Chapter 17
Transhumanism Without Mind Uploading and Immortality

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ABSTRACT

Elon Musk regularly advertises for the simulation argument, stressing that he regards it as highly likely that we live in a computer simulation. However, it must be noted that the argument can be reconstructed such that its line of thought can be rationally grasped. This, however, does not necessarily mean that it is a plausible argument. The argument presupposes the anthropology that human beings can be uploaded onto a hard drive, which is based upon the view that humans are nothing like a software running on our body which serves as our hardware. It is this understanding of the human species which has been employed by many transhumanists who stress that immortality is near. The author will explain the line of thought underlining the simulation argument while they will, at the same time, explain that it is neither highly likely that we live in a computer simulation, nor that we can upload our personalities onto a computer, and even if this was possible, it would not enable us to become immortal.

INTRODUCTION

I have heard transhumanists claim that mind uploading is the crux concerning whether someone counts as a transhumanists or not. I do not think that his is the case. Julian Huxley who first coined the term transhumanism in 1951 would not be a transhumanist, if you had to believe in the possibility of mind uploading. I do not regard mind uploading as impossible, and I definitely hold that we can and should use technologies to move beyond the current limitations of our existence. However, gene or cyborg technologies are far more likely possibilities of fulfilling this goal in the near future (Sorgner 2018b). Gene technologies cover the wide range of options from gene editing via gene analysis towards selecting fertilized eggs after IVF (=in vitro fertilization) and PGD (=preimplantation genetic diagnosis) (Sorgner 2016, 140-189). Cyborg technologies have to do with the digitalisation of the life world, smart cities, the internet of things, and the upgrading of human beings by means of RFID chips. We have to realize that

smart cities need upgraded humans and the internet of things needs to integrate the internet of bodily things. Both of these types of technologies are progressing rapidly fast, due to the central relevance they have for promoting a widely shared human goal, the prolonging of our health-spans.

When it comes to transhumanism, what is being discussed in newspapers, magazines and the popular media most often is the possibility of mind-uploading. It is an intriguing idea indeed. It also serves as an entertaining basis for Hollywood movies. The movie Transcendence by Wally Pfister with Johnny Depp as a main actor provides an excellent case in question. Not only does it provide non-experts with an excellent visualization of how mind-uploading can be imagined, but it also moves beyond fiction by including Elon Musk in the movie, who is among the best known popularisers of this theory. In one scene of the movie, he sits in the lecture hall listening to a talk about mind uploading what is being referred to as transcendence in the movie.

Elon Musk and the Simulation Argument

In the non-fictional world, Elon Musk regularly advertises and talks about the simulation argument in front of economic, political, and social leaders. This argument is closely related to the concept of mind uploading, as I will explain in more detail soon. The simulation argument goes back to an argument by Bostrom which he presented in his paper "Are you living in a computer simulation" (Bostrom 2003). Musk adds some additional twists which make his line of thought particularly imaginable.[1]

Musk reminds us that less than fifty years ago, the computer game Pong was popular. Its rules are comparable to those of table tennis, and its graphic consists of lines and dots. The two clubs of the players and the centre line are represented by vertical lines, and the ball by a point. These simple graphic elements made up the cutting-edge game of the seventies. Meanwhile, he correctly points out that millions of players play simultaneously on the Internet in a photorealistic environment. This leads him to raise the following questions: What will we be able to do in 2070, if the speed of innovation in this area is maintained? Will we still be able to distinguish between artificial and fundamental reality then? Musk is convinced that the artificial and the fundamental reality will be indistinguishable in terms of their experiential content. If this consideration is correct, then it is likely that we are already living in a computer simulation today, he concludes. But why should it be likely that we are already living in a computer simulation when it can be expected that in fifty years the experiential content of an artificial and the basic reality will be identical? There clearly seems to be a fallacy here, one might think. However, if simple probability calculations are included in this train of thought, the idea underlying the simulation hypothesis can be understood rationally. Here it is necessary to reflect on the numerical relationship between the future simulated and the currently experienced reality. This idea can be illustrated by means of a special example.

Musk's line of reasoning includes the assumption that lifelike computer simulations of the past will be possible in fifty years due to the exponential growth in computer performance power. This idea presupposes that we will not be extinct by then and that some people will be so advanced that they are capable of lifelike computer simulations and, on top of that, that there is an interest in computer simulations of the past. I currently regard myself as living in the year of 2020 as one of about seven billion people on earth. In future computer simulations of the past, the same will apply to every single inhabitant. Many people in every simulated world will expect to be one of seven billion people on Earth in 2020. Each of them will experience their own world as intensely, real and emotional as each of us does at present. From Musk's point of view, it is likely that there will be a billion such simulations of the past, resulting

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