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# Synthetic biology and the almighty fixers

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## Abstract

The entrepreneur Craig Venter has made a significant contribution towards the sequencing of the human genome; he has since added synthetic biology to his scientific repertoire. He founded the J. Craig Venter institute (JCVI) and is building the first carbon-neutral laboratory facility in the world. At the lab "designer" bacteria and other organisms will be produced by mixing bits and pieces of DNA. The organisms will be designed to remove oil pollution, to clean up toxic waste and to fight global warming. Apparently, what man has (inadvertently) broken in his use of nature and technology to better human's life, man can fix. Consequently, one should not be overly concerned with today's environmental crises and should not fear for new ones, in particular, those that may be the result of producing artificial organisms. The idea that man can "fix" the world (improve it) or can fix what he has broken is shared by many in the western world: scientists, politicians and the public in general. In this talk I will present Eric Katz's "restoration theses." Katz, an environmental philosopher, offers a critique of the "fix" idea hoping that his argument may be of use to environmental activists in their efforts to set limits to land use. Here, I will examine whether this theses can serve as a warrant for action in the public domain as regards synthetic biology.

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