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Philosophy & Technology Bootcamp
I For One Welcome Our New Robot Overlords

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Should you be allowed to use genetic testing and engineering to ensure that your baby is not pre-disposed to certain genetically-linked illnesses? How about choosing the gender of your baby? Or eye color? Or height; strength; musical talent; intelligence?

What about machines? How intelligent can we make them? How intelligent *should* we make them? Can we make them intelligent enough that they can go on and make *themselves* more intelligent – sometimes called “the singularity”? Should we?

Science and engineering seems to know no bounds, and is rapidly developing the ability to do all this and more. Since there were humans, Humanists have speculated about the consequences of human actions – think Prometheus, Adam and Eve, through *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* and Carl Kapek’s robot play, “R.U.R.” In 2000, Bill Joy, the co-founder of Sun Microsystems, wrote an article for *Wired*, called “Why the Future Doesn’t Need Us.” In it he argues that technology will make humans obsolete. The Joy article (ironically named) is worth a look: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.04/joy.html>. Here is a response to Joy by John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid. You can decide which side has the stronger case: <http://www.aaas.org/spp/rd/ch4.pdf>.

All this points to the enduring question, “Do We Control Technology or Does Technology Control Us?” Wouldn’t it be ironic if the defining feature of humans – the use of tools – proves to be our undoing. Or, as Elizabeth Kolbert glumly concludes in her 2006 book, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*, “It may seem impossible to imagine that a technologically advanced society could choose, in essence, to destroy itself, but that is what we are now in the process of doing.”

And so the question: What *more* can the Humanities contribute to tame this whirlwind? (Whatever it is contributing now does not seem to be enough.) Or is the role of the Humanities just to keep us distracted, content, and out of the way?