



# The Immortalization Commission: Science and the Strange Quest to Cheat Death

*John Gray*

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*A Globe and Mail Best Books of the Year 2011 Title*

At the heart of human experience lies an obsession with the nature of death. Religion, for most of history, has provided an explanation for human life and a vision of what comes after it. But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such beliefs came under relentless pressure as new ideas—from psychiatry to evolution to communism—seemed to suggest that our fate was now in our own hands: humans could cease to be animals, defeat death, and become immortal.

In *The Immortalization Commission*, the acclaimed political philosopher and critic John Gray takes a brilliant and frightening look at humankind's dangerous striving toward a scientific version of immortality. Probing the parallel faiths of Bolshevik "God-builders," who sought to reshape the planet and psychical researchers, who believed they had evidence of a nonreligious form of life after death, Gray raises fascinating questions about how such beliefs threaten the very nature of what it means to be human. He looks to philosophers, journalists, politicians, charlatans, and mass murderers who all felt driven by a specifically scientific and modern worldview and whose revolt against death resulted in a series of experiments that ravaged whole countries.

An urgent examination of Darwin's post-religious legacy, *The Immortalization Commission* is an important work from "one of Britain's leading public intellectuals" (*The Wall Street Journal*).

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