now extinct Aquamorph is also created, *Piscanthropus submarinus*. And then, slowly but surely, especially after *Homo sapiens machinasdiumentum* dies off, these genetically engineered, radically altered versions of humanity begin to evolve in adaptive response to changes in their environment . . .

Five million years go by. The world goes through its changes, ice age giving way to a more temperate climate which then returns to an ice age, over and over again. Areas that were above water are submerged; land that had been below the surface of the oceans is left high and dry. Without humanity's factories and other sources of pollution, the Earth has healed of the wounds we inflicted on it. And then . . .

Strange lights appear in the night sky, moving against the background of stars whose proper motions through the heavens over the eons are not discernible by members of species which, descended from bioengineered versions of humanity, have given up the intellectual lives and abilities and cultures of their remote, unaltered ancestors. Resolving into large structures of worked metal, they alight on Earth and disgorge their

passengers. Ah! Humanity has returned from its far-flung interstellar colonies -- but not in the form it had when it first left Earth for the stars. These weird creatures have been so heavily reworked to meet the demands of their inconceivably technologically and biotechnologically advanced culture that they barely retain any resemblance to the original parent stock at all. Tiny, with clusters of minute arms without hands, but with servoconnections for manipulating controls which, in turn, activate machines that do their work for them, these creatures have no legs. Their legs have been sacrificed in order to enable them to fit better into saddles mounted on machines or bioengineered living mounts, which then serve as their legs, powerful and enduring beyond anything nature could have given us. Unheeding or, perhaps, ignorant of the fact of their ancestral origins on this blue, living world, they take it over for their own purposes. They fill it with factories that produce everything they need, using local resources as raw materials -- including, when appropriate, the flesh of the animal life around them. They begin modifying that life to suit their needs and desires, turning the children of men into ugly, pathetic caricatures of living organisms, not to mention humans and their strange but natural descendants in the process. Finally, having robbed Earth of most of her mineral wealth and biological resources for their factories, turning Earth into a blasted, ravaged, low-oxygen wasteland and Earth's seas into heavily polluted sinks in the process, the little horrors leave, probably still ignorant that this was the homeworld of their ancestors. And in the seas, the surviving members of *Piscanthropus profundus*, the ultimate descendants of the original Aquamen of the 25th Century, rise up out of the water to watch the rocket exhaust of the factory ships dwindling to nothing in the poisoned skies of Earth . . .

Migl? says

Beautiful book on... speculative anthropology?

It reads like a collection of short stories (from viewpoints of different creatures), connecting into one big narrative of what could become of humans after genetic engineering and natural evolution millions of years in the future.

LOVED the illustrations and the reasons for one or another adaptation of the creatures. Beautiful book, if a little bit sentimental at times.

Baja Thylacine says

This book is so out dated and hilariously bad it isn't even funny. So let me get this straight, the world is dying and humanity's best bet is to send the "genetic elite" into space while the scientists left behind decide to de-evolve the human race? I suppose the only way for humanity to survive overpopulation and bad magnetic waves is to de-evolve our genetic children into ugly-as-sin ape things and manatees. You may think I'm joking about the ugly-as-sin part but take a look at this:

http://29.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_lcb...

That's one of the hilariously bad illustrations in this book. Believe me when I say that the illustrations and phony-science get even worse from there! Would I recommend this book? Don't waste your money, but check out the illustrations if you want a good laugh or pure A-Grade Nightmare Fuel.

Jonathan Gillespie says

This utterly depressing, gripping tome broadcasts its mission statement very early on, when it claims that genetic engineering is the only way to ensure mankind will continue to evolve and develop to meet the needs of his future. What follows is a book that is hard to pin down, and the decision on the ultimate value of its content wheels on one's own opinions.

Is it a cynic's guide to future anthropology, or the detached viewpoint of an objective realist? That depends.

Is it a withering indictment of man's ability to control his own impulses and destinies, or an acknowledgement that many of us strive to, however futile? Could be.

Is it a warning about the dangers of over-reliance on technology and medicine, or an appeal to us to change our own circumstances before we surrender everything upon these two altars? Maybe.

It's hard to tell where the author is coming from, and to be honest, I don't know what to think about it. Is he advocating eugenics or warning against it, or simply saying "time is running out" before we're faced with one of these two options? There are moments where his own opinions seem to poke through the page; at other times he steps so far back into his narrative-driven speculative anthropological world that he vanishes, and one is immersed in the minds of his creatures.

Ultimately, I don't buy much of what *Man After Man* posits, but given how long ago the book was written, it's easy to see why some of its missteps occurred. Taking it in the context of its time, I still find a very deep read presented, but it is coupled with a sense of dead ends, as if the author began trains of speculative evolution and wasn't sure quite which station he'd stop them at. For example, I ached for more about the memory people, as implausible as they were, and less about the hivers and tundra dwellers, who had too much of the book's time.

Dixon's tale posits a world in which two extremes are each given their playground: pragmatism and dogmatic Luddism. One camp dies out, another becomes a twisted version of what it once was, and everything caught in the middle suffers for it.

Ouch. This book will stay with you, for better or worse, and in the end its bravery merits acclaim.

Catfish Dogfight says

This is an interesting attempt at illustrating possibilities in human evolution, but his rendering of post human bodies bugs the hell out of me. He uses a style that can best be described as "derp". Seriously, Dixon, take some life drawing classes. Gah!

Also, rumors of plagiarism off Wayne Barlowe.

Summer says

Although Dixon himself said he didn't want to write this book, it is actually a pretty cool (and in some

places, pretty scary) idea. The book is a short narrative done in different view points of various evolved forms of humans several thousands of years from now. The prose is okay, but the illustrations and ideas behind them are what you really come to the book for. Of course, everything in here is fiction based on science, so there is no guarantee of anything that it portrays happenining... but there is nothing to say that it won't either.

Zac Cronin says

Love it. So cool. Love the pictures

Peacegal says

Sci-fi imagines the craziest extremes in the future of human- and nature- controlled evolution of our species.

Yes, much of it is dated--the big, clunky "futuristic" machines and the rather sexist imaginings of hominid society. However, it should be entertaining to those readers who enjoy imaginative and bizarre illustrations and material.

Amy says

I really enjoyed this book, despite all the negative reviews I have seen. It was a real trip. Once I opened this book up, I couldn't put it down.

People say that it's far fetched (I agree), depressing (yeah, much of it is), and inaccurate in many ways. I'm no scientist so I'm not going to complain about the scientific inaccuracies much. But I can, from a layman's point of view, pretty much agree with that too.

The book is basically about man's future on Earth and begins 200 years in the future. Man has pretty much wrecked the planet, and he's on his way out, so it seems. Scientists begin making genetically engineered humans that can live in places regular homo sapiens cannot. For instance, outer space. The Vacumorph is an odd, bug-looking like critter that lives in space and fixes space vessels. From the outside, it doesn't look human at all; but there is a skeletal structure diagram that shows a very human-like skeleton. This skeleton is protected by a tough shield, so the creature can withstand the vacuum of space.

And that's just one of the more interesting morphs in this book. Others include the Tics, who are these gig, blob-like creatures that body parts are grafted onto (a homo sapien lives inside the "blob," which is referred to as a cradle). Before the tics, cradles were machines (there is one picture of one guy inside what sort of looks like a steam shovel). Man has advanced far enough to where certain people that could not live like normal humans can be kept alive in the "cradles". They are on life support and eat synthetic foods. They're very vulnerable outside their cradles.

Another of the freakiest "future men" are the parasites and hosts. Way down the line, a few million years or so, certain humans that resemble the Abominable snowman without hair develop into big eating machines that serve as "hosts" for smaller, blood sucking, vampire-bat-like humans. They latch on, sucking blood of

the host. Really crazy stuff!

That's just a few.

I saw this more of a sci-fi fictional type thing than a factual book (which others have said). It was very entertaining, yet dismal. According to Dixon, man's future is not very bright. The Homo sapiens that were left when man was in decline developed into sort of "tribes" in the ruins of the cities where they had to fend for themselves. Basically, they became cavemen again. Only a select few were chosen to go into space and try to colonize elsewhere.

Homo sapiens eventually die out, and the genetically engineered critters are left to do whatever they do. One thing they do is evolve into even more freaky creatures. The saga ends at 5,000,000 years in the future. By now, "man" isn't even recognizable.

I won't spoil the ending for you. You need to experience that for yourself. Not a real optimistic book, for sure. That's all I will say.

One review I read about this book argued that man could not possibly evolve that much and that quickly in the time range given in the book. That was one of the first things I thought about, after I started reading this, in fact. But I guess with the genetic engineering thrown in there, Dixon figured that it'd go nuts.

The illustrations are just plain out there. Many of the humans just look like apes, or early man, but there are some doozies in this book, like mentioned above. I found myself, after getting done with the book, going back several times just to look at the illustrations. Several people commented that the illustrations weren't very well done. I agree that some of the anatomy was off, but then...was it? These are all imagined beasts/humans after all. I wasn't turned off by the pictures as far as quality, but some were pretty disturbing (for instance, the tics. They just gave me the heebie-jo-jeebies.)

For entertainment purposes, this book is a fun, interesting read. It was hard for me to put down. I love Dougal Dixon's work, especially the speculative works, such as *The New Dinosaurs* (which I am reading next.)

Dixon went all-out with this book, and I think he probably had a lot of fun with this one, letting his imagination go wild. As said though, some of it is dismal. Many of the descendants of man have a really rough go at it.

Though many people argue that it is his weakest work, or worst work, I disagree. It was as fun and intriguing to me as any of his other stuff. I think maybe people were turned off because most of man's descendants in Dixon's future world are not pretty, and many are not real nice.

All in all, a good read, in my opinion. Just don't take it too seriously.

Peter says

Compared with the other titles by Dixon, this is a major misstep. The premise and many of the ideas presented are intriguing, but I severely dislike the ridiculously unrealistic timeframe that the evolution of Dixon's future human species is set in. I mean, come on ! Even if we accept that many of the starting stock

species were genetically engineered and have some latent special capabilities "built in", the time it takes them to evolve into a completely new form is laughably short - just a few hundreds or few thousands of years (like, only 2000 !). Even us, the currently last human species, have had a vaguely unchanged form for 40 000 years (and yet we are still evolving, even though it's visible only in small details over the many millenia and not some kind of Hollywood Turbo Evolution (tm) as in this book) ! Furthermore, while the posthuman stuff in the early chapters of the book is pretty much fully believable, many of the latter species that crop up in the book are borderline cartoonish or act nothing like an extinct or existing natural species would... Doug seems to understand evolution pretty well, but I just get the feeling he can't resist the urge to make "clap your hand if you believe, because this is cool shit" assumptions, that needlessly bring the book's atmosphere into the realm of uneducated pulp sci-fi. And this isn't the first time he's done the same mistake : Even his true classics, *After Man* and *The New Dinosaurs*, are often burdened by needlessly out-there species - for instance, the "parashrew" of *After Man* shook my suspension of disbelief, which until then had no problems with the fictional future animals presented. The concept of the parashrew was laughably stupid and that particular creature seemed less like the work of Dixon and more like something out of the fantasies of a five year old. That's basically, what most of the future human species in *Man After Man* are - very promising speculative ideas overburdened by piling irrelevant, random and overall daft pseudo-scientific crap on top of them, killing any semblance of seriousness.

Juushika says

I originally read this book when I was 13, and picked it up again these many years later out of nostalgia. Unfortunately my nostalgia was largely misplaced: Dixon's *After Man* is the book I remember so fondly; *Man After Man* by comparison is something of a disappointment. It has a similar premise: pulling on evolutionary trends of the past, Dixon looks forward and projects possible variations and forms that mankind may adopt in the distant future. In *Man After Man*, however, these predictions are based on a combination of genetic engineering and natural evolution. Near-future man creates genetically reversed-engineered variations of himself, stripped of nearly all human intelligence and built to fill niches in the ecosystem vacated by extinct animals; over time, these human animals evolve into fitter, sometimes more intelligent forms.

Stripping mankind of society, intelligence, and recognizable human form, most human evolutions in *Man After Man* hardly seem human or futuristic—which rather defeats the purpose of the book. Yet most of the future evolutions remain constrained to variation of the same human/primate form, and so feel uninspired and repetitive. Narrative sections add a personal, sometimes refreshing, element, but the writing style is unremarkable. Mediocre art which (even after suspending disbelief for genetically engineered, distantly evolved forms) never feels entirely convincing or realistic does a lot to drag down the book. Which isn't to say that *Man After Man* is all bad: there are some clever ideas, a few fascinating evolutions, and at least a basis in rational explanation which, combined with the short length and plentiful illustrations, make the book a quick, fairly absorbing read. But *Man After Man* isn't half as inventive, entertaining, or thought-provoking as it could be (or as Dixon's other books are), and so it's a disappointment. I don't recommend it.
