Newton Lee (Ed.): *The Transhumanism Handbook*

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A reader can find in this handbook important information for understanding some of today's advances in technology and medicine, and especially the related transhumanism ideas, its aims, the philosophical, social, political consequences, which might influence the future of humanity and society, including perils that may occur. The volume contains texts written by more than 70 transhumanists from various domains. While most chapters of the book discuss about the necessary and possible evolution towards transhumanism, there are also included critical positions. In addition to transhumanism, very useful information may be found about artificial intelligence, medicine, and even cryptocurrency.

A revealing definition of transhumanism is given by the editor Newton Lee in the preamble of the book:

> *"Transhumanism offers the most inclusive ideology for all ethnicities and races, the religious and the atheists, conservatives and liberals, the young and the old regardless of socioeconomic status, gender identity, or any other individual qualities. (. . .) Transhumanism is the next logical step in the evolution of humankind, and it is the existential solution to the long-term survival of the human race."* (p. vii).

Therefore, transhumanism is viewed as a desired bright future that will be a kind of golden age where all ideologies, religions, science, political parties, all people will be in harmony, where also health problems and ageing will have a solution. To be sincere, I find this perspective too optimistic. Moreover, while transhumanist ideas and goals are materialized also in a political party (Chapter 5), this is a fact that might raise a signal whether the idea of a perfect society is not similar to ideas that drove to communism and nazism.

The editor Newton Lee has an outstanding record of achievements, including, among others, being the "longest-serving editor in chief in the history of the Association for Computing Machinery for its publication Computers in Entertainment (2003–2018)" and creator of a commercial Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool at AT&T Bell Labs. He is also the chairman of the California Transhumanist Party. Therefore, Lee is a person that has a strong background in Computer Science (CS) and AI, having also B.S. and M.S. degrees in CS and AI with Summa Cum Laude from Virginia Tech and also one of the main supporters of the transhumanism movement, even with the aim of transforming it in an influential political party, which promises to bring abundance (as detailed in the large Chapter 5).

The book has 66 chapters grouped in 8 parts, the first one ("Brave New World of Transhumanism") introducing basic transhumanism ideas and the next 7 dedicated to specific related domains: Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Superintelligence; Super Longevity and Rejuvenation; Biohacking and Mental Health; Blockchain and Cryptocurrency; Art, Literature, and Films; Society and Ethics; Philosophy and Religion. This structuring reflects the main recurrent themes in the book, which were also mentioned in the preamble: the possibility of achieving artificial general intelligence (AGI, that means AI that will be exactly as human intelligence, and beyond – the so-called "technological singularity", discussed in Section 1.5), and superintelligence; advancements in medicine for extending life and even making real the millenary myth of rejuvenation; the impact of transhumanism on economy, ethics, philanthropy, philosophy, and politics. In many chapters (even in the first page of the first chapter, written by Lee himself) is found also a concern to find transhumanism ideas and themes in religious writings, especially in Christianism. Many examples start from quotes from the Bible, which are interpreted in a posthumanist sense, for example, Lee considers that some episodes refer to superheroes: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown in the fire; but they walked around freely in the fire, completely unharmed (Daniel 3:1–30). Samson was so strong that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands (Judges 14:5–6)" (p. 24). He continues the idea and writes that the statement of Jesus in Matthew 17:20 about achieving belief can be re-interpreted from a technological, posthumanist perspective.

The first part of the book (and the first chapter) has a title that adds "transhumanism" to the famous "Brave New World" dystopian book of Aldous Huxley [Huxley, 1932/1998], and starts with a motto from Julian Huxley, the brother of Aldous, an evolutionary biologist, eugenist, the first director-general of UNESCO, the founder of the World Wildlife Fund and the first that used "transhumanism" in the sense discussed in the handbook. Reading the chapters of this part is essential if someone wants to have a good image about transhumanism. The first chapter, written by Newton Lee, is a very good journey through some important ideas related to transhumanism. In Section 1.3, for example, is discussed the idea that we all may be considered transhumanists because we use prosthesis, organ transplants, medical advancements. The technological singularity is introduced in Section 1.5; the analysis of the future options for humanity, emphasizing the need of transhumanism is the subject of Section 1.6; philanthropy, democracy, ideology, existential risk, world peace, natural disasters and biohazards, the "Mother Earth", and the "mystery of the Universe" are presented in relation to transhumanism in Sections 9,10,13,16,17,19,20, and 21 of the first chapter.

Section 1.12 is of extremely importance because it contains the Transhumanist Bill of Rights, hand-delivered it to the U.S. Capitol on December 14, 2015, a new version being developed by the U.S. Transhumanist Party in 2016 (`https://transhumanist-party.org/tbr-2/`). This document is obviously created inspired from the United States Bill of Rights and one of its main new ideas is that humans are put on an equal place with "sentient artificial intelligences, cyborgs and other advanced sapient life forms" (p.19). Moreover, a third version was published, which defines "sentient entities" as: "(i) Human beings, including genetically modified humans; (ii) Cyborgs; (iii) Digital intelligences; (iv) Intellectually enhanced, previously non-sapient animals; (v) Any species of plant or animal which has been enhanced to possess the capacity for intelligent thought; and (vi) Other advanced sapient life forms." (`https://transhumanist-party.org/tbr-3/`) These additions seem, de facto, to consider humans as lower quality entities, fact that is the subject of many criticisms, especially from religious positions, fact explaining probably the many discussions in the volume on Christian ideas and quotes from Bible from a posthuman position. Moreover, the future of human life is viewed as driven only by pleasure, transhumanism being said that it "can turn this very life into a never ending amusement park", in opposition with the "deception of life after death", being "not an ideology for poor, hopeless and depressed" (Section 4.1). Eventually, the fact that the Transhumanist Bill of Rights is published by the U.S. Transhumanist Party and that an entire (the largest) chapter of the book is dedicated to it (Chapter 5) shows that there is a political program

towards the "Brave New World of Transhumanism", as prognoses the title of the first part of the book.

The other chapters of the first part include the history of transhumanism, including the current situation (Chapter 2). An evolutionary view, including the NBIC convergence is examined in Chapter 3. Religion, ethics, and other related topics, including a transhumanism manifesto and examples of projects are discussed in Chapter 4.

The second part of the handbook is a very good presentation of artificial intelligence. It contains 10 chapters covering important ideas such as testing AI, machine learning, human-machine symbiosis, superintelligence, beauty of AI artifacts, artificial intimacy, quantum computing, sapient and sentient intelligence, ethics of AI, conversational agents with AI, autonomy, etc.

Together with AI, progress in medicine is a major vector towards transhumanism. Therefore, the next chapters (16-27, Part III) are dedicated to super longevity, rejuvenation, gene therapy, health, the meaning of life and related subjects. The transhumanist perspective of biology and life from these chapters is continued in the next part (Chapters 28-32) with discussions related to the topics of cyborgs in the arts, sciences, and medicine.

The new collaborative, decentralized technologies for security assurance and finance (blockchain and cryptocurrency) are considered as very important for transhumanism as an entire Part V, with three chapters, is dedicated to this subject. I found very interesting this inclusion, but probably not unexpected if viewed from the present-day fashions of using social networks and other related to internet applications, which promote collaboration and attitudes against authorities, which are related to transhumanism ideas.

The last three parts (VI-VIII) of the handbook are dedicated to very important domains of human life: art, literature, and films; society and ethics; philosophy and religion. In the chapters of these parts I found interesting positions, some of them criticizing transhumanism. However, art, literature, and films are discussed mainly in the context of science-fiction and robotization, including the controversial subject of love and intimacies with robots, the latter theme being not unexpected if we consider the idea of the Transhumanist Bill of Rights that humans and AI (robots) should be considered equal. Other subjects that many can find controversial are the Christian transhumanism and Christianity as transhumanism (Chapter 61).

To conclude, the handbook is very dense, it has interesting and useful information about recent achievements in AI, computer science, medicine, about perspectives on science-fiction literature, philosophy, and religion. Many referred facts in the handbook are correct but I found at least two there are incorrect: Julian Huxley was not a Catholic priest (p.51), and it is not true that the essay Religion Without Revelation was reprinted in his book New Bottles for New Wine (p.69). There are many exciting ideas but some of them need require attention and a passing through the personal thought filter.

References

[Huxley, 1932/1998] A. Huxley (1932/1998) *Brave New World*, HarperCollins Publishers.

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