

# [The issue of science without ethics as shown through margaret atwood’s oryx and c...](https://assignbuster.com/the-issue-of-science-without-ethics-as-shown-through-margaret-atwoods-oryx-and-crake/)

In the emerging technical age the idea of science without ethics has turned into a center stage issue. Throughout Margaret Atwood’s novel Oryx and Crake, science without ethics is explored through two dystopian worlds engineered by Atwood all from the eyes of the protagonist Jimmy, or Snowman—as he is known after humanity was demolished by a devastating plague. The world Jimmy has constant flashbacks to throughout the novel depicts a time in the arguably not so near future where science and technology seem to develop faster than ethics and human responsibility. The second world Atwood manufactures is a post-human world where “ Crakers,” creatures similar to humans but without human flaws are among the last living things on the planet, in addition to overrun genetically engineered animals such as rakhunks, wolvogs, and pigoons. Jimmy’s twisted and morally questionable childhood friend Crake is behind the collapse of humanity and overall is a symbol of all of the negative possibilities that can result from scientific thinking detached from ethics.

Throughout the novel, Atwood toys with the idea of anthropocentricism, the idea that in the world humans are the dominant and the most morally significant animals. Through Crake and his obsession with science without ethics, Atwood explores the dangers of trying to push the limits of humanity and anthropocentricism; she turns Oryx and Crake into a cautionary tale of the future. Throughout Oryx and Crake, Atwood contrasts Crake’s science obsessed character with Jimmy who broadly embodies the humanities. With all of the cold and detached futuristic madness that takes place within the novel, Jimmy acts as a voice of reason, a voice of the humanities. In order to create the character of the almighty Crake, Atwood begins his interactions with Jimmy as a teenager. High on marijuana, Jimmy and Crake would play computer games centered around creation and destruction, such as “ Barbarian Stomp (See if you can change history” or “ Blood and Roses.” Jimmy describes Blood and Roses as a trading game similar to Monopoly, except this game’s content is much more vulgar. Jimmy describes the Blood side as playing with, “ human atrocities for the counters, atrocities on a large scale: individual rapes and murders didn’t count, there had to have been a large number of people wiped out. Massacres, genocides, that sort of thing. The Roses side played with human achievements,” (Atwood 79). In addition to the vile computer games that the boys played, the pair also watched a fair deal of child pornography. Crake appears to be incredibly intrigued by both activities, Jimmy quietly plays along but he actively knows that these actions and games are morally wrong, at one point he even calls “ Blood and Roses” a, “ wicked game,” (79). At this point in the novel, the reader begins to understand that Crake is a budding psychopath with an inflated ego and a nasty god-complex, which contrasts with Jimmy. Though Jimmy is flawed, as the narrator of the tale he is the only voice of ethics, or moral reasoning. Overall, Crake is mentally detached from what evil he is doing in the games or what evil it is watching child pornography, and his cold manner is what makes him susceptible to devoting his life to science without ethics, and basically singlehandedly bringing mankind to its terrible and bloody demise.

In the futuristic society Atwood manufactures, science without ethics is predominant and people are incredibly enamored by biotechnology and its potential benefits. Near the beginning of the novel, in one of Jimmy’s many flashbacks to the world before, Jimmy remembers pigoons, which are essentially a genetically modified pig whose sole purpose on the planet was to, “ grow an assortment of fool proof human-tissue organs in a trans genetic knockout pig host—organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more strains every year,” (22). The anthropocentricism in Jimmy’s society is so dominant that the biotechnology companies have resorted to altering other species in order to supplement their own trans humanistic needs. However, what Jimmy’s society does not realize is that trans humanism comes at a price, what happens when a change in life expectancy occurs for humans? A change in human life expectancy means a severe negative impact on both the environment which humans actively and knowingly trash daily, and a devastating impact on species besides humans. To further the negative effect of anthropocentricism, Crake reveals that most of the “ bugs had now been ironed out, said Crake, and new varieties were appearing every month… ‘ If you could tell they were fake,’ said Crake, ‘ it was a bad job. These butterflies fly, they mate, they lay eggs, caterpillars come out.” (200). Biotechnology companies in this age are essentially play god, and they see no harm in what they are doing when messing around with other species because in their head they believe that they are the center of the universe, they see no negatives to playing god because they trust that technology and science will fix whatever problems arise.

Within the novel, Crake is not alone in exploiting both humans and nature. It is revealed that the biotechnology corporations such as HelthWyzer or RejoovenEssence that dominate the society not only strive to expand human life expectancy, but also manufacture new diseases in order to get people to rely on their products. Science stripped of ethics in these private profit biotechnology companies forces one to question the value of humanity, not only are humans altering other species to benefit themselves, but they are also making their peers and kin ill on purpose to feed their sadistic capitalistic needs. These evil and dehumanizing projects were kept a secret from the general population, obviously to avoid an utter up rise, and once people found out about them, such as Jimmy’s mother or Crake’s father, they were disposed of; their morality and ethics got them killed. Throughout Jay Sanderson’s scholarly article, “ Pigoons, Rakhunks, and Crakers: Margaret Atwood’s Oryx and Crake and Genetically Engineered Animals in a (Latourian) Hybrid World,” Sanderson argues that citizens in Jimmy’s society are so infatuated by biotechnology and its potential benefits that they are willing to take Crake’s BlyssPluss pill without knowing or really caring about its side effects because they hoped that it would improve their quality of life and help take away their vulnerability as humans. Little did these people know that the BlyssPluss pill actually contained Crake’s deadly Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary (JUVE), which causes the human body to completely shut down, resulting in mass human extinction (Sanderson 220). It can be argued that Crake is not completely evil in tricking society into taking a pill that will end its existence, as they know it. In humans, Crake sees a species that is slowly killing itself and they planet that they inhabit. Resources are getting scarcer, pollution created by humans is making the climate harsher, and classes are becoming more prevalent—resulting in wars and turmoil within the species. Crake sees that humanity itself cannot be saved, so he devises to create a “ better” species.

Near the end of the novel when the two dystopian worlds collide, Crake introduces Jimmy to his life work, the “ Crakers.” Throughout his life, Crake’s isolation from human emotions and things that make people really “ human” had made him into a cold-hearted and logical man who is obsessed with the idea of science without ethics. Crake does not value humanity, Crake sees humanity as weak—which truly separates him from the rest of his population who are heavily anthropocentric. Like many other species before humans, Crake foresees the extinction of mankind, but he quickens it with the BlyssPluss pill, which is sent out worldwide and successfully massacres nearly all of humanity, except for Jimmy and possibly a few others, as Atwood leaves readers to believe at the end of the novel. Throughout Crake’s life stages Atwood throws in whimsical quips on his refrigerator magnets, in Crake’s college life they were much more playful, but near the end of Crake’s life they turned into messages about creation, such as “ Where God is, Man is not,” (Atwood 301), because here, Crake is disregarding all other life forms and playing God. Crake’s life obsession and work was with his “ Crakers” which are simply put, extremely genetically modified humans. By taking positive and advantageous aspects from many different species Crake creates the “ perfect” human—or creature.

The Children of Crake are not destructive creatures; Crake had taken all evil “ human” tendencies away. Within the Children of Crake there were no notions of racism, and with that there was no presence of the negative repercussions of racism. There was no need for hierarchy, all of the Crakes were equal, and no class system is present. The Children of Crake are not territorial; they share their land equally. For them, food will never be a driving separating factor within the population because the Children of Crake eat roots, berries, and leaves—and there are always plentiful stashes of such. Sexuality will never be a torment to them, because like most mammals the Children of Crake go into heat at regular intervals—so they do not waste their time brooding over lost love or unrequited love. The Children of Crake only live until about thirty, so there is no fear of mortality, or as far as Crake knows seeing that at his demise the “ Crakers” were nowhere near their thirty-year mark of self-destruction (305). Most importantly in the Children of Crake, absent is the tendency to make art or to believe in a God or religion. Crake had tried to take away almost everything that makes one human. Whenever Snowman (Jimmy) interacts with the “ Crakers” one learns that they are naïve and simple creatures.

However, as the novel progresses what Crake desired out of these efficient beings begins to slip. Near the middle of the novel as Snowman decides to take his adventure he stops at the Children of Crake’s campground to let him know that he is leaving, as he arrives at the camp he is greeted by Abraham Lincoln. Snowman notes that the one called Abraham Lincoln is getting to be, “ a bit of a leader, that one. Watch out for the leaders, Crake used to say. First the leaders and the led, then the tyrants and the slaves, then the massacres. That’s how it’s always gone.” (155) so here, one can see that a form of hierarchy is becoming prevalent within the “ perfect group.” As a stab at Crake for betraying him and killing off his loved ones and humanity as a whole, Snowman presents Crake to the “ Crakers” as a god, essentially going against Crake’s final wishes. Hints of a strong religion developing occur when the “ Crakers” begin to actively worship Crake as a God and constantly inquire Snowman about him. In addition when Snowman leaves to set out on his journey to the buildings of the old world in search of booze and supplies, the “ Crakers” create an idol of Snowman and begin praying and chanting to it, desperately hoping for Snowman’s safe return. Out of all of the things Crake was able to omit, he was not able to get rid of signing and dreaming, those two random human actions, according to Crake, are two things that are too human to take away from even the most simple of creatures. The fact that Crake was unable to skip certain aspects of humanity when creating the “ Crakers” says a lot about base values of humanity, one is never able to fully get rid of traditional humanity as a whole. Atwood leaves readers to question, is this the only way humanity will survive, to kill it off and start again? On the other hand, seeing the “ Crakers” go against Crake’s wishes in developing a religion and such, one has to wonder, will the “ Crakers” even make it, or will they turn out just like the civilization that proceeded them and have a tragic end just like humanity? Overall, Margaret Atwood’s novel Oryx and Crake illustrates the potential dilemmas and unintended consequences of biotechnology gone too far.

Through the two dystopian worlds created by Atwood and explored by Jimmy/Snowman, Atwood paints a terrifying picture of a techno-centric world that may not be too far away. If humans continue to be anthropocentric and keep messing with the other species and with the planet all for their own benefit, then this dystopian world really is right around the corner. Anthropocentricism leads to trans humanism, but one-day technology will no longer be able to be a Band-Aid on all human limitations, such as food shortages, climate change, and even mortality. Oryx and Crake leaves readers with a cautionary tale of what happens when humans decide to play God, and what happens when science is stripped from ethics.