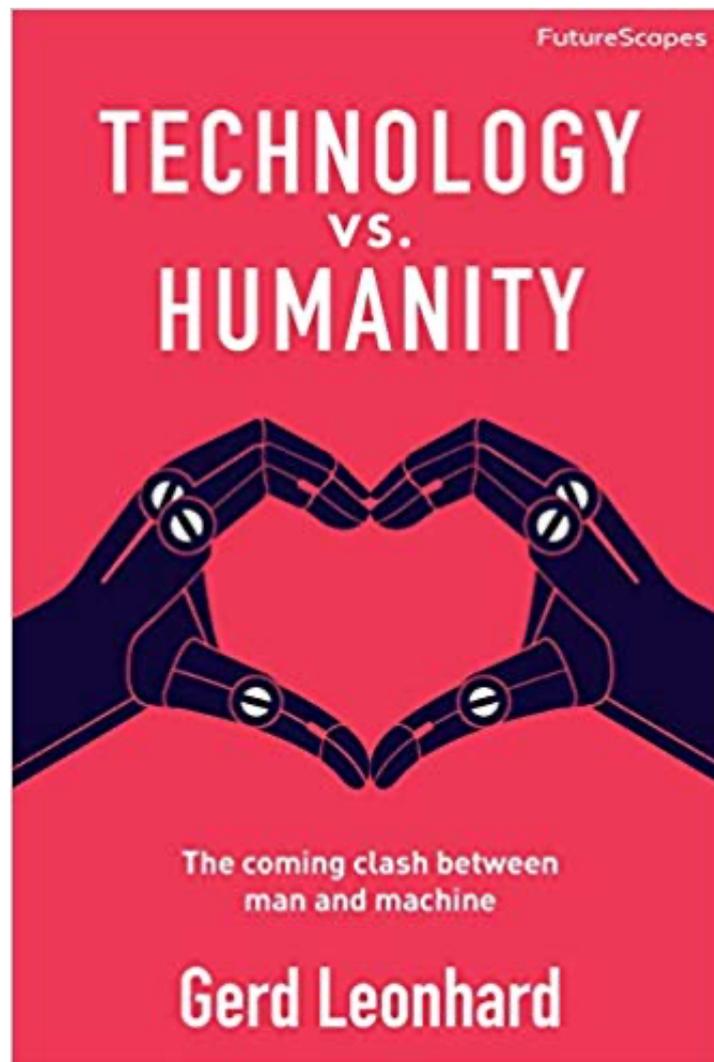


Technology vs Humanity: The coming clash between man and machine – Gerd Leonhard

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A seminal discourse today involves evaluating the virtues and vicissitudes of what is being seen as brazen forays into the world of [Artificial Intelligence](#) and [Machine Learning](#). While egregious companies, venture capitalists, tech entrepreneurs, and pioneers of cutting edge technology wax eloquent over the undiminished benefits that would constitute outcomes of this research into hitherto uncharted territories, a counterfactual caution is issued by a few of their counterparts, who fear that man ultimately would become subservient to and subjugated by machines. So will we be the immortal all-conquering Gods inhabiting a

veritable utopia that cocks-a-snook at [Thomas More](#)'s famous satire or would we, in a phenomenon of pathetic reductionism be reduced to [Yevgeny Zamyatin](#)'s or [Aldous Huxley](#)'s lab rats, scurrying to and fro in sequestered scenarios while our robotic masters look down upon us with derision and disdain?

Humanist/Futurist, Author, and Explainer/Designer, [Gerd Leonhard](#) takes this existential conundrum head on in his extremely readable book, "Technology vs Humanity". At the core of this deep book is the distinguishing features between happiness as a hedonistic concept and happiness in the [Aristotelean](#) vein of [eudaimonia](#). While the latter describes the notion of living in accordance with one's daimon, which we take to mean character and virtue, that leads to a good life, the former refers to an ephemeral and temporary state of happiness primarily driven by [dopamine](#) surges.

This distinction becomes extremely vital because the technological changes which we are collectively going to experience as humanity is not going to be sequential. As per Mr. Leonhard, we need to be prepared to adapt to a change that will be exponential, combinatorial, and recursive both in its wake and sweep. Mr. Leonhard opines that nihilistic technology is a far cry from self-actualization. Leonhard argues that technology or its advancement should not find itself perched atop the pile in a [Maslow's pyramid of needs hierarchy](#). "Technology is entirely nihilistic about the things we humans truly care about. I believe it cannot and should not move up Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid from helping with basic needs towards love and belonging, self-esteem, or self-realization."

Mr. Leonhard identifies, what he terms are ten Megashifts that will combine to alter the future in ways unimaginable. The megashifts are:

1. Digitization
2. Mobilization
3. Screenification
4. Disintermediation

5. Transformation
6. Intelligization
7. Automation
8. Virtualization
9. Anticipation; and
10. Robotization

These Megashifts with their preternatural possibilities and ingrained perniciousness have the potential to both make and mar our future. Hence Mr. Leonhard's coinage of the term "HellVen" (a combination of Hell and Heaven") to illustrate the possible trajectory these Megashifts might take.

Mr. Leonhard makes an extremely interesting and important dissimilarity between algorithms and 'androrithms.' According to him, it is the facet of androrithms that confers the traits of humanism in us. "What makes us human is not mathematical or even just chemical or biological. It involves those things that are largely unnoticed, unsaid, subconscious, ephemeral, and unobjectifiable. These are the human essences that I like to call androrithms that we absolutely must keep even if they appear to be clumsy, complicated, slow, risky, or inefficient compared to non-biological systems, computers, and robots." A simpler way to assimilate the essence of androrithms would be to grasp the tenet of the philosopher [Martin Heidegger](#)'s 'Dasein'. Dasein is a German word that means "being there" or "presence". Dasein rhymes with "existence", and found a mention in Heidegger's magnum opus [Being and Time](#). Heidegger uses the expression Dasein to refer to the experience of being that is peculiar to human beings. Hence while machines may mirror the traits of human beings and surpass their once masters in intelligence, they will never be able to either experience or emote the philosophy of Dasiem.

Thus while radical optimists such as [Ray Kurzweil](#) and [Peter Diamandis](#) chose to amplify and themselves exemplify the positive scheme of AI (deservedly so), Mr. Leonhard advises judiciousness and prudence. "As

much as I am enthralled by STEM breakthroughs, I believe that we urgently need to create a counterbalance, one that amplifies the importance of truly human factors. In contrast to the STEM acronym, I have recently started calling this CORE: creativity/compassion, originality, reciprocity/responsibility, and empathy."

Drawing on the works of the likes of [James Barrat](#), the author of the hugely popular "Our Final Invention" – and incidentally one of my favourite Science & Technology authors – Mr. Leonhard makes a spirited case to proceed with great discretion in so far as the realms of Augmented Reality (AR); Virtual Reality (VR) and Brain Computer Interface (BCI) are concerned. Rooting for the creation of a Global Digital Ethics Council (GDEC), Mr. Leonhard proposes a definition of ground rules and the establishment of most basic and universal values such a dramatically different, fully digitized society should imbibe.

Mr. Leonhard also argues for the preservation and protection of a set of inalienable rights in a burgeoning digital world. These rights are:

- The right to remain natural;
- The right to remain inefficient in so far as humanness is concerned and not be reduced to machine efficiency;
- The right to disconnect
- The right to be anonymous
- The right to employ or involve people instead of machines

While the first 4 rights are self-explanatory, the fifth right raises interesting questions. Mr. Leonhard argues that "We should not allow companies or employers to be disadvantaged if they choose to use people instead of machines, even if it's more expensive and less efficient. Instead we should provide tax credits to those that do, and consider automation taxes for companies that dramatically reduce the number of employees in favor of machines and software. Those taxes would need to be made available to retrain people that became the victims of technological unemployment.

However, imposition of any steep penalty might not be adequate to enforce this right since considering the deep pockets of giant multinationals, no monetary levy might be sufficient to act as a deterrent. Mr. Leonhard also provides his readers with a list of strawman arguments, which he himself concedes might need to be further refined, honed or revamped for ushering in a degree of equanimity between man and machine. Some of these arguments are:

1. Understanding the exponential nature of the future;
2. Perceiving opportunities and threats.
3. Becoming better stewards of humanity.
4. Incorporating ethics into technology
5. Understand the progression or regression from magic-manic-toxic, the path which an obsession with technology takes
6. Supplement STEM with CORE
7. Distinguish between real and simulation.
8. Ask Why and Who.
9. We should not let Silicon Valley, technologists, the military, or investors become mission control for humanity— no matter what country they are in.

As James Barrat famously quoted in his "Our Final Invention", "As I'll argue, AI is a dual-use technology like nuclear fission. Nuclear fission can illuminate cities or incinerate them. Its terrible power was unimaginable to most people before 1945. With advanced AI, we're in the 1930s right now. We're unlikely to survive an introduction as abrupt as nuclear fission's."

Mr. Gerd Leonhard's clarion call to be part of "Team Human", a concept popularized by Doug Rushkoff, an American media theorist, writer, columnist, lecturer, graphic novelist, and documentarian represents an effort to prevent the fossilization of mankind's identity and its sacrifice at the altar of dangerous technology. "Technology vs Humanity" is thus, a plea for the preservation, if not downright redemption of the values that make the human species singularly unique.