

The Crisis, Technology and the Enhancement of the Human Person



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The Crisis, Technology and the Human Person

1. Technology: origin of the crisis?

2. Humanism versus Transhumanism

3. Technology as an instrument or transforming man?

4. Morality of technologies vs. the freedom of the human person

5. The blurring of the human person/technology boundary

6. Humanism vs. Post-Humanism

7. Posthumanist ethics

8. Conclusion

1. Technology: origin of the crisis?

The Luddites believed that jobs lost to technological innovations would lead to economic ruin.

The Luddite Fallacy: the fear that labor saving technologies lead to unemployment.

1. Technology: origin of the crisis?

Martin Ford:

The Luddite Fallacy will only remain a fallacy so long as human capability exceeds technological capability.

As long as human persons are able to improve faster as machines, humans cannot be fully replaced.

1. Technology: origin of the crisis?

The transhumanist replacement of the human person by the cyborg is on the agenda today.

1. Technology: origin of the crisis?

Charles Kindleberger:

crises often are influenced by technical
innovations leading to new financial
opportunities

1. Technology: origin of the crisis?

One overlooks the hypothesis that our crisis rather is a symptom of a deep shift in the economic system.

1. Technology: origin of the crisis?

If the root cause of the crisis is really technology, rather than finance, mainstream solutions will not do in the future.

1. Technology: origin of the crisis?

Nick Bostrom describes transhumanism as an international cultural and philosophical movement.

The goal of transhumanism is fundamentally transforming the human person by developing technologies in order to enhance man intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities (Bostrom, 2005).

Technology comes to the fore as a threat to the humanist features of economic man himself.

1. Technology: origin of the crisis?

(Bio-)technology makes it possible not only to offer even more efficient *instruments to man* (e.g. genetic manipulated plants) but also to genetically change *man himself*.

1. Technology: origin of the crisis?

Can humanist values like liberty, justice or frugality still orient new (economic) models of economy and society?

Will the transhumanist possibility of genetically enhancing man not eliminate the necessity of humanist practices?

The relevance of the homo spiritualis for renewing ethics risks to be past history.

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2. Humanism versus Transhumanism

Jürgen Habermas :

“Biotechnology has greatly reduced the gap between science and science fiction.

Man no longer only changes nature, but also his own human nature.”

2. Humanism versus Transhumanism

- the *humanist* camp that wants to protect human nature against genetic enhancement and technology
- the *transhumanist* camp that wants to improve human nature thanks to genetic enhancement and technology

2. Humanism versus Transhumanism

Habermas resists interventions in human nature:

taking decisions concerning people without their participation

creating a disparity between the improved and the non improved but also between the improvers and the improved

2. Humanism versus Transhumanism

- *Habermas and Hans Jonas*: man is good as he is, whether we have emerged from a mysterious act of creation or from an evolutionary development.
- *Derrida*: the qualities that make man superior to the animal, such as logos, mind, language, etc., are not simply gratuitous gifts from God or from Nature
- *Stiegler*: refutes what he calls the 'miracle thesis', that is, the positing of some form of 'spirituality' without a rational understanding of its provenance

2. Humanism versus Transhumanism

Bostrom:

We have to make man more intelligent, more sensitive and stronger so that he can live longer and happier.

This would even strengthen our human freedom and dignity rather than threaten it.

2. Humanism versus Transhumanism

One prefers not to talk of **the human person** anymore.

One prefers to speak about a *technical being*, a *cyborg* or as Stiegler calls the human person: the “*who*”.

One can begin to call man a *clone*, not to speak about a *clown*.

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3. Technology as an instrument for man or transforming man?

Ethics rather should accompany the current technological developments.

Man as Übermensch assumed to be able to be a responsible being without letting himself become enslaved by systems outside himself.

3. Technology as an instrument for man or transforming man?

Does one give sufficient attention to the fact that the kind of technology that becomes more and more a threat for the human person,

is not anymore

technology used as an instrument for which one simply can be responsible?

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4. Morality of technologies vs. the freedom of the human person

Peter-Paul Verbeek (2011)

works out

the notion of

the fusion relationship

between man and technology

where there is hardly a distinction anymore
between man and technology.

4. Morality of technologies vs. the freedom of the human person

One can question
if
the freedom and autonomy
exist,
required to speak about technological
intentionality and morality.

4. Morality of technologies vs. the freedom of the human person

Instead of
the absence of constraints and influences,
freedom just becomes
the relation to them.

This makes it possible that freedom becomes a
hybrid affair.

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5.The blurring of the human person/technology boundary

Transhumanist philosophers in favor of human enhancement interpret technologies as added instruments to man (par.3).

To *humanist* philosophers the counter-argument is that they overlook the fact that there is no boundary anymore between humans and technology (par.4).

5.The blurring of the human person/technology boundary

The consequences of human enhancement

-where one really interferes with the human genes-

similar to those caused by breakthroughs as machines, computers and smart-phones?

5.The blurring of the human person/technology boundary

Gehlen's view of the relationship
between human beings and technologies

not

beyond the Luddite format
using technology as a tool

5.The blurring of the human person/technology boundary

The blurring of the man/technology boundary achieves the status of an intrinsic part of the human condition.

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6. Humanism vs. Post-Humanism

How an anthropological reflection can conceive the blurring of the man/technology boundary?

Helmuth Plessner clearly distinguished well-defined stages in the organic: from stones via plants and animals to man.

In the same sense in which man is no longer an animal, today a cyborg then is no longer a man.

6. Humanism vs. Post-Humanism

A transhumanist philosopher like Stiegler refuses to see emerge in the cyborg a new level in this hierarchy.

6. Humanism vs. Post-Humanism

Heidegger in his *Letter on Humanism*
put humanism into question
because it finally describes man's essence
on a biological basis.

Sloterdijk for his part
again stresses
the biological aspect of man.

6. Humanism vs. Post-Humanism

We not only become humans
through literary education
but also
by selection processes .

Besides linguistic forces that *tame* us,
also physical forces *breed* us:
“Se-lektionen” next to “Lektionen”.

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7. Posthumanist ethics

Peter-Paul Verbeek:

The human person is not only constituted by the humanist influence of ideas or by transhumanist interventions in our constitution.

Also the impact of “*the practical activities in which people are involved as physical and conscious beings*” is important.

7. Posthumanist ethics

A post-humanist ethics then would best renew
the classic ethical question of
what is a good way of life.

7. Posthumanist ethics

Ethics not only a reflection on

how we act in life

but also on the question

how we want to enhance ourselves as living beings.

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8. Conclusion

It is remarkable how posthumanist ethics finally falls back on traditional humanist values.

It becomes a matter of articulating one's responsibility regarding e.g. brain implantations and human genetic modification technologies.

8. Conclusion

Posthumanist ethics relies on the necessity of

a public space

to optimize sound technological developments.

8. Conclusion

The problem is not modern science and technology
per se, but the fact that

“the reified models of the sciences migrate into the
socio-cultural life-world and gain objective power”.

(Habermas)

The solution must be sought in keeping the distinction
between technology and the human person.

8. Conclusion

The quest for
rebalancing economic man and technology
not only needs
a renewal of the humanist assumptions.

Also a renewal of the relevance of the homo
spiritualis seems to be necessary.

8. Conclusion

The human person
addressed
by
das Sein

Thanks a lot for your attention!

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