Control + 1 – Block Headings

Alt/Option + Control + 1 – Hidden Block Header

Control + 2 – Tags

Control + 3 – Nothing/Clear Formatting

Control + 4 – Cards

Alt/Option + Control + 6 – Author-Date

Control + 7 – Underline

Control + Alt/Option + 7 – Dotted Underline

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Extinction should not be discounted but is not inevitable

Leslie ‘99 Risking Human Extinction, <http://lifeboat.com/ex/risking.human.extinction>

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People who accept the argument, even in a weakened form which takes account of the fact that the world is probably indeterministic, will re-estimate the size of the threats to humankind, showing increased reluctance to believe that humans will survive for very long.

 Possible threats include nuclear and biological warfare; ozone layer destruction; greenhouse warming of a runaway kind; an environmental crisis caused by overpopulation; new diseases; disasters from genetic engineering or from nanotechnology; computers replacing humans entirely, as some people think would be desirable; the upsetting of a space-filling scalar field through an experiment at very high energies, as discussed in a recent book by England’s Astronomer Royal; and even the arguments of the many philosophers who see no duty to keep the human race in existence. But despite all such dangers and despite Carter’s disturbing argument, humans may well have a good chance of surviving the next five centuries.

Extinction outweighs- nuclear weapons can cause an irreversible impact

Bostrom 02

Existential Risks

Analyzing Human Extinction Scenarios and Related Hazards

 Nick Bostrom

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<http://www.nickbostrom.com/existential/risks.html>

¶ 8.5 Psychological biases?¶ ¶ The psychology of risk perception is an active but rather messy field [80] that could potentially contribute indirect grounds for reassessing our estimates of existential risks.¶ ¶ Suppose our intuitions about which future scenarios are “plausible and realistic” are shaped by what we see on TV and in movies and what we read in novels. (After all, a large part of the discourse about the future that people encounter is in the form of fiction and other recreational contexts.) We should then, when thinking critically, suspect our intuitions of being biased in the direction of overestimating the probability of those scenarios that make for a good story, since such scenarios will seem much more familiar and more “real”. This Good-story bias could be quite powerful. When was the last time you saw a movie about humankind suddenly going extinct (without warning and without being replaced by some other civilization)? While this scenario may be much more probable than a scenario in which human heroes successfully repel an invasion of monsters or robot warriors, it wouldn’t be much fun to watch. So we don’t see many stories of that kind. If we are not careful, we can be mislead into believing that the boring scenario is too farfetched to be worth taking seriously. In general, if we think there is a Good-story bias, we may upon reflection want to increase our credence in boring hypotheses and decrease our credence in interesting, dramatic hypotheses. The net effect would be to redistribute probability among existential risks in favor of those that seem to harder to fit into a selling narrative, and possibly to increase the probability of the existential risks as a group.¶ ¶ The empirical data on risk-estimation biases is ambiguous. It has been argued that we suffer from various systematic biases when estimating our own prospects or risks in general. Some data suggest that humans tend to overestimate their own personal abilities and prospects.[16] About three quarters of all motorists think they are safer drivers than the typical driver.[17] Bias seems to be present even among highly educated people. According to one survey, almost half of all sociologists believed that they would become one of the top ten in their field [87], and 94% of sociologists thought they were better at their jobs than their average colleagues [88]. It has also been shown that depressives have a more accurate self-perception than normals except regarding the hopelessness of their situation [89-91]. Most people seem to think that they themselves are less likely to fall victims to common risks than other people [92]. It is widely believed [93] that the public tends to overestimate the probability of highly publicized risks (such as plane crashes, murders, food poisonings etc.), and a recent study [94] shows the public overestimating a large range of commonplace health risks to themselves. Another recent study [95], however, suggests that available data are consistent with the assumption that the public rationally estimates risk (although with a slight truncation bias due to cognitive costs of keeping in mind exact information).[18]¶ ¶ Even if we could get firm evidence for biases in estimating personal risks, we’d still have to be careful in making inferences to the case of existential risks.¶ ¶ 8.6 Weighing up the evidence¶ ¶ In combination, these indirect arguments add important constraints to those we can glean from the direct consideration of various technological risks, although there is not room here to elaborate on the details. But the balance of evidence is such that it would appear unreasonable not to assign a substantial probability to the hypothesis that an existential disaster will do us in. My subjective opinion is that setting this probability lower than 25% would be misguided, and the best estimate may be considerably higher. But even if the probability were much smaller (say, ~1%) the subject matter would still merit very serious attention because of how much is at stake.¶ ¶ In general, the greatest existential risks on the time-scale of a couple of centuries or less appear to be those that derive from the activities of advanced technological civilizations. We see this by looking at the various existential risks we have listed. In each of the four categories, the top risks are engendered by our activities. The only significant existential risks for which this isn’t true are “simulation gets shut down” (although on some versions of this hypothesis the shutdown would be prompted by our activities [27]); the catch-all hypotheses (which include both types of scenarios); asteroid or comet impact (which is a very low probability risk); and getting killed by an extraterrestrial civilization (which would be highly unlikely in the near future).[19]¶ ¶ It may not be surprising that existential risks created by modern civilization get the lion’s share of the probability. After all, we are now doing some things that have never been done on Earth before, and we are developing capacities to do many more such things. If non-anthropogenic factors have failed to annihilate the human species for hundreds of thousands of years, it could seem unlikely that such factors will strike us down in the next century or two. By contrast, we have no reason whatever not to think that the products of advanced civilization will be our bane.¶ ¶ We shouldn’t be too quick to dismiss the existential risks that aren’t human-generated as insignificant, however. It’s true that our species has survived for a long time in spite of whatever such risks are present. But there may be an observation selection effect in play here. The question to ask is, on the theory that natural disasters sterilize Earth-like planets with a high frequency, what should we expect to observe? Clearly not that we are living on a sterilized planet. But maybe that we should be more primitive humans than we are? In order to answer this question, we need a solution to the problem of the reference class in observer selection theory [76]. Yet that is a part of the methodology that doesn’t yet exist. So at the moment we can state that the most serious existential risks are generated by advanced human civilization, but we base this assertion on direct considerations. Whether there is additional support for it based on indirect considerations is an open question.¶ ¶ We should not blame civilization or technology for imposing big existential risks. Because of the way we have defined existential risks, a failure to develop technological civilization would imply that we had fallen victims of an existential disaster (namely a crunch, “technological arrest”). Without technology, our chances of avoiding existential risks would therefore be nil. With technology, we have some chance, although the greatest risks now turn out to be those generated by technology itself.¶ ¶ 9 Implications for policy and ethics¶ ¶ Existential risks have a cluster of features that make it useful to identify them as a special category: the extreme magnitude of the harm that would come from an existential disaster; the futility of the trial-and-error approach; the lack of evolved biological and cultural coping methods; the fact that existential risk dilution is a global public good; the shared stakeholdership of all future generations; the international nature of many of the required countermeasures; the necessarily highly speculative and multidisciplinary nature of the topic; the subtle and diverse methodological problems involved in assessing the probability of existential risks; and the comparative neglect of the whole area. From our survey of the most important existential risks and their key attributes, we can extract tentative recommendations for ethics and policy:

We should mitigate existential risk over existing problems- future people matter as much as people in other spatial locations

Andersen 12

ROSS ANDERSEN Ross Andersen is an Atlantic correspondent based in Washington, D.C. He is also the Science Editor at the Los Angeles Review of Books, and a contributor to The Economist. We're Underestimating the Risk of Human Extinction

MAR 6 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/03/were-underestimating-the-risk-of-human-extinction/253821/>

Unthinkable as it may be, humanity, every last person, could someday be wiped from the face of the Earth. We have learned to worry about asteroids and supervolcanoes, but the more-likely scenario, according to Nick Bostrom, a professor of philosophy at Oxford, is that we humans will destroy ourselves. Bostrom, who directs Oxford's Future of Humanity Institute, has argued over the course of several papers that human extinction risks are poorly understood and, worse still, severely underestimated by society. Some of these existential risks are fairly well known, especially the natural ones. But others are obscure or even exotic. Most worrying to Bostrom is the subset of existential risks that arise from human technology, a subset that he expects to grow in number and potency over the next century. Despite his concerns about the risks posed to humans by technological progress, Bostrom is no luddite. In fact, he is a longtime advocate of transhumanism---the effort to improve the human condition, and even human nature itself, through technological means. In the long run he sees technology as a bridge, a bridge we humans must cross with great care, in order to reach new and better modes of being. In his work, Bostrom uses the tools of philosophy and mathematics, in particular probability theory, to try and determine how we as a species might achieve this safe passage. What follows is my conversation with Bostrom about some of the most interesting and worrying existential risks that humanity might encounter in the decades and centuries to come, and about what we can do to make sure we outlast them. Some have argued that we ought to be directing our resources toward humanity's existing problems, rather than future existential risks, because many of the latter are highly improbable. You have responded by suggesting that existential risk mitigation may in fact be a dominant moral priority over the alleviation of present suffering. Can you explain why?

Bostrom: Well suppose you have a moral view that counts future people as being worth as much as present people. You might say that fundamentally it doesn't matter whether someone exists at the current time or at some future time, just as many people think that from a fundamental moral point of view, it doesn't matter where somebody is spatially---somebody isn't automatically worth less because you move them to the moon or to Africa or something. A human life is a human life. If you have that moral point of view that future generations matter in proportion to their population numbers, then you get this very stark implication that existential risk mitigation has a much higher utility than pretty much anything else that you could do. There are so many people that could come into existence in the future if humanity survives this critical period of time---we might live for billions of years, our descendants might colonize billions of solar systems, and there could be billions and billions times more people than exist currently. Therefore, even a very small reduction in the probability of realizing this enormous good will tend to outweigh even immense benefits like eliminating poverty or curing malaria, which would be tremendous under ordinary standards.

Must evaluate consequences.

Issac 2 [Jeffrey, professor of political science at Indiana University, Dissent, Spring, ebsco]

As writers such as Niccolo Machiavelli, Max Weber, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Hannah Arendt have taught, an unyielding concern with moral goodness undercuts political responsibility. The concern may be morally laudable, reflecting a kind of personal integrity, but it suffers from three fatal flaws: (1) It fails to see that the purity of one’s intention does not ensure the achievement of what one intends. Abjuring violence or refusing to make common cause with morally compromised parties may seem like the right thing; but if such tactics entail impotence, then it is hard to view them as serving any moral good beyond the clean conscience of their supporters; (2) it fails to see that in a world of real violence and injustice, moral purity is not simply a form of powerlessness; it is often a form of complicity in injustice. This is why, from the standpoint of politics—as opposed to religion—pacifism is always a potentially immoral stand. In categorically repudiating violence, it refuses in principle to oppose certain violent injustices with any effect; and (3) it fails to see that politics is as much about unintended consequences as it is about intentions; it is the effects of action, rather than the motives of action, that is most significant. Just as the alignment with “good” may engender impotence, it is often the pursuit of “good” that generates evil. This is the lesson of communism in the twentieth century: it is not enough that one’s goals be sincere or idealistic; it is equally important, always, to ask about the effects of pursuing these goals and to judge these effects in pragmatic and historically contextualized ways. Moral absolutism inhibits this judgment. It alienates those who are not true believers. It promotes arrogance. And it undermines political effectiveness.

Extinction from nukes is qualitatively different – standard calculus doesn’t apply.

Sandberg 8 [Anders, (PhD in Neuroscience and Postdoc Research Fellow @ Future of Humanity Institute), Jason G. Matheny, (Dept. Health Policy and Management @ Johns Hopkins School of Public Helath), and Milan M. Cirkovic, (Senior Research Associate @ Research Observatory of Belgrade, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, “How can we reduce the risk of human extinction?” 9-9, http://www.thebulletin.org/web-edition/features/how-can-we-reduce-the-risk-of-human-extinction]

Such remote risks may seem academic in a world plagued by immediate problems, such as global poverty, HIV, and climate change. But as intimidating as these problems are, they do not threaten human existence. In discussing the risk of nuclear winter, Carl Sagan emphasized the astronomical toll of human extinction: A nuclear war imperils all of our descendants, for as long as there will be humans. Even if the population remains static, with an average lifetime of the order of 100 years, over a typical time period for the biological evolution of a successful species (roughly ten million years), we are talking about some 500 trillion people yet to come. By this criterion, the stakes are one million times greater for extinction than for the more modest nuclear wars that kill "only" hundreds of millions of people. There are many other possible measures of the potential loss--including culture and science, the evolutionary history of the planet, and the significance of the lives of all of our ancestors who contributed to the future of their descendants. Extinction is the undoing of the human enterprise. There is a discontinuity between risks that threaten 10 percent or even 99 percent of humanity and those that threaten 100 percent. For disasters killing less than all humanity, there is a good chance that the species could recover. If we value future human generations, then reducing extinction risks should dominate our considerations. Fortunately, most measures to reduce these risks also improve global security against a range of lesser catastrophes, and thus deserve support regardless of how much one worries about extinction. These measures include: \* Removing nuclear weapons from hair-trigger alert and further reducing their numbers.