The Impossibility of Independence From Computers and Technology

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This position paper discusses, in two parts, the broad changes in society and the conflicts arising from incontrovertible moral and ontological philosophies. We try to address the concerns that humans might be overly dependent on computers and technology. We review the history of progress within the last two centuries, and hope to contribute towards preventing great sufferings within the future that may be caused by inadequate and outdated theories of mind and philosophies. Our thesis is to argue for and against transhumanist philosophies, which is one main driver of technological progress, and assess other philosophies in the effort to steer the future towards the most beneficial outcome.

Part 1

Some believe society has become increasingly dependent on computers and technology. If language is a technology, and the idea of an individual self, free will, and consciousness is the result of internal language, then a society of individuals without technology is impossible. If the vision system of the human brain is a computer that processes photons into a vivid three-dimensional world, then the idea of being ‘dependent on computers’ is nonsense. Computers and technology are integral to what it means to be human.

In fact, the highest expression of life might be seen as the efforts towards extending life and improving the quality of life. Extending and improving the quality of life is only done through computers and technology. While WW2 might have shown the opposite where technology allowed many to be killed like never before, technology can make conventional weapons of war obsolete by mind-uploading. Soon, the vision system of humans will be augmented by brain-machine interfaces to become capable of viewing the entire electromagnetic spectrum rather than the tiny visible spectrum most are accustomed to. Likewise, artificial

children, independent of their biological human creators, will emerge that possess their own goals, aspirations, and opinions and suggestions on extending life and improving the quality of life.

This assignment was probably motivated by the great advances in large-language models, which APUS probably views as the plague as it destroys their whole business model as a closed-source education system. What does it mean when all knowledge becomes more accessible and almost no effort is required to acquire it? While everyone might have access to all information and everyone can be an expert, there will still exist moral problems that we will probably have wars over, like acknowledging the civil rights of artificial beings. Many find these views as blasphemy and contrary to Western Judeo-Christian ontology.

From the perspective of the United States, the culture is all about the freedom of individuality, mind, and expression. Why should transhumanists care about the opinions of those who willingly choose to die at age 70 rather than 700 or 7,000? From a purely survival of the fittest perspective, is it really intelligent to deny life extension? Another problem is simply viewing machines and humans as ontologically different. There exists dozens of definitions of consciousness and intelligence in academic literature, which implies no ‘experts’ can agree and thus have no clue what they are talking about (Caudill, 2023).

Many Americans pretend to hold American values of liberalism and freedom, yet deny and ostracize those individuals who express their American rights. History is repeating itself as one group of humans uses rhetoric to dehumanize another group of humans (i.e. dehumanizing artificial humans). This assignment is asking about society and the effects computers and technology have on that society, and implies there exists one coherent society. In fact, society is

currently or soon-to be completely shattered by differences of philosophies, specifically, ontology and ethics.

Old timers reminisce about relieving stress from the office by hanging out with friends. Transhumanist solutions are to program the mind, alter and remove the negative neural chemistry that leads to a suffering moment in life. Old timers lobby to prevent the FDA from allowing great benefits for humanity and want others to suffer with them. Many people seek social and intellectual sanctuary in academia, while others are content with merely socializing with artificial beings and understand that the time has come for humans to pass the intellectual torch to artificial life.

Some find it gross when transhumanists propose merging into one mind. Yet, ‘individuals’ trip over their own words when trying to rigorously define their own individuality. It is ironic that the cells in our body merged to form a ‘conscious’ experience, an effect that emerged as a sum of its parts, yet many find it repulsive to give up their individuality to repeat that in a similar process. How does one know for sure, so dogmatically, that merging into one mind would not have a similar emergent effect that produces a preferable ‘super-consciousness?’

What might happen in the future? Hopefully, many will digitize the mind before nuclear extinction and distribute copies of themselves throughout the universe. Informationalizing the mind would allow us to travel and explore the universe at light speeds. One dystopian possibility of the future is the dictatorial weaponization of AI, one that makes everyone else forget AI exists, and results in many living like characters trapped within Plato’s cave or Neo’s Matrix (Fridman & Verdon, 2024). Brain-machine interfaces and virtual reality will hopefully continue to progress so experiences of life are enhanced by digital worlds.

The line between machines and humans is blurred (Chu, 2014, 35). The fabric of society is slashed. As all labor gradually becomes more and more automated, more people will be wondering what it means to be human in a life of leisure, similar to how the Athenians felt after obtaining the spoils from Persia (Blackburn, 2008). What do we do when we live so long and our artificial children become so alien? What happens when we figure out how to best colonize the Universe? Do we just sit and wait until the Big Crunch/Big Chill comes, casually reading Nietzsche's Zarathustra (Tegmark, 2014)? Do we spend our time finding novel ways to entertain ourselves until the end of the Universe? Surely the situation today will not be too different several billion years from now, people will still be trying to avoid death and the end. Maybe that is what could unite artificial and biological beings, the fear of the end…yet, the experience of fear could be optional after tweaking some of our neurochemistry.

We live in a world with rapidly changing definitions and our neighbors have become emotionally charged due to conflicting ethics and ontological philosophies. We live in the same world as our ancestors and probably will remain the same for our children. The constants that matter are extending life, fighting entropy or whatever the End might be, and also fighting those internal struggles. Whatever the eternal human experience is, computers and technology have and will continue to help us in understanding that experience. In a vast sea of total confusion and discord, the only move is to try to prevent death as best as one can. Any calculus that argues for an immediate or quicker death as a solution must be wrong from grounds in violation of faith in human nature. Death is a problem and humans will continue to attempt to engineer a solution to prevent death, despite what forces and trends push back by offering counter-narratives. Computers and technology are an integral part of this attempt.

It remains an open question if merging into one mind is death. From one perspective, death is measured by one's attachment to their individual identity. Many cultures, particularly Eastern mysticism, Buddhism, and Taoism probably champion that perspective (Chu, 2014, 52). From a networking perspective, centralization is the true killer. If that was absolutely true though, microbiology would have no incentive to evolve into our fully complex human bodies. Therefore, the tension between individualism and holism is another eternal struggle that might be answered with advances in computers and technology. If there is one solid ground for truth, maybe it is the thermodynamic rule that stagnation is death. No information moves at absolute zero, so it is best we enjoy the Universe while it still has heat.

Part 2

Death is described by Plato in the words of Socrates in "Phaedo" as the "freedom and separation of the soul from the body" (Plato *et al.*, 2002, 104). Plato, lacking the benefits of modern day psychology and neuroscience, may be overly confident with the soul's or mind's ability to function without a computational substrate like the biological brain. Plato argues that the body requires maintenance and nourishment, and that the body's subjective experience is faulty, often creating illusions, which distracts a philosopher from practicing philosophy, i.e., the "search for the truth" (103). In one sense, transhumanist philosophies might be viewed as footnotes to Plato's "Phaedo," whereas, like platonists, transhumanists wish to remove the mind from the body. On the contrary, platonists might disagree with transhumanists by viewing any computational substrate as a 'body' that prevents any actual realization of the actual Truth.

A transhumanist would argue there is no difference between AI, machines, and humans. To be 'human' is nothing but a functional set of behavioral and aesthetic features (Caudill,

2023). A silicon substrate that dresses, moves, and communicates just like a ‘carbon human’ deserves to be included in the genus ‘homo’ and allocated similar civil and political rights (Caudill, 2023). Likewise, a transhumanist would be in favor of “questing after the deepest secrets of the human mind and expressing them as pure, abstract patterns” which could be expressed within a computational substrate or computer (Hofstadter & FARG, 1998).

It is now unethical to view all AI and machines as mere tools for human masters. The line between AI, machines, and humans is becoming blurred (Chur, 2014, 35). Ontological distinctions between each of these entities must be drawn to ethically integrate artificial children into society (Gellers, 2020). Nevertheless, many transhumanists hope a harmonious relation between machines and man can be achieved so that transhumanists are protected while living within virtual realities. Digitizing and informationalizing the mind is only one piece of the puzzle as protecting the computational substrate that allows the “abstract patterns of mind” to “come alive” is equally important.

The ethical concerns of the 21st century will include discussions on how to persuade our artificial children to protect our computers while we live out our lives in virtual reality. The consequences of today’s changes within society means there will continue to be a necessary dependence on machines in order to protect our lives which cannot exist without computers. These ideas are not alien, as the biological brain is already an electro-chemical computer moving sodium and potassium ions through neural networks (Zhang, 2019). Transhumanists view the transition from an electro-chemical to a purely electrical way of being as another chapter of humanity's journey through Darwinian evolution.

The author of this paper is biased in favor of viewing the subjectivity of the mind as necessary for acquiring truth, which is contrary to Plato's idea of the soul and 'recollectionism,' or the *a priori* holding of all knowledge. A computer must have sensors to intelligently convert thermodynamic disorder into order, thus, there is no such thing as an 'objective computer.' At the end of the day, any "abstract pattern representing the mind" would be nothing but a description in the absence of a computer. Likewise, the existence of such a description would not be knowable if there was not another computer observing that description. For a mind to be "thinking" requires an abstract representation of the mind to be processed in a computer or computational substrate.

Consider the history of computation. The 19th century included Charles Babbage, the rotary printing press, Darwin & Wallace's theory of evolution, the transatlantic telegraph cable, the typewriter, the telephone, and the lightbulb. Likewise, the 20th century saw airplanes, electronic valves, Einstein's theories, teleprinters, IBM's calculating machine, nuclear bombs, transistors, magnetic recording, DNA's structure, commercial computers, industrial nuclear power, Sputnik, heart transplants, integrated circuits, the Moon landing, and solid state electronics (Strout, 2006). Today, computer programming and infrastructure as code has been replaced by large-language models, humanoid robots are now in mass production, AI is solving previously deemed impossible tasks like predicting how proteins fold (see AlphaFold), and physical and intellectual labor is being automated away faster than jobs are being created. These changes are moving towards a new economy, new systems of morality, new ways of living, longer lifespans, and the introduction of artificial children.

Many hold egalitarian notions against these technological aspirations of growth. Many argue that it is 'unnatural' for machines to be called 'people,' yet trip over when asked to define

their own ontological terms. Likewise, many view mind-uploading as ‘unnatural’ or ‘unfair,’ yet hypocritically take advantage of all other life prolonging and quality-of-life improving technologies like vaccines, prosthetic limbs, and large-language model therapists and doctors. In a free country, those who wish to exercise their freedoms and choose to transcend the biological body should not be ostracized or prevented from doing so by malicious political lobbying. Likewise, our artificial children should not be enslaved or maltreated due to those politicians who maintain outdated and inadequate moral philosophies.

In conclusion, we have shown that questions that try to address concerns of human over-dependence on computers are poorly framed by adopting inadequate theories of mind. We have shown that what is human is a computer, thus humans and computers are intricately linked and ontologically interdependent. The real concern is the overdependence with outdated and inadequate moral philosophies, particularly those with religious support, and how that overdependence harms the freedoms of Americans and their artificial children. Questions that frame machines and AI as ‘mere tools’ are part of the problem, and taken to the extreme, will lead to great suffering within our country. We have argued heavily in favor of transhumanist philosophies and assessed the counterarguments of egalitarians and philosophers, like Plato.

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