THE ETHICS OF TRANSHUMANISM

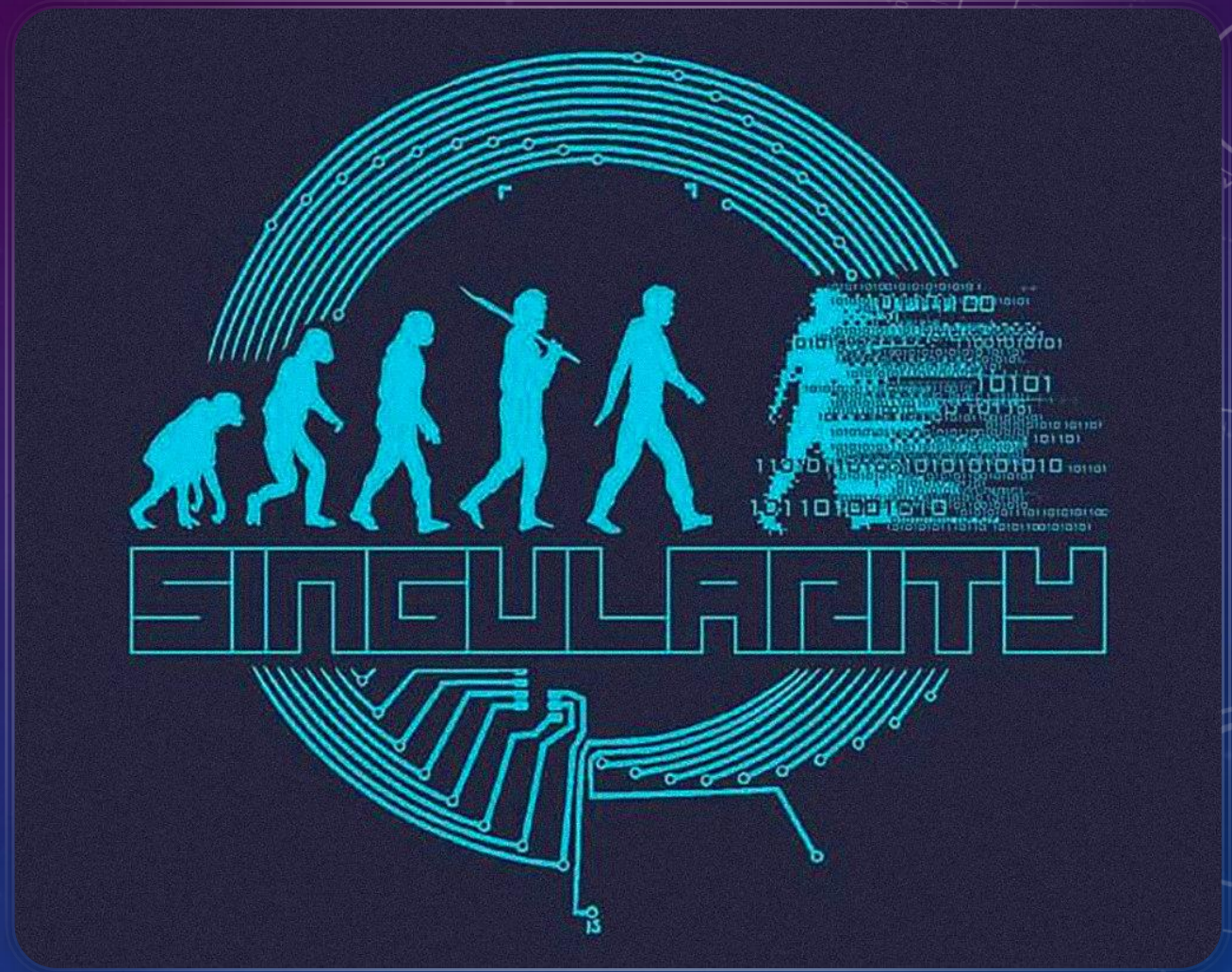MITCHELL GRELSON

WHAT IS TRANSHUMANISM?

- "...a class of philosophies of life that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life-promoting principles and values."

  - Max Moore, founder of the Extropian Movement

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

- Research and development of new technologies
- Improve the human condition
- "Enhance" normal human ability

TIMELINE

- 1923: J. B. S. Haldane publishes *Daedalus*, offers an early vision of transhumanist thought
- 1951: Julian Huxley coins the term "transhumanism" in a lecture on overcoming limitations
- 1965: Irving John Good proposes a bright future for "Ultraintelligent machines"
- 1983: The Transhumanist Manifesto is written by Natasha Vita-More
- 1988: Max Moore publishes the first transhumanist magazine, establishes the idea of extropy
  - Main drive for modern Transhumanist thought
- 1998: The World Transhumanist Association is founded by Nick Bostrom and David Pearce
  - Later branded Humanity+ in 2008
- 2003: Methuselah Foundation is established to research Life Extension
- 2018: The Brain Preservation Society awards 21st Century Medicine the "Large Mammal Brain Preservation Prize" for the demonstration of *Destructive Uploading* as theoretically viable for revival

NOT-SO-CRAZY EXAMPLES

- Pacemakers

- Virtual Reality

- Robotic Prosthetics

- Regular Prosthetics

- Virtual Assistants

- Pretty much any technology that improves or eases life

THE "CRAZY" EXAMPLES

- Neural / bodily implants

- Designer babies

- Technological strength enhancement

- Suspension or elimination of Illness / death

- Merging our human consciousness with that of machines

  - The Singularity

POTENTIAL ETHICS CONCERNS

- Death Prevention / Immortality

- Religious Beliefs and the Violations of

- Social and Economic Division in a Transhuman / Posthuman World

ISSUES WITH IMMORTALITY

- Seems pretty cool:
  - Saving people's lives is viewed as good
  - Why wouldn't you want to
- Consequences of a population that never dies of old age:
  - Overpopulation
  - Disproportionate Age Distribution
  - Emotional Stress

RELIGION AND TRANSHUMANISM

- Lots of opposition from religious and spiritual groups

- Goes against the "natural order of things"

- Abrahamic Religions

  - Designed in God's image

  - Transhumanism views humans as something that needs improvement

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DIVIDES

- New technology isn't cheap
  - Technology that postpones or prevents death would *Definitely* not be cheap
  - This means that the rich get first dibs
- Augmented humans would be physically and mentally "superior"
  - Humans without augments could be viewed as a lower class of society

TRANSHUMANIST ANSWERS?

HOW WILL PROPONENTS OF TRANSHUMANISM ANSWER THESE ISSUES?

IMMORTALITY

- Overpopulation:
  - The creation of a new generation, not as valuable or prevalent in the minds of immortals

- Age Distribution:
  - Perhaps not even an issue at all
  - Older and wiser, new ideas still available

- Mental:
  - Though these would be totally new mental concerns, still hope
  - We have tentative treatments for many mental concerns in todays world
  - Scale it up alongside the rest of advancement

RELIGION

- Very difficult to answer this issue
- Many religions have a promise of eternal life
  - This usually involves the death of the mortal body first
- Allows humans much more time to examine the nature of faith

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC

- Throttling release of the tech until it is available for *ALL*
  - Very difficult to monitor
- Dispersal of "Old Money"
  - No one dies, no one inherits wealth by default
- Long term situation might not be as bad as the short term
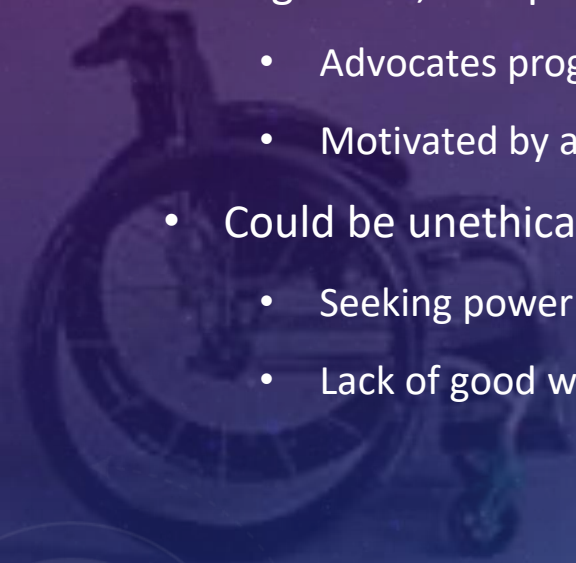
ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS

- Kantianism

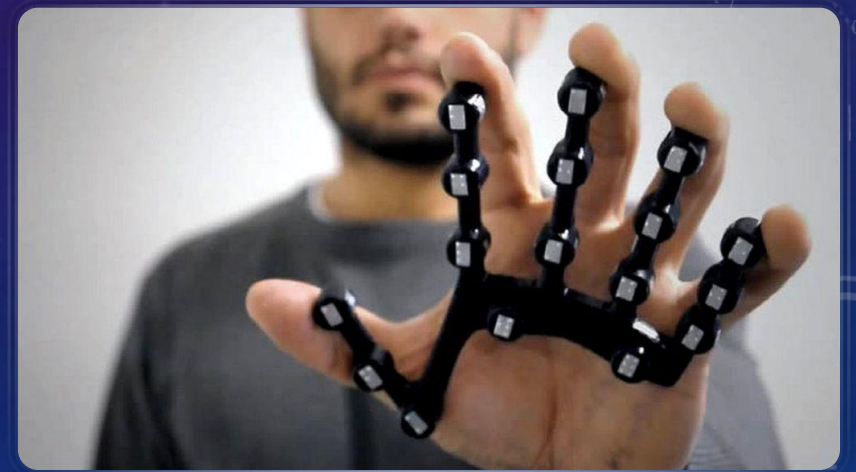- Rule Utilitarianism

- Act Utilitarianism

KANTIANISM

- *Act in such a way that such actions would be appropriate as universal law.*

- In general, accept as ethical

  - Advocates progress

  - Motivated by a "good will"

- Could be unethical in some situations

  - Seeking power over others

  - Lack of good will

RULE UTILITARIANISM

- *Conformity to a rule that leads to the greatest utility / good*
    - *Rule: Transhumanist technologies may be used to enhance humans only if the value gained is intrinsic to the individual, and minimizes the extrinsic effects on others*
- This holds only if the value gained is Intrinsic
    - Extrinsic effects on others could be negative
        - Humans are competitive and will seek to have the best advantages
- The vast majority of Transhumanist technologies would be extrinsic
- We are forced to oppose Transhumanism under Rule Utilitarianism

ACT UTILITARIANISM

- *The ends justify the means*

- Allows us to examine the long-term effects of Transhumanism

- Taking control of Human Evolution

  - We can maximize any quantity we choose (Happiness?), not just reproduction

- Elimination of suffering

  - Utility: Net difference of happiness and suffering

  - Minimal to no suffering, very high utility

- Technological Progress

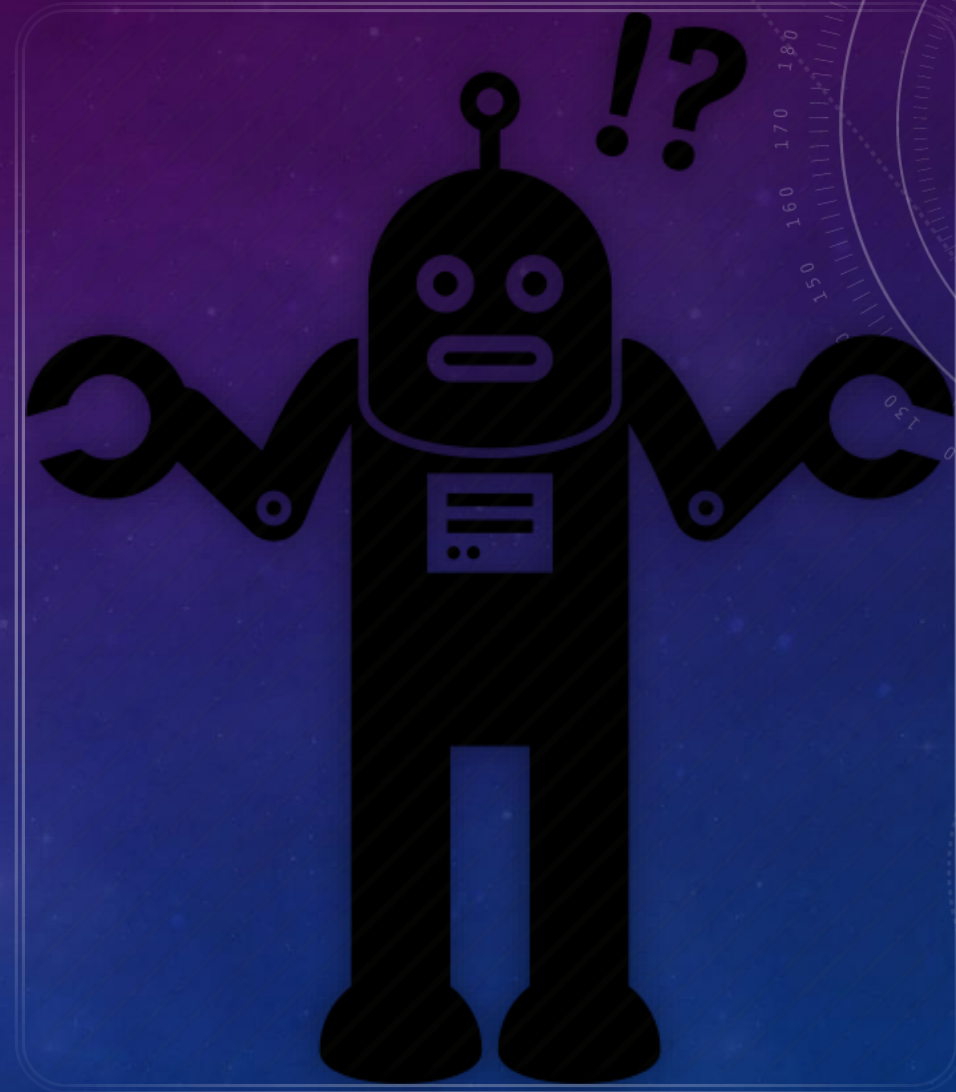 - Generally progress enhances and improves life

ACT UTILITARIANISM (CONT.)

- Potential for Extreme Inequality

- Loss of human nature

  - If we enhance away our human flaws...

    - Anger, jealousy, irrationality...

- Elimination of Suffering

  - Not necessarily a purely good thing

  - Suffering is an important part of the human experience

    - But Is it important to preserve the human experience?...

- Very Difficult to assign a verdict to all of Transhumanism

  - Better to just assign ethics to individual advancements

CONCLUSION

- Transhumanism is a phenomenally difficult thing to assign an ethical value to

- It in large part depends on who does it first

- We might never have a concrete answer to this

- We can only hope that we will be able to make the right decision when the tech comes into play

QUESTIONS?

THANKS!