

NEXT STEP

Now the Species Dominance Issue Has Become Main Stream in the Media the Next Step Should be Political

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Abstract

A milestone in the species dominance issue has been reached. 2011 is the year that the issue has become main stream in the (American) media, having passed through the “intellectuals crying in the wilderness” and the “establishment of interest groups” phases. This essay contains ideas on how the next phase can be promoted, i.e. how the issue can become “political.”

1. Introduction

The issue of species dominance, i.e. whether humanity should build god like massively intelligent machines this century, with mental capacities trillions of trillions of times above human level is thought by many to be the singularly most important issue of the 21st century, due to its profound consequences to humanity's survival once these “artilects” (artificial intellects) exist.

As with any issue, the species dominance issue had to start with a few intellectuals “crying in the wilderness”, e.g. I. J. Good in the 1960s, then in the 1980s, Moravec, de Garis, Kurzweil, etc. In the 1990s, the second stage occurred, namely the establishment of interest groups, such as the Transhumanists, the Extropians, etc. The number of people concerned with the issue of the rise of the artelect (or as the Americans say, the “singularity”) has reached a critical mass, to the point that 2011 is the year that the issue has gone main stream in the (American) media.

One of the major reasons why this media interest has occurred has been due to the “one man publicity machine” Ray Kurzweil, with his “exponentially increasing technologies” message. His book “The Singularity is Near” (2005) caught the attention of film maker Barry Ptolemy, who then made a movie of the life and work of Ray Kurzweil called “Transcendent Man”, which attracted a lot of media attention, particularly the cover of Time Magazine.

At about the same time, my “Artelect War” book (2005) caught the attention of the History Channel, who made a 90 minute documentary “Prophets of Doom”, which prompted Newsweek to write a similar feature article. Discovery Channel is now making a major documentary on the species dominance theme, which will be broadcast in 2011.

Thus it is clear that the issue of species dominance will be reaching the American public in 2011, with so much publicity. These US documentaries will then find

themselves on the internet and will spread around the world. The next few countries to take up the torch will be Canada, Australia, UK, and then Europe etc. In time the media of the world will take up this “biggest story of the 21st century.”

Thus, a major milestone has been passed, namely phase 3, i.e. the attention of the journalists has been attracted, who are now spreading the message to the masses, the billions. So the time is now ripe for phase 4 to begin, i.e. for the issue to go “political.”

If one looks back at the environmental movement, it started with a single intellectual crying in the wilderness, i.e. Rachel Carson, with her book “Silent Spring” (1962) which made the point that humanity was polluting the environment with toxic chemicals, such as DDT that was killing the birds, leading to the evocative vision of a “silent spring”. Environmental consciousness spread and spread, and eventually political parties were formed, known as the “Greens”, e.g. in Germany, where they are particularly powerful in the national political arena.

Species dominance awareness has not yet reached the political phase. This essay proposes ideas on how this 4th phase in the general development of a social movement on this topic can be promoted and stimulated.

2. Politicizing the Species Dominance Issue

This section will consist of a series of topics on how the species dominance issue can become more political, i.e. how it can enter its 4th phase in its development as a social movement.

a) *Continue the debate*

There is not yet any real consensus within the interest groups on whether the rise of the artelect is a good thing or not for humanity. Debate on this and related issues needs to continue, hence the annual conferences such as the “Singularity Summit” (in the US and Australia) should continue, and they should continue making efforts to attract the journalists to their meetings.

Ray Kurzweil is very optimistic about the rise of intelligent machines in the coming decades, and thinks that human beings and machines will merge, allowing humans to acquire superhuman abilities. He is an undiluted optimist, and is widely criticized for this.

I, on the other hand, am the opposite extreme. I’m claiming that a sizable proportion of humanity (the “Terrans”) will not tolerate human beings becoming the No. 2 species and in the limit will go to war against the creators of the artelects (the “Cosmists”) to stop them building them. This “Artelect War” will kill billions of people, because it will be waged with 21st century weapons that will kill far more people than the tens of millions killed in WW2 with 20th century weapons.

Between these two extremes lie most thinkers in the species dominance debate. The various issues involved need to be given a lot more thought, considering the critical importance of the topic.

b) Extending the debate

Personally, I will be very happy to see the “species dominance debate” move beyond being discussed largely by “techies”, i.e. people with largely computer science backgrounds, who are usually politically naïve and too young to have any real experience of how negative human nature can be, particularly when it comes to warfare.

Until now, the species dominance debate has been conducted almost exclusively by the techies, and this is only natural, since it is the techies who are creating the problem (i.e. building artificially intelligent machines, i.e. AI). It is normal that they are the first to see the “writing on the wall” since they are the ones doing the writing so to speak. I can give my own case as an example. My first 2 published articles on the topic were in 1989. I started building artificial brains in 1993 in Japan, when the term sounded rather exaggerated, but is now fully accepted. Since I was helping to create the species dominance problem, it made sense that I and others in a similar position were the first to write about the issue.

However, now that the species dominance issue has gone main stream in the media, a wider academic audience can

“get into the act”. I would particularly like to see the social science guys bring their expertise to the problem, e.g. the political scientists, the historians, the philosophers, the psychologists, etc. I would also like to see the Europeans get more involved. The current debate (in 2011) is still dominated by American techies, who are way too optimistic and naïve. They know intellectually, that last century was the bloodiest in history (200-300 million people killed for political reasons) but fail to translate its equivalent in the 21st century into an emotional reality. I will be very glad to see the historians and political philosophers bring their more balanced view points (i.e. the optimistic with the pessimistic) into the debate.

c) A lot more books need to be written on the topic

The species dominance issue is so important for humanity in the 21st century that a flood of books should be written on the topic. Look at Marx for example, and the number of books written on his ideas. Marx’s question “Who should own capital?” dominated the global politics of the 19th and 20th centuries. “Who or what should be dominant species?” will dominate the 21st century, hence deserves to be written about extensively. The universities have a strong obligation to get involved.

d) Think tanks

Once a flood of books have appeared, the think tanks can get into the act. The “tankers” can read these books and listen to the intellectual debates on the media (to the extent that they exist in corporatist controlled, dumbed down America). The role of the tankers should be to translate the ideas in the books and the media into future political activity. For example, they should start thinking about future political policies to be given as advice to political parties. In fact, the issue is so dominant, probably new political parties will be formed to deal with the issue (see below).

Most issues in politics are not important enough for a political party to label itself with that issue. For example, the US does not have an “Abortion Party” that pushes for free abortions. In many European countries, the issue of better rights for workers was considered so important that whole political parties were formed to promote their interests, e.g. Britains “Labor Party”, Germany’s “Arbeiter Partei”, etc.

As the species dominance debate heats up, we can expect new parties to be formed with names such as the Terran “Humanity First Party”, or at the other pole, the Cosmist “Transcendent Party”.

The tankers will have their hands full, thinking up all the many political consequences of the rise of the artelect in the coming decades. They should start thinking now.

e) Text books and new courses at universities

Once the species dominance issue is widely discussed, professors can collate the ideas and put them into text books that they write, and create new courses for their students. This way, the issue will be widely studied and far better understood. The students, on graduation, can then help contribute to the political discussion.

f) Lobbying the politicians

Once the general public has taken sides on the species dominance issue, (i.e. whether they are Cosmist, Terran, or Cyborgist (i.e. wanting to become artefacts themselves, by adding artefactual components to their own brains)) it can then approach the politicians and lobby them to do what the lobbyists want. This will force the politicians to take sides. This may be difficult for conventional politicians, because experience so far shows that the question whether or not to build artefacts (or advanced cyborgs) sharply divides people right down the middle. The politicians will be pulled left and right with equal force.

g) New political parties

Once large numbers of people start getting passionate about the issue, especially when there are lots of cyborgs in the population, creating deep alienation amongst the Terrans, the Terrans should organize and form their own political

parties, and make plans on how to combat the Cosmists. The Cosmists, not to be outdone by the Terrans, should also form their own political parties.

As the debate really heats up, the Terran and Cosmist parties should start making plans for military action. In the case of the Terrans, they will be terrified of being superseded by the artefacts and cyborgs, and feel a visceral rejection of the growing number of cyborgs in their midst. The Terrans should prepare for an extermination campaign against the Cosmists and Cyborgs, for the sake of the preservation of the billions of human beings.

The Cosmists should also prepare themselves militarily, because they know that the Terrans cannot wait too long. The Cosmists know that the Terrans must “first strike” while the latter still have enough intelligence to win a war over the issue of species dominance. The Cosmists cannot afford to be caught off guard by the Terrans, and should hit back immediately when the Terrans hit them. Both sides should also be thinking about various scenarios in the case of “gigadeath” casualties with 21st century weaponry.

h) Alternatives to gigadeath?

The prospect of a gigadeath Artefact War is so horrible (billions of humans killed) that a major effort needs to be made by the planet’s best thinkers to find ways to avoid such a calamity. I have been unable to find one, which is why I am so pessimistic. I am glad I am alive now, and will

probably die peacefully in my bed. I will live long enough (into the 2030s probably) to see the “species dominance debate” heat up and rage, but will not see the Artilect War, but my grandson will. He will be caught up in it and will probably be destroyed by it.

If there is a way to avoid an artilect war, then it is critical for humanity that it be found, and discussed and planned for. Personally, I’m cynical that such a way exists, otherwise I think I would probably have thought of it after considering the issue for over two decades, but many heads are better than one. Perhaps someone out there will dream up a strategy that can save us.

I don’t see Ray Kurzweil’s (and others) strategy of the “Cyborg Route” being the solution, i.e. having all human beings become cyborgs, who keep upgrading themselves into fully blown artilects, thus avoiding a conflict between Terrans and Cosmists, because there will be no humans left to disagree amongst themselves. Instead I see the Terrans being horrified at seeing humanity being gradually destroyed, by being transformed bit by bit into utterly alien creatures that the Terrans cannot relate to at all, and rejecting them with murderous passion and revulsion.

Kurzweil’s “cyborg route” is part of the problem, not the solution. Since the potential computing capacity of a “nanotech” grain of sand is a quintillion (a million trillion) times greater than that of the human brain, a human body with a cyborged grain of sand will be an “artilect in

human disguise” which will make the Terran paranoia all the greater.

3. Getting Started

This essay will hopefully motivate the species dominance interest group members to start acting politically, by spreading the word to the media, to the general public, to the universities, to the think tanks, to the politicians, and eventually to creating their own political parties to prepare for the consequences of the species dominance debate heating up to explosion point.

The species dominance issue is the most important of the 21st century, and will color our age. It has now reached the 3rd phase in the development of social movements (i.e. it has gone main stream in the media.) The time is now ripe to move on to the 4th phase, i.e. into politics. Hopefully, some of the advice given in this essay will prove to be useful towards that end.