Chapter 7

Ethical Issues in Transhumanism

Faruk Karaman
Konya Food and Agriculture University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Transhumanism seems to be inevitable. There seems to be no way to stop the developments leading humanity to transhumanism. As Heidegger puts, technological determinism rules, rather than social determinism. In other words, the technology controls the society, not the other way around. Therefore, in a short time period, people will be forced to face the challenges of transhumanism. It is therefore the right time to prepare for those challenges before they became mainstream. Tomorrow, it will be too late. Academicians, educators, politicians, philosophers, intellectuals, psychologists … etc. all should concentrate on the issue. This chapter will try to answer such questions and many others. A philosophical approach is used. After all, ethics is a branch of philosophy. Since, this is a futuristic topic, it is hard to find first-hand data and conduct survey analysis etc. Therefore, this is a theoretical chapter.

INTRODUCTION

One certain fact about the future is that it is uncertain. It is almost impossible to predict the future. There are infinite number of possibilities and before time passes it is hard to determine which possibility will come true. Therefore, research topics such transhumanism are difficult to conduct. Uncertainty means risk and risk should be managed.

Maybe, all will go well and side effects of technology will not appear. However, it is better to be prepared for pessimistic scenarios. If cures are found for the negative effects of technology, only the positive sides will be left and then a much more desirable future is ahead. For the time being an healthy dose of pessimism is what is needed in that possible problems can be detected via being pessimist.

As time passes, the number of possibilities will shrink to a few. Then, maybe some of the fears about the technology will prove to be ungrounded and then the documents like this will be thought to be overly pessimistic. But, this is just a possibility. Alternatively, a very dystopic future world may arise and the majority of people may suffer.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8431-5.ch007
It is not wise to wait for risks to happen before taking any action. Then, it will be too late and it will most probably be impossible to correct anything. Although, it is hard to predict all of the risks, ethicists should work hard to analyze the possible side effects. Also, many more people should be trained as technology ethicists. Given the unemployment threat from the technology, this is one of the areas for secure employment.

This is not the first time that technology used as a destructive weapon. In fact, some of the scenes from science-fiction movies direct humans’ attention to the negative effects of the technology. Such movies give clues about how ethical conduct should be in that most of them are based on some ethical problems. There is a tendency to underestimate these movies but they can help humans in understanding what the future will be like.

Messages about the positive attributes of the technology are delivered to the people by means of media by the representatives of the technology companies. There is no shortage of such positive and optimistic messages. However, negative views can not be heard and read by majority of people. For example, side effects of cell phones are not researched enough even though quite a lot of time has been passed since the first introduction of them.

Transhumanism-related new technology is first introduced in medical practices. Almost no one can criticize new but controversial applications for desperate patients. Thus, these new techniques find application in the treatment of deadly diseases. After, they prove to be successful, then they spread to more normal people and at a point they become mainstream.

Anyway, it is necessary for human being to make predictions about the future. If it is known where the events are heading to, the situation about the current time will be better understood. Maybe some predictions will prove to be wrong, but even so they will be helpful in understanding the technology environment, its positives and side effects.

**BACKGROUND**

Due to the rapid technological developments, transhumanism is fast becoming a reality. Each year, enhanced people are seemingly appearing as a close possibility rather than science-fiction. Although, the ordinary people are not fully aware of the phenomenon, experts know the issue well.

In fact, the great majority of technological developments follow an exponential path. Initially, the developments are very slow, but then it accelerates gradually. Finally, technological change is very rapid. The case of transhumanism is no different. Today, transhumanism is not a top agenda among leading media outlets, however in the future, it will be much different.

Transhumanism present numerous opportunities for humanity but there are also a lot of ethical problems to be solved. After becoming a synthesis of biological and non-biological portions will humans stay as human or transform into a new type of creature? What will happen to those who do not want to be enhanced and prefer to stay as classical humans? Will they be able to finance their lives and find jobs in a world where super-humans called transhumans set the rules?

Some experts predict that humans will be divided into two different species, one is enhanced, the other is un-enhanced. This may cause social clashes, wars, famine etc. Will classical humans have place in future’s world or will everyone be forced to transform into the new form of the humans? Some people may