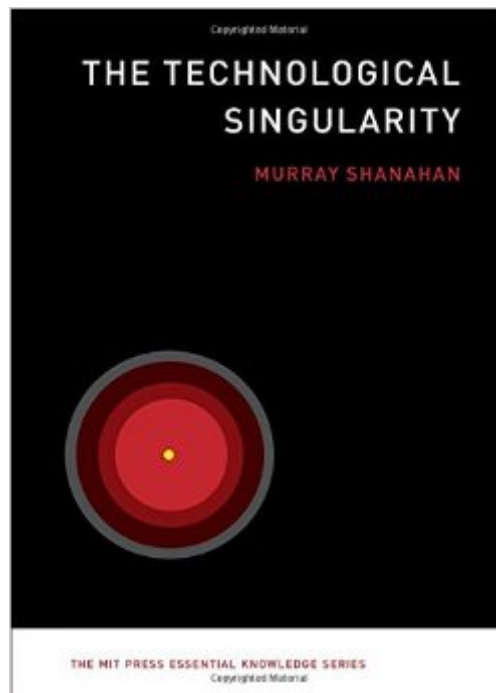# The Technological Singularity (The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series)

Synopsis

The idea that human history is approaching a "singularity" -- that ordinary humans will someday be overtaken by artificially intelligent machines or cognitively enhanced biological intelligence, or both -- has moved from the realm of science fiction to serious debate. Some singularity theorists predict that if the field of artificial intelligence (AI) continues to develop at its current dizzying rate, the singularity could come about in the middle of the present century. Murray Shanahan offers an introduction to the idea of the singularity and considers the ramifications of such a potentially seismic event.Shanahan's aim is not to make predictions but rather to investigate a range of scenarios. Whether we believe that singularity is near or far, likely or impossible, apocalypse or utopia, the very idea raises crucial philosophical and pragmatic questions, forcing us to think seriously about what we want as a species. Shanahan describes technological advances in AI, both biologically inspired and engineered from scratch. Once human-level AI -- theoretically possible, but difficult to accomplish -- has been achieved, he explains, the transition to superintelligent AI could be very rapid. Shanahan considers what the existence of superintelligent machines could mean for such matters as personhood, responsibility, rights, and identity. Some superhuman AI agents might be created to benefit humankind; some might go rogue. (Is Siri the template, or HAL?) The singularity presents both an existential threat to humanity and an existential opportunity for humanity to transcend its limitations. Shanahan makes it clear that we need to imagine both possibilities if we want to bring about the better outcome.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A nice crystallization of The Technological Singularity and it's surrounding issues. If you just want to understand why it's a real issue this is the book for you.

This is an excellent, brief book. Unlike many books in this field, it gets right to the point as well as filling the newbie in on vital aspects of applicable technologies. The book is somewhat philosophical but looks at the whole space of AI up to and including the singularity. It does not take a strong stance on what is possible technologically but explores what the implications are if it turns out to be the case that AI is possible.

I wanted an overview of the ideas in play and this book provided it along with new information I had not been considering. Probably worth reading for everyone in our society.

I see a trend in the books that I am reading this year. AI aside, the merging of technology and everyday life is inevitable. It is up to human kind to claim ownership over the biologics of life and enforce the ethical dilemmas.

A very thorough and thought provoking piece of work from Shanahan. It goes hand in hand with his other piece of work 'Embodiment and the Inner Life'.

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