



Editorial: Of Minds and Machines

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This special issue of *JET* deals with questions relating to our radically enhanced future selves or our possible “mind children” – conscious beings that we might bring about through the development of advanced computers and robots. Our mind children might exceed human levels of cognition, and avoid many human limitations and vulnerabilities.

In a call for papers earlier this year, the editors asked how far we ought to go with processes that might ultimately convert humans to some sort of post-biological form or replace us with post-biological beings. Are these coherent ideas at all? If so, is it likely, or plausible, that we’ll one day be able to do such things? Even if we can, is that desirable? More generally, how far can all these processes go, and how far should we pursue them?

To offer a more personal and pointed question, would you “upload” your personality into some kind of advanced computer or robot if the technology became available? Would you do so even if the process required the destruction of your original organic brain?

We are not the first to ask such questions. A large body of relevant literature has built up in recent decades, some of it discussing these and similar questions purely as philosophical thought experiments (e.g., to clarify ideas of personal identity and individual survival), but some of it at the level of practical recommendations for a posthuman future. Despite the intensity and quality of the ongoing debate and the eminence of many of the contributors, much work remains to be done to sort it all out and advance the discussion. We have gathered a range of viewpoints, and I predict that some of these pieces will soon be regarded as classics. They may not be the last word – how could they be when they do not all agree with each other? – but they advance our understanding of what is at stake.

I have co-edited this issue with a fine guest editor, Linda MacDonald Glenn, a distinguished bioethicist, educator, and practicing lawyer who has previously published in the journal and brings unique expertise to it. My thanks go to her for all her work as we put the issue together, and particularly for attracting such an impressive field of submissions. She will also provide a

detailed afterword to reflect on the issue's contents and the difficult ideas that the papers grapple with. My thanks, also, to James Hughes and Mark Walker for their assistance throughout the project.

It remains to thank all our authors. They have enabled us to put together an especially strong special issue of *JET*.

In accordance with our practice, articles will be published online as and when they are ready, rather than when the whole issue is fully edited. In this case, however, the editorial process is largely complete (as I write these words in November 2011), and I expect *JET* 22(1) to take its final form within a few weeks. Stay with us as the special issue unfolds.