

“How Humans are Shaping Our Own Evolution” by D.T. Max

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Just like other species in existence today, human beings are a result of years of evolution and have come to the point where they are taking matters into their own words. According to D. T Max, in his article “How Humans are Shaping Our Own Evolution,” which was featured in 2017 in the National Geographic magazine, humans are on the verge of redefining the means by which they evolve.

In his opinion, evolution is not only dependent on the slow grind of natural selection but also on everything that humans do to amplify their powers using the union of genes, culture, and technology. D.T. Max uses strong sources to increase credibility and appeal to ethos while at the same time employing convincing statistics and facts to appeal to logos in attempts to succeed in convincing the reader’s emotional appeal or pathos. In essence, the purpose of this article is to persuade governments and corporations that technology is faster and can bolster our physical skills so that we can further expand into more challenging situations.

D.T. Max sets the stage by sharing the experience he had when he visited cyborg Neil Harbisson in Barcelona. Harbisson, 34, had a rare condition known as achromatopsia, which hindered his ability to perceive color (Max, 45). This necessitated the intervention of a doctor whose name remains undisclosed to plant a black antenna at the back of Harbisson’s blond hair. This device had fiber-optic sensors that were responsible for detecting colors in front of him and sending the signals to the end of his head. In essence, technological intervention changed Harbisson’s life and proved that evolution could be influenced by human interventions.

Throughout the article, Max cites many sources that strengthen the position of his argument and appeal to ethos. To begin with, he mentions the works of Ray Kurzweil in the book, “The Singularity Is New,” and describes Harbisson’s current state as a result of the vast expansion of human potential. Other sources that Max uses to increase his credibility include a recent article by scientist and paleoanthropologist John Hawks, “Origin of Species” by Charles Darwin, molecular engineer George Church, cyberpunk writer William Gibson, and microbiologist Elodie Ghedin, among others. Citing these writings or words boosts Max’s credibility and indicates that he has done his research thoroughly and is confident to provide expert opinions and reasons that support his claims (Max, 50). D. T. Max’s profile describes him as the author of the renowned “The Family That Couldn’t Sleep: A Medical Mystery” and a frequent contributor to the National Geographic publications meaning that he keenly follows on matters to do with evolution and thus is well equipped and qualified to write as a credible author.

Adding to his ethos appeal, D.T. Max effectively appeals to pathos in the beginning and the middle section of the article when he narrates about Neil Harbisson’s condition. The introduction of the story

is felt with emotional phrases and words to create a sympathetic image. The author describes the antenna as an “exhilarating” gadget that made Harbisson neither perceive it “like sight nor hearing aid” but as a “sixth sense” that enabled him to perceive colors correctly. The image that the author creates in the reader’s mind invokes pity and effectively allows us to associate with Harbisson’s condition as well as to embrace the technology that helps him. Onwards, Max describes the antenna as a device that gave Harbisson an ability that the rest of the people did not have. Harbisson had “not just matched ordinary human skills; he had exceeded them.” Another appeal to pathos is shown by emotionally charged statements that the author makes concerning the antenna. As the world’s first official cyborg, Max reaches the hearts of many readers when Harbisson persuades the government to allow him to wear the antenna, claiming that it has become an extension of his brain. Also, the author uses the influenza pandemic of 1918 to appeal to pathos (Max, 54). He says that if such an epidemic were to happen today, those with a resistant mechanism against the pathogen would survive due to the evolutionary advantage as the rest of the population is wiped out. D.T. Max, in this particular line, sympathizes with the readers and illustrates how technology can help overcome certain predicaments.

DX Max has played into the ideals of logos. He has a well-developed list of material facts as well as detailed statistics which work to reinforce his main argument. He also adds to this by giving his work a continuous flow of ideas that guide a leader toward understanding his argument on how human beings are influencing their evolution curve. DX Max offers accurate accounts of how different personalities in history exposed to very adverse conditions muster their own genome to counter the conditions and pass it down to the generation. “...the ancestors of all non-Africans came out of Africa with dark skin. Indeed, even 10,000 years ago, according to researchers...” These factual accounts help DX Max give his readers a deeper understanding of how evolution has been intraspecific to specific factors and thus is a dynamic concept (Max, 61). Today, human beings have had such a grasp on it to the extent of manipulating it, like in the case of Cyborgs.

“Not long ago, we knew the makeup of only a handful of the roughly 20,000 protein-encoding genes in our cells; today, we know the function of about 12,000.” DX Max also uses statistics when capturing logos. This goes a long way to help instill a sense of trust in the information being presented, as the general assumption is that the writer has taken the time to do some background research to provide an accurate account.

Logos lets a writer elevate their content or intended message by providing an account of logical consistency in their workflow. Although, as earlier stated, this might be done through facts and statistics, logos are also appealed to by the choice of citations and the flow of the original idea throughout the entire essay. By using logos, Kairos, Ethos, and Pathos as his literal tools, the writer can play around with the faculties of the leader using selective use of emotions to introduce the cyborg as well as generating a flow of ideas throughout the essay, making it consistent from the very beginning to the end (Max, 53). This is useful in capturing the attention of the reader by not providing incomplete linkages of concepts he is trying to intertwine or choosing citations that may deviate from the original thought. Logos, thus, is the backbone of any important and argumentative work

demanding consistency in the flow of work, just as DX Max employs it to embellish the credibility of his modern concept of humans now shaping their course of evolution.

Even though the writer has given historical accounts of events, he has appealed to Kairos by playing to the mind of a modern scientist and enthusiasts of modern futuristic scientific thought. “A connected implant held the vibrating microchip, and another implant was a Bluetooth communication hub so that friends could send him colors through his smartphone.” This reference points to a specific timeline in modern times when current trends in technology have greatly liberalized the usage of smart technology. Kairos allows for flexibility depending on the target audience. As such, one may change their timing, tone of language, and level of formality depending on who is to read the work in question. DX Max goes for a more formal tone as he addresses age-great scientific principles to appeal to his audience. “... but what if it had your brains and my looks? CRISPR would eliminate that risk. If IVF is ordering off a menu, CRISPR is cooking.” Here, DX Max tries to use an informal tone, having appeased his reader out of the formality presented by the complexity of the concepts he is trying to use to push his point. Talking about altering eugenics through modern processes such as CRISPR and IVF and equating them to a hotel experience gives an audience relatable expertise, hence understanding his meaning promptly (Max, 60). DX Max has articulated a very selective use of Kairos, altering his tone and pointing to references that anyone leading a modern lifestyle can relate to, hence giving a more compelling argument to his target audience. He has also used a couple of references drawn from the distant past, an account of recent events, and projections one may anticipate shortly. He cites a much-diversified range of evolutionary accounts in both animals and plant species, presenting time arguments in a fashionable manner that is appealing to a modern scientific reader. This is crucial in articulating Kairos, and by understanding his audience, DX Max has been able to take his audience on a mental journey of evolution from a more dynamic perspective, which is essentially mandatory for one to successfully defend any scientific claim.

There is no doubt that the world is changing. Cars have become our feet, virtual reality is the hottest-selling game toy on the market today, Google is our memory, and calculators have become our minds. In truism, our lives are partly biological, with no distinct differentiation between carbon and silicon, organic and technological. Indeed, we may not know where we are heading, but at least we know where we have come from. D. T. Max, in his article, “How Humans Are Shaping Our Own Evolution,” gives valuable information and facts on how evolution is taking shape in the modern world. He successfully employs rhetorical tools to help make his case. Overall, he is an amazing writer who effectively highlights the influence of technology on evolution and, subsequently, on our lives.

Works Cited

Max, D. T. “How humans are shaping our own evolution.” *Natl. Geogr.* 231 (2017): 40-63.