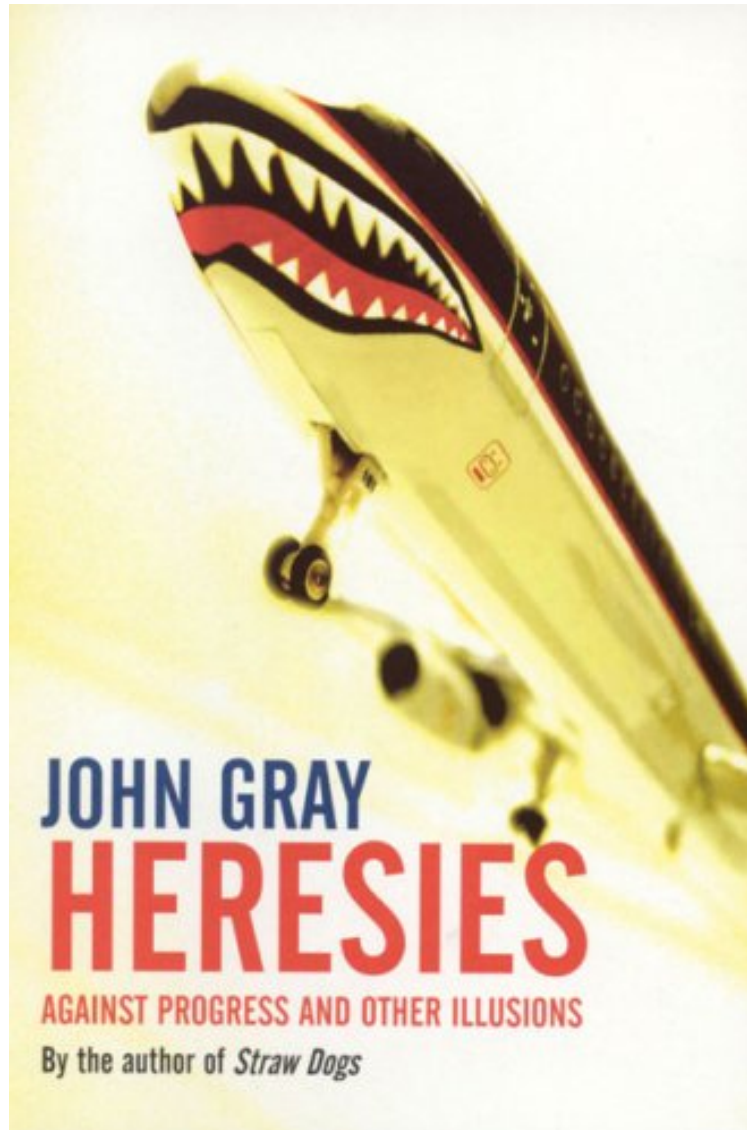


(Read free ebook) Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions

## Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions

John Gray

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**John Gray : Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A good introduction to MrBy James MaysAn interesting read, even if you don't agree with his point of view: well reasoned an interesting position. What if progress? why do we accept it in such a doctrinaire manner? Why or humans [or that sub-group, Christians] of any more value than any other form [live or otherwise]?A good introduction to Mr. Gray's thought, but best to move on to his other books, beginning with

the latest [Straw Dogs, etc] and then on to his earlier work.<sup>5</sup> of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Fascinating but speculative arguments...By D. D. John Gray certainly has his own style and perspective, which can be very interesting to read even when you disagree with him. He clearly aims for and enjoys a provocative tone, and the hyperbolic tendency that so often accompanies that method is not absent here. On the other hand, it isn't nearly as prevalent as you might think after a title like "Heresies" (sounds just like the kind of title Ann Coulter might use), or essay titles such as "Homo Rapiens". Most of these essays are short, lean and straightforward, if occasionally repetitive. Though Gray is a celebrated contemporary philosopher, this is really more of a collection of opinion pieces than a philosophy book. All of the essays here were originally published in Gray's column in *The New Statesman*, so there's not a lot of room to make well supported arguments. If you'd prefer Gray's philosophy straight, you'd be better off heading over to his book of aphorisms, *STRAW DOGS*. The first of the three sections of this book, "The Illusions Of Progress" is it's best, and it's where you'll find the bedrock of Gray's thought and his politics. For Gray, God, or at least Allah, is far from dead, and is thriving beyond the West. It's only Western Christianity that's withering, while secular humanism haunts us as it's ghost. Gray believes that history is cyclic rather than progressive, and that humanity's essential situation is unchanging. As to this, of course, we can really only speculate, but don't expect to be reminded of that here. Here is his central postulate, from the introduction - "Postmodern thinkers may question scientific progress, but it is undoubtedly real. The illusion is the belief that it can affect any fundamental alteration to the human condition...History is not an ascending spiral of human advance, or even an inch by inch crawl to a better world. It is an unending cycle in which changing knowledge interacts with unchanging human need." Gray isn't the first philosopher to have a serious bone to pick with Progress (at least as far back as Kierkegaard this idea was being expressed), and there's no space to critique it here. There really isn't space in *HERESIES* either, but Gray has a straightforward way of writing that excludes most of the annoying jargon that these subjects are usually quarantined to. That alone places this book above so many others of it's type. There are many persuasive passages throughout this book that bear him out, and he also happens to be conducting his attack on Progress at a time when faith in Science and Technology is at an all time high. Because of this, I'd really like to have seen him deal in more specific and extensive terms with the ideologies surrounding those two twin faiths and the fallacies therein. I plan to read his newest, "The Immortalization Commission" next, which will hopefully be more thorough. In 2012 I'm afraid the second section is far less interesting, unless you are the rare person who feels they haven't read enough about the early years of the U.S./Iraq conflict. Not only that, but I feel that such "real life" situations are where Gray's philosophy is at it's weakest. The downside of his ideas is that they condemn him to fluctuate between fatalism and activism, unable to reconcile the tension between the two convincingly. There seemed to be nothing but directionless pessimism (not unwarranted perhaps, but entirely useless) to these entries until after the war was "won", when everything went to hell and anyone could see it. Advocating no unilateral policy seems wise if it is based in the belief that each situation is complex and deserving of evaluation on it's own terms. If I'm being generous I'll credit him with that foresight, but I'm not entirely convinced he wasn't just as fraught with uncertainty about the situation as many of the rest of us at the time. From then on, things are hit or miss. Joseph Conrad? Guess what he didn't believe in. Thatcher was bad, Blair bad too, yabba dabba do. His positions on the European political situation of the day are well spoken but seem a bit obvious, much like the Iraq essays. There are still some thoughtful moments though, such as the entirely relevant and engaging piece on the drug war, his spot-on diatribe against human overpopulation and the book's last essay on Guy Debord, an under recognized thinker on technology and capitalism. I will say this for him; I can't remember the last time I had such a volatile reaction to a single book. One passage would have me cheering in the stands and then the next would leave me shaking my head in frustrated disagreement. He writes with unapologetic vigor for his subject and no mercy for the dismayed. I was glad for it when we agreed, and when we didn't his smugness really got on my nerves. Are we to see every progressive as, at best, a pointless fool flailing his arms about, and, at worst, a deluded, dangerous totalitarian? Even if we were to accept that we can manage only temporary improvements in our lot, wouldn't we still have to face the same perils? In what way would our methodology, our science and technology be different if we acknowledged only temporary gains? Gray never fleshes this out, at least not in this book. He grants that some cultures may have need of "useful myths", and that these may differ from culture to culture. However, nowhere in the book does he mention what it may mean for us to adopt his story of humanity, to regard it as one malignant, rapacious, narcoleptic organism, headed for inevitable destruction. What use might this myth be put to, or does that even matter? Of course, how pleasant or unpleasant a theory is has no bearing on it's verity. Gray has said in interviews that he's not in the consolation business, and in general anyone looking for that from philosophy had better stick to coffee table books. You'll have to make up your own mind about *Heresies*, but if these subjects are your kind of thing, then it's a good read.<sup>0</sup> of 0 people found the following review helpful. Read this if you want to read thing prophetic about ...By Bruce Letsch Read this if you want to read thing prophetic about the times we are entering, especially if Trump wins the 2016 election.

By the author of the best-selling *Straw Dogs*, this book is a characteristically trenchant and unflinchingly clear-sighted collection of reflections on our contemporary lot. Whether writing about the future of our species on this planet, the

folly of our faith in technological progress, or the self-deceptions of the liberal establishment, John Gray dares to be heretical like few other thinkers today.

From Publishers Weekly Gray, a philosopher and professor at the London School of Economics, sounds like the quintessential grumpy, world-weary intellectual: he disagrees with almost everyone and is pessimistic about almost everything. In these essays, originally published in the *New Statesman*, he contents himself with criticizing ideas and politics on both the right and left, but proposes little that might solve the problems he sees, apart from a typically contrarian endorsement of the use of torture (arguing that "in a truly liberal society, terrorists have an inalienable right to be tortured") and a wishful argument for why Europe needs to style itself as a "counterweight to American power." The book is divided into three parts: the first expands on Gray's view that humans (he calls them "Homo rapiens") have an apocalyptic capacity for self-destruction; the second looks at the war on terror; and the third focuses on European, mainly British, politics. Many of the essays revolve around current events—the earliest was written in 1999, the most recent in early 2004—but they already feel dated and distant, especially when he refers to the aftermath of 9/11 and the early stages of the Iraq war. Theoretically, Gray's cynical, nonpartisan opinion might appeal to Americans frustrated with the ideological polarization and intransigence of American politics, but his relentlessly crotchety discussion of not-so-current events is most likely to turn off readers. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. About the Author John Gray's books include the best-selling *Straw Dogs*. He is Professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics.