Consumers Guide to a Brave New World

Wesley J. Smith
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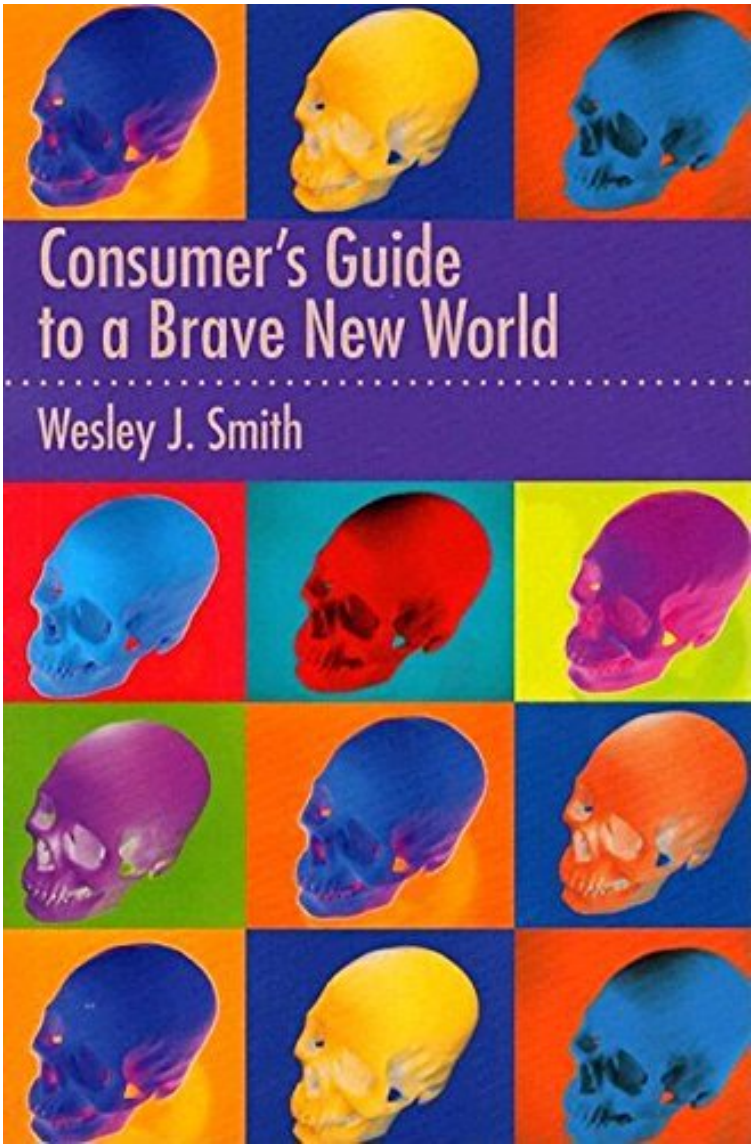

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Wesley J. Smith : Consumers Guide to a Brave New World before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Consumers Guide to a Brave New World:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Embryos are human beingsBy Bobby BambinoThis book is fantastic! Anyone who is interested in the stem cell research debate from a secular point of view. There is no mention of God or religion or the bible. Just clear, rational thinking about the debate. Smith, I believe, is the pioneer of the "human exceptionalism" philosophy, which I very much admire him for.13 of 16 people found the following review

helpful. Fascinating and IlluminatingBy R. J. MarsellaI found this book to be extremely informative and learned quite a bit from reading it. Prior to reading this my exposure to the issues inherent in some of the biotechnological initiatives discussed here was what is presented/argued about in the mainstream media. Mr. Smith has done an admirable job in describing the details associated with cloning and stem cell research , embryonic as well as adult. His arguments regarding the scientific and ethical dilmma that these potentially powerful technologies represent are thought provoking and logically presented. There is a tremendous amount of misinformation out there regarding these issues on both sides of the argument. This book lays out the conservative viewpoint in scientific terminology and I beleve that Mr. Smith has made a valuable contibution to the debate that our society is engaged in on which direction to take with these technologies.8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. How brave a new world?By Bill MuehlenbergIn 1932 Aldous Huxley wrote his prophetic and chilling novel, Brave New World. In it he mapped out a future in which science, instead of being a great help to mankind, becomes the undoing of human nature and personhood.Seventy years on one has to ask where we now stand. Smith thinks the picture does not look good. While we can all be grateful for advances in science and technology which have extended life, healed diseases, and made us all much more comfortable, there is also a dark side to this progress. It is this negative side, and its potential, that this volume addresses.Smith looks at many of the recent and controversial issues in biotechnology, chief among them, genetic engineering, human cloning and stem cell research. He does a good job of explaining where we are with these developments, and the various possible shortcomings they may raise.But of real value in this book is the author's concern to not just focus on the biotechnologies alone, but to look at the bigger picture. Where are these developments taking us as human beings? How are these new advances impacting on our understanding of humanity and human worth? Are moral and ethical concerns being swept under the carpet as we race ahead with scientific breakthroughs?Smith reminds us that it is all too easy for prudence and ethical interests to be sidelined in the chase for fame and fortune. Careful, objective science can easily be compromised and marginalised when so much is at stake.Smith notes that we now see the rise of a new scientific-industrial complex, every bit as worrying as past alliances with the private sector. Both academia and the scientific community are becoming increasingly cozy with the profit-making community. While that may not be bad in itself, an unduly cozy relationship may well mean trouble ahead.Thus the reality of Big Biotech is now a genuine concern as much as is Big Oil or Big Tobacco. As but one indication, in the past quarter century $100 billion has been poured into the biotech sector. As a result biotechnology companies today are largely research and fund-raising machines. And the old adage of `those who pay the piper call the tune' is very much a real concern.And the money trail flows in all directions. Not only does Big Business drive much of the biotech agenda, but the latter in turn spends billions each year in public relations and political campaigns. The industry has many staff working full-time as paid-lobbyists and PR wizards, actively seeking to influence not only public opinion but the flow of tax-dollars.Of course many of these biotech companies have ethical advisors who are meant to act as a safeguard against any untoward influences. The real fear is that this is just a case of ethics for sale. Many of these bioethicists are simply putting the company spin on things. Few are genuinely objective, neutral and independent. Most are in the pay of their masters and will happily do their masters' bidding. After all, if the main concern is to get a good return on investment to stockholders, what company will hire an ethicist to work against that concern?Smith documents numerous cases of such questionable ethical advice, and how financial concerns very clearly determine much of the direction of the biotech industry.Another major concern highlighted in this book is the transformation of objective science into scientism. Scientism is the idea that science alone, unclouded by any moral and other input, can decide what is best for us. Science is seen as saviour and the sole source of truth. The humility and objectivity needed for good science are jettisoned for an ideology that eschews other considerations.This of course is a real concern, since much of the new bioscience is dealing with issues that have profound consequences for humanity and society. With so much at stake, other influences need to be brought to bear. Philosophical, theological and ethical input is crucially needed, but is often rejected altogether. Science begins to be seen as an end in itself, instead of a means to an end.Thus science itself is becoming tainted in this process, and any concerns about how humanity may suffer as a result are seldom discussed. But Smith certainly raises the issues. He knows that the political and financial pressures brought to bear on the biosciences are having a very real negative effect.One clear negative effect is the return of eugenics. This can especially be seen in the rise of Transhumanism. This philosophy states that any means available could and should be used to enhance individuals and their progeny. A very well funded and organised Transhumanist movement is quite clear about its goals: the transformation of human evolution by means of bioengineering and other emerging techniques. The aim is to create a "posthuman" species, free of the defects and limitations of mere humanity.But the pursuit of human perfection always comes at a price. We should have learned our lessons years ago. But we are ignoring those lessons and repeating those mistakes. All the warnings of Huxley and others are falling on deaf ears.Thus this book serves as a wake-up call. There are tremendous goods and benefits to come from the new technologies, and Smith is quick to point those out, but there are very real fears as well.The future is very much in our hands, and Smith reminds us that it is not enough to have science alone or the marketplace alone determine how we proceed. The advances of science and technology need to be counterbalanced by advances in ethical and social reflection. And this volume very nicely serves that purpose.

Cloning researchers claim to have cloned an embryo that is mostly human, but also part animal. Biotech companies brag about manufacturing human embryos as "products" for use in medical treatments. Echoing long discredited master-race thinking, James Watson, who won a Nobel Prize for co-discovering the DNA double helix, claims that genetically enhanced people will someday "dominate the world." Events are moving so fast--and biotechnology seems so complicated--that many of us worry that we can't have an informed opinion about these issues that are remaking the human future before our very eyes. But now Wesley J. Smith provides us with a guide to the brave new world that is no longer a figment of our imagination but right around the corner of our lives. Smith starts with the basic questions. What are stem cells? What is the difference between embryonic stem cells and adult stem cells and which is most promising for medical therapy? What does embryonic stem cell research involve and why is it so controversial? What is its relationship to human cloning? But in addition to explaining the science of stem cells, this highly readable and carefully researched book reports on the gargantuan "Big Biotech" industry and its supporters in the universities and in the science and bioethics establishments. Smith shows how this lobby works and how the lure of huge riches, mixed with the ideology of "scientism," threatens to impose a "new eugenics" on society that would dismantle ethical norms and call into question the uniqueness and importance of all human life. "A Consumer's Guide to Brave New World" presents a clear-eyed vision of two potential futures. In one we will use biotechnology as a powerful tool to treat disease and improve the quality of our lives. But in another, darker scenario, we will be steered onto the anti-human path Aldous Huxley and other prophetic writers first warned against fifty years ago when science fiction had not yet become science fact.

From Publishers WeeklyEver since the cloning of Dolly in 1997, critics have warned that human society has begun sliding down the slippery slope to posthumanity. In a rather repetitious and bland look at the moral questions arising out of biotechnologies such as cloning and stem cell technology, Smith (The Culture of Death: The Assault on Medical Ethics in America) does offer some helpful insight into the practices themselves. Much like Leon Kass, the chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics, and Francis Fukuyama (Our Posthuman Future), Smith argues that any medical or scientific development that diminishes human dignity"the intrinsic worthiness of embodied human life"ought to be avoided, regardless of the good it promises. Smith contends that the technologies are not in and of themselves pernicious; rather, the political, ideological and entrepreneurial promotion of any scientific advance, he asserts, can lead us to ignore its dangers (for instance, producing a hybrid pig-human embryo). Smith opposes human reproductive cloning and embryonic stem cell technology. On the other hand, he argues that some advances, such as adult stem cell technology and umbilical cord blood/stem cell technology (which has been used to treat sickle-cell anemia), should be embraced. Along the way, Smith makes some mistakesJoseph Fletcher, for example, is not the "patriarch of bioethics"and his case has been stated better and more forcefully by others, notably Kass. Smith deserves exceptionally high marks for providing an eminently readable, profoundly insightful and thoughtful conversation on the impact of biotechnology. -- American ConservativeAbout the AuthorWesley J Smith lives in Castro Valley, California with his wife, the syndicated columnist Debra Saunders.