

SPECIES DOMINANCE DEBATE : FROM MAIN STREAM MEDIA TO OPINION POLLS

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Abstract

2011 is the year that the “Species Dominance Issue” (i.e. whether humanity should build artefacts (artificial intellects), with mental capacities trillions of trillions of times above the human level, in the coming few decades), is going main stream in the media in the developed world. This will mean that within a few years, members of the general public in these countries will be sufficiently informed to be able to form their own opinions on the issue. Once that happens, the time will then be ripe to have opinion polls on the topic, so that the theorists within the “species dominance movement” need no longer be guessing about how society will react towards the issue. Instead they will have hard sociological data. They will know who thinks what, e.g. “What kinds of people are Cosmists (people who want to build artefacts), or Terrans (people opposed to building artefacts), or Cyborgists (people who want to become artefacts themselves by adding artefactual capacities to their own brains)?” Those leaders pushing the international media campaign on the issue of species dominance should soon be thinking hard about how to get the opinion pollsters active on the issue. Once these leaders have the data, they will be able to make much more informed (political) decisions on the issue, e.g. some scenarios will become more probable and others less, which will impact on the level of energy given to the various ideological stances related to the rise of the artefact.

1. Introduction

It is now clear that 2011 is the year that the issue of species dominance (i.e. whether humanity should build artefacts this century or not) is going main stream in the media in the developed countries. For example, the Barry Ptolemy movie “Transcendent Man” on the life and ideas of Ray Kurzweil has become cult, and a top seller on iTunes (<http://search.yahoo.com/web?fr=slv502-msgr>, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwPPJ-oy_eM). Kurzweil made the cover of Time magazine in early 2011 (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2048299,00.html>). History Channel had me in a 90 minute documentary “Prophets of Doom” on the species dominance issue (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnKbwwEOwwc>), and again in a Discovery Channel 45 minute documentary on “The Singularity” to be released in November 2011. In June 2011, Australia’s national television ABC’s “Hungry Beast” program had Kurzweil and me in a 5 minute piece on the issue (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDZc9QJU_Hg). I’m planning to launch a European media campaign shortly to cover the UK, Holland, Belgium, France and Germany, whose 3 languages I can speak having spent 15 years living in the capitol of the EU (European Union, i.e. Brussels, Belgium, Europe). With

the wind in our sails from the US and Australian campaigns well launched (i.e. with links to videos that can be easily sent to journalists in other countries) it will be easier to launch things in Europe.

2. Stabbing in the Dark

Over the past few years, it has also become clear that Ray Kurzweil and I are often seen by the media as representing polar opposite views on which scenario is the more likely to become reality in the coming decades, regarding the rise of the artefact. Ray, whose inventing and propagating capacities I admire, takes a very optimistic view, saying that “We (humans) will merge with our machines.” He paints a rosy picture of nanobots roaming our bodies in their zillions that are programmed to kill viruses and harmful bacteria, thus ridding us of disease, and to repair aging cells, thus ridding us of our mortality. He sees humans adding artefactual components to their brains thus boosting human intelligence into the super-intelligent range. He deliberately paints a positive picture to his many audiences as he hits the speech circuit around the US.

I, on the other hand, could not be more polar extreme. I’m predicting the worst war that humanity has ever known, the most passionate, and the most deadly, killing billions of people over the issue of species dominance. I claim that a lot of people will be horrified at the gradual loss of “humanness” as they see all around them, people becoming more and more “cyborg” (i.e. cybernetic organism, i.e. part machine, part human). They will feel profoundly alienated and threatened as they watch the cyborgs and artefacts increase their intelligence each year. They will organize politically and then go on an extermination war to kill off the Cosmists (people in favor of building artefacts), the Cyborgists, plus the cyborgs and artefacts, for the sake of the preservation of the dominance and hence survival of the human species.

Ray and I share at least one thing in common. We are both “shooting in the dark”. We are both hypothesizing. We don’t really know what will happen. His scenario seems plausible and a lot of people buy it. Mine also seems plausible and according to my small scale polls that I take at my own talks, plus a few larger scale polls, a lot of other people also buy it. So who is right?

3. From Main Stream Media to Opinion Polls

I was recently in Australia for the 2011 Humanity+ conference organized by “Mr. Singularity, Australia” (Adam Ford) who organizes the Singularity and Humanity+ conferences in Australia (<http://summit.singinst.org.au>). He is currently filming people for a documentary he is making on the singularity. He got 5 hours of me on file. It was during this marathon of questions and answers that I became increasingly conscious of the importance for the “species dominance community” that opinion polls be taken of the general public’s attitudes toward the species dominance issue. It became clear to me that the next obvious step once the species dominance issue has gone thoroughly main stream in the media, is for opinion polls to be taken.

Why do I feel this? Because such opinion polls, which can be taken a few years from now, once the general public in the developed countries have had time to absorb the messages from the species dominance community, will be able to provide some solid sociological data on how people think. How do they divide up between the Cosmists, the Terrans, and the Cyborgists? What are the correlations between the many categories of social groups (e.g. the religious right, the liberal left, the scientifically educated, the working class, the upper middle class, etc) and their preferences along the Cosmist/Terran/Cyborgist spectrum?

4. Political Consequences

Once the sociological data is in (and obtaining such data may serve as the topic of many PhD theses in university departments of sociology, political science, psychology and philosophy) the various scenarios related to the rise of the artelect, can be re assessed in the light of the hard data. For example, how would Ray Kurzweil react or change his tune, if he learned that about half of people *strongly* oppose the rise of artelects AND cyborgs? He would be forced to give a more balanced (i.e. utopian AND dystopian) presentation of the rise of the artelect, in his speeches around the US.

If I learned that the *vast* majority of people were in favor of becoming cyborgs, then I would have to tone down the “doom and gloom” of my dystopian message, and increase the “sweetness and light”, a la Kurzweil, in my talks and media appearances.

However, I claim that some early sociological data is already in. I make it a habit when I give my artelect talks, to invite the audience to vote on the species dominance issue. I ask them whether they are Terran (preferring that artelects/cyborgs not be built), or Cosmist/Cyborgist (preferring that artelects/cyborgs are built). My experience, based on two decades of giving such talks, is that the issue divides humanity about evenly. The split ranges from 40/60 to 60/40.

At first I thought this 50/50 split was due largely to ignorance of the issues, so that people were voting almost randomly, and hence the even split. But gradually I began to realize that people were ambivalent within themselves as individuals. They were in awe at the prospect of building artelect gods, with their vastly superior mental capacities compared to human beings, but were horrified at the prospect of a “gigadeath” artelect war between the Cosmists/Cyborgists and the Terrans over the species dominance issue.

For example, the US national radio program “Coast to Coast” had me talking in 2005 on this issue. After the interview, they took a survey by inviting people to call in and vote whether they preferred that artelects should be built or not. The answer was 56% anti artelect, 44% pro artelect (<http://www.coasttocoastam.com/guest/de-garis-hugo/6492>, <http://www.coasttocoastam.com/show/2005/04/06>). The following year, in 2006, the BBC made a 50 minute documentary in their Horizon series, called “Human V2.0”. On their website, viewers were invited to vote on whether they preferred Kurzweil’s optimistic scenario or my pessimistic one. The answer was 60% for Kurzweil, 40% for me

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/tvradio/programmes/horizon/broadband/tx/singularity/clash/>, <http://thoughtware.tv/videos/watch/93-Human-2->). These two surveys both resulted in fractions within my 40/60 – 60/40 experience, although lately, amongst highly selected audiences (e.g. at singularity or humanity+ conferences, the pro artelect proportion has shot up, e.g. 90% pro artelect, 10% anti artelect, but that is to be expected in a self selected pro artelect conference.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that large scale (Gallop Poll?) surveys which are professionally done, with a large sample size that select truly representative samples of the whole population, give the result that the pro artelect and anti artelect proportion of the general public is about 50/50, then that will have both ideological and political consequences.

For example, I will be able to point the finger at Ray Kurzweil and say “Your optimistic message is only half the story. You are not being responsible to your audiences in ignoring the very real negative possibilities of the rise of the artelect. You are pulling the rosy wool over people’s eyes, and fooling them. Once your “exponential increase in technology” message has been generally accepted, people will then move on and start thinking about the political consequences of the rise of the artelect. Once that happens, you risk being sidelined, because you refuse to talk politics. Your Pollyanna style will go out of style, and you will be sidelined, a painful development for you, since you have made selling the singularity message as one of your major life goals.”

But, the major consequence of hard sociological data on the species dominance issue will be political. Once we know who thinks what – e.g. imagine most of the religious right in the US are strong Terrans (just a guess on my part?!) then the Cosmists will know that and can adjust their strategies accordingly. Those social groups favoring Terranism will know who their opponents are, i.e. they will know which social groups tend to be pro artelect (e.g. the scientifically trained, upper middle class liberals? – again just a guess on my part?!). With such sociological data at hand, the various opposed ideological groups will have more accurate tools with which to sharpen their ideologies. They will “know their enemies.”

As the IQ gap between humans and home robots closes in the 2020s and 2030s and the resulting “species dominance debate” heats up, the Cosmists, Terrans, Cyborgists will be able to adapt their politics to a better known intellectual terrain. They will be able to target their ideological missiles more effectively than is possible today, when we are all still “stabbing in the dark.”

5. Pushing the Pollsters

In light of the above discussion, I think it would be a good idea if the people pushing the species dominance issue to the main stream media start suggesting to the journalists and to the opinion poll companies to start taking opinion polls. Having accurate data on who thinks what on the species dominance issue will sharpen the focus of the respective ideological groups. This sharpening will be an essential mile stone along the history of

the rise of the artelect. Future historians on the artelect rise will devote a whole chapter to such a development. It's only recently that its importance has really crystallized in my mind.

I hope this little essay will stimulate other species dominance thinkers to become more conscious of the importance to have hard sociological data on the issue that will dominate our global politics this century. Now that the issue is going main stream in the media in the developed countries it is now time to start thinking seriously about the next step, which in my opinion is getting the pollsters onto the issue.

6. What about the Developing World?

You may ask, "What about the other two thirds of humanity, i.e. the developing world?" Well, I live in China. My strategy is to lie ideologically low in China for a decade, until the country democratizes. If I really started pushing Cosmism in China now, I would attract attention, and then the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) people might start looking at my essays in English and maybe kick me out of the country.

After democratization, I will then be in my 70s and hopefully an "eminence grise" in China with fluency in the language and fully acculturated, preaching powerfully the species dominance debate to the Chinese, who in my view should take the view - "*The dominant culture of the 21st century, should lead the dominant debate of the 21st century.*"

I'm now ARCing (after retirement careering) living in a third world country on my US professor salary pension savings, so that I can retire a decade earlier than I could in an expensive first world country. I will put up with the Chinese decade of the 2010s, the "dark decade", with the expectation, once China democratizes around 2020 and has freedom of speech, with its 1.3 billion people, its average IQ of 105 (compared to India's 85) and the world's highest average economic growth rate, that in the decades of the 2020s and 2030s (if I'm still alive) China will be intellectually the most exciting place on earth.

I could live in any cheap third world (internet connected) country and ARC (which in my case means researching and writing books about Topological Quantum Computing (TQC) and femtotech) but I choose China, since there is a real prospect that I may end up on the winning side. I have no nationalist feelings at all. I've lived in seven nations, and have long outgrown the myopic pretensions of the nation state. Politically I'm a globist (pro world government) but that's another story (and the topic of my second book (http://www.amazon.com/Multis-Multicultured-Monocultured-Towards-Creation/dp/0882801627/ref=sr_1_3_title_0_main?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1311161160&sr=1-3), and possibly the topic of a Discovery Channel TV documentary in 2012?)

Postscript :

My good friend Ben Goertzel suggested I add some proposed opinion poll questions that the pollsters might use in the near future. So here are some (assuming that the general public has been well exposed to the species dominance issue in TV and radio documentaries and articles in newspapers and magazines, etc). If you like these questions, perhaps you might try them out on your friends, your acquaintances, your school, your college, your company, your organization, and report back the results to me (profhugodegaris@yahoo.com).

1. Which ONE of the following three philosophies do you have the most sympathy for?

- a) Terran
- b) Cosmist
- c) Cyborgist

Ans :

2. Do you think humanity should allow artelects to exist that are more intelligent than humans? (Yes or No)

Ans:

3. Do you think humanity should allow cyborgs to exist that are more intelligent than humans? (Yes or No)

Ans:

4. Do you think that a species dominance war between human groups is –

- a) Impossible
- b) Extremely unlikely
- c) Moderately unlikely
- d) Moderately likely
- e) Highly likely
- f) Inevitable

Ans:

5. If superintelligent artifacts come into being, do you think they will wipe out humanity with –

- a) Zero probability
- b) Very low probability
- c) Moderate probability
- d) High probability
- e) Certainty

Ans:

6. Do you think a planet-wide maximum legal limit should be placed on the level of intelligence in our machines?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Ans:

7. If you answered Yes to 6. should that maximum level of artificial intelligence be *less* than human intelligence levels?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Ans:

8. If our machines approach human intelligence levels in the coming decades, would that make you feel –

- a) Very fearful
- b) Fearful
- c) Indifferent
- d) Optimistic
- e) Very optimistic

Ans: