

1. Who is Nick Bostrom ?

2. He is seen as « a prophet of doom » by what kind of people ?

3. Give the title of the book he has written :

4. What does he examine in this book ?

5. When will the « intelligence explosion » occur, according to Nick Bostrom ?

6. Why are we « like children playing with a bomb » ?

7. What is this « bomb » he is talking about ?

8. Why is it a threat ? Why is it « Darwinian », according to Bostrom ?

9. Can you explain what the transhumanist movement's vision of the digital age is ?

10. What has Bostrom be identified as ?

11. At the end what has Bostrom's optimism turned into ?

Transition for a commentary : AI is presented as a threat in this document and humans presented as children unaware of the dangers.

What are these two possibilities of a digital future ?

- Heaven ?
- Hell ?

TO GO FURTHER on TRANSHUMANISM : read A Stanford University debate :
transhumanism vs anarcho-primitivism
by Zolstan Istvan.

What do transhumanists believe in ?

What do anarcho-primitivists believe in ?

What questions does it raise ?

A Stanford University Debate: Transhumanism vs. Anarcho-Primitivism

by Zoltan ISTVAN, *The Huffington Post*¹, 11/20/2014

Last Saturday night at Stanford University, I had the honor of publicly debating the world's leading anarcho-primitivist philosopher John Zerzan. As a transhumanist, I differ from Zerzan on just about every topic. According to Wikipedia, anarcho-primitivism "advocates for a return to a non-'civilized' way of life through deindustrialization." Transhumanism advocates for the continued use of science and technology to improve and change the human species. Simply put, Zerzan encourages everyone to give up civilization and go back to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. And I encourage everyone to do more to speed up technological and scientific progress. It was a meeting of polar opposite views.

EXCHANGE I:

*Zoltan Istvan*²: Imagine what the world would look like if we gave up some of the technologies we have, if we gave up progress, if we essentially gave up civilization. The world would be very difficult, at least for all of us in the modern world today. John Zerzan and a lot of anarcho-primitivists are asking us to give up the modern world that we have evolved through, that we have adapted to, that we have created.

*John Zerzan*³: I consider transhumanism an unhealthy fantasy. Primitive lifestyles—a time before domestication—didn't destroy the natural world, didn't objectify women, didn't have armies and temples and war, didn't have everyone working their ass off, like we have now.

EXCHANGE II:

Zoltan Istvan: I'm going to begin with a story, perhaps one of the luckiest things I've done in my life. I was the first foreigner to visit basically an untouched primitive tribe in the island nation of Vanuatu in 1995. I returned and filmed the tribe six years later for the National Geographic Channel. The problem there is that almost half the people born in the village don't survive to adulthood. What anarcho-primitivists are forgetting, that while primitive lifestyles might be more natural and harmonious with nature, people like that don't have the medicines, technology, and science to stop basic diseases and early death. The village lived in a constant state of mourning due to the frequent deaths of its people.

John Zerzan: Zoltan said people could get to be astronauts if they wanted. I don't think that's a healthy thing a person would want, to tell you the truth. Consider what it takes to take a picture of the Earth from the moon. There's a massive industrial basis for that. In fact, there's an industrial basis for so many of the nice modern things we have today. Except the cost is the destruction of this planet, destruction of the biosphere. That is unmistakable.

EXCHANGE III (closing statements):

Zoltan Istvan: This question sums up the difference between transhumanists and anarcho-primitivists: Why is being an astronaut cool? Zerzan said he didn't think it was "cool." It's the symbolism of the question: Who are we? What are we doing on Earth? Where are we going? Transhumanists want to survive and thrive. We want to conquer nature. For a lot of humans that want to become more than they are—being an astronaut, being a scientist, being an explorer... conquering disease, conquering death, conquering the things that plague humanity—these are some of the coolest, most beautiful, most meaningful experiences that humans have ever had.

In short, a lot of the problems, a lot of the suffering, a lot of the dilemmas that the human race faces will be eliminated, cured, fixed, and overcome by technology—and that is something that is going to make us all better.

John Zerzan: We haven't talked about the one big issue in the world: overpopulation. It turns there are two big institutional events that created the unnatural population levels on Earth. The first is domestication in our species. The second is the Industrial Revolution, which is the basis for all modern technology, and which occurred because of millions of people doing grunt work. You have to basically enslave millions of people to have your toys.

I read on Zoltan's website a quote he wrote: "We didn't evolve through billions of years to remain animals." But we are animals. And some transhumanists want to become machines. I don't quite get that. Zoltan and I are really on opposite sides.

¹ The Huffington Post is a politically liberal American online news aggregator and blog.

² Zoltan Istvan Gyurko (born 1973) is an American writer, futurist, philosopher and transhumanist.

³ John Zerzan (born 1943) is an American anarchist and primitivist philosopher and author.