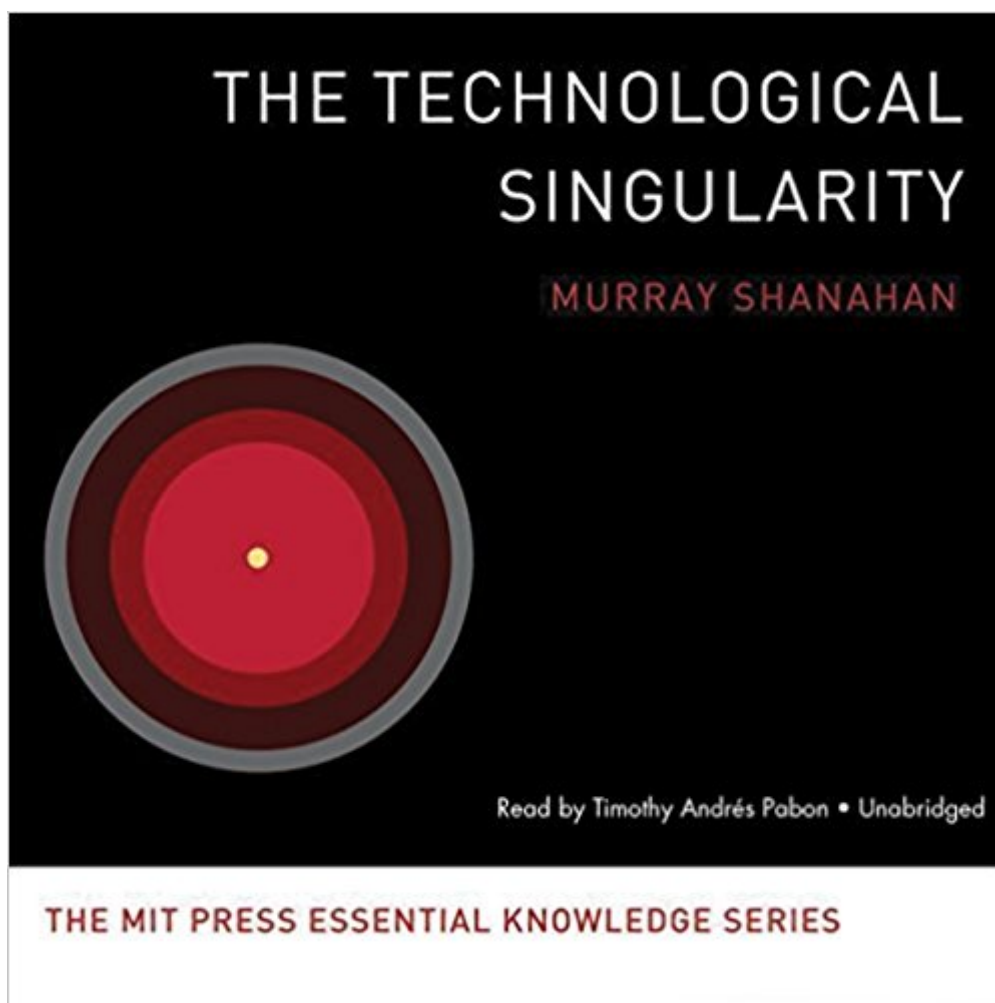


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The Technological Singularity (MIT Press Essential Knowledge)



Synopsis

[Read by Timothy Andres Pabon]The idea that human history is approaching a "singularity" -- that ordinary humans will someday be overtaken by artificially intelligent machines, 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.

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Customer Reviews

This evenhanded primer on a topic whose significance is becoming increasingly recognized ought, as per its inclusion in this series, to receive wide exposure. It will naturally appeal more to those with lay interests in philosophy, ethics, anthropology, computer science, cognitive science, engineering, sf, and world issues. (Library Journal)Shanahan's presentation is succinct, comprehensive and commendably accessible for such a complex subject. (E & T: Engineering & Technology Magazine) --This text refers to an alternate Audio CD edition.

Murray Shanahan is professor of cognitive robotics in the Department of Computing at Imperial College London. He is the author of Solving the Frame Problem and Embodiment and the Inner Life.

I found this book remarkably readable - whether from impressive writing skills of the author or the skill of a brilliant editor, it flowed beautifully, coherent and well organized. The content itself provides an interesting, high-level overview of the topic, comprising many philosophical questions, concepts, and speculation. There's not much hard science here, a few tidbits (though there are plenty of references cataloged for follow-up). If you're interested in philosophical/moral questions and speculation about rather unbounded future possibilities you may well enjoy this. It's not really a summary of current and near-future technology or development trends. Chace's "Surviving AI" is a good alternative or complementary summary, and the 1200-page textbook "Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach (3rd. ed.)" also has extensive introductory, overview and summary material - it's brilliantly written, very readable, and very firmly grounded.

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.

This is a nicely written short book about an event that's a little scary but which could happen, according to some, but not all, experts in the field of AI -- the idea that AI could "run away" and become arbitrarily smart (e.g. if they started to engineer and modify themselves). I picked up this book after seeing a TV interview of Bill Gates, who said (paraphrasing) that he thinks there is a very good chance of better-than-human AI being achieved in about 50 years. "They'll be a lot smarter than us", I remember him saying. That made me think it might not just be the stuff of science fiction and I started my hunt for books on AI. I picked this one (and another one) because it had good reviews, was brief, and was published by the MIT Press. It was very entertaining, well-written, and thought-provoking. I felt that I learned a lot about both the latest technology and the moral and social issues in a compact book that's quick to read. Leave it to humans with our supposedly superior brains to find new and more efficient ways to harm ourselves. In primitive times we discovered fire, then later guns, then the atomic bomb, and now the Terminator ? Well, let's hope we can control it and make it benign, if it happens.

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'.

A bird's (or AI pigeon's) view of possible futures and issues with Artificial Intelligence. A number of very interesting concepts are discussed in this book, but not in any great level of detail. One of the most interesting things I learnt from this book was the power of the human mind (operating on 30W!) and the depth of the challenge to emulate. I enjoyed reading about the connectedness between the body and mind, as a condition of general intelligence or awareness. The author notes the challenges with managing any general intelligence AI but this, to me, highlights how little in-depth discussion there is on this topic. I would give this book 5 stars if it were to give us more on the author's thoughts on the next steps.

We are already surrounded by pretty stupid computers. Don't write it too loud, though. They are listening... What if we manage to create human level AI? Then the computers may take us, ordinary humans, out of the development loop creating a singularity; WE are then OBSOLETE. This book raises a bunch of philosophical questions standing on the hypothesis of feasible superintelligent AI + cybernetics developments. Hey, we can use such machines to colonize the galaxy!

These MIT Press series are a good, quick read.

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.

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