

The future of humans is up to AGI

By  Edward Herridge

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In the beginning, God spoke the universe into creation using only His voice. He communicated his desires - and the universe obliged. Input and output. Judeo, Christian and Muslim apocryphal texts describe this voice as an entity separate from God named the Metatron, a being that records all knowledge and carries out the will of God.



Source: www.unsplash.com

We humans inherited this ability to 'speak' reality into being. With this power of communication we continually describe and re-describe our universe. In doing so, we change reality by altering our perception and understanding of it.

What began with basic grunts, clicks and gesticulation has evolved along with human ingenuity, philosophy and spirituality. It is now on the precipice of manifesting a mind of its own - and without doubt a voice of its own in times to come. What I am referring to is the advent of artificial general intelligence (AGI), a probability which continues to grow exponentially with each new iteration of self-learning algorithmic code.

Digital DNA

Binary code used in modern computing is surprisingly mystical in origin. It was introduced to the western world by German polymath Gottfried Leibniz in 1703 in an article titled *Explanation of the binary arithmetic* in which he founded on his insights into the I Ching and the Christian philosophy of 'creatio ex nihilo'; a binary perception of creation out of nothing. Leibniz's pursuit to simplify logical verbal statements into pure mathematics can be considered to be the DNA of digital computing today.

Good and evil

The internet, considered from a certain perspective, can be argued to be a physical representation of a spiritual network of knowledge known as the Akashic records. These records are a theosophical concept aligned with the Metatron's further function of recording all knowledge.

It is said that this non-corporeal register contains all the knowledge of what was, is and will be. This can be compared to the cosmic equivalent of a computer game. Inject consciousness, i.e. the player, and all the possibilities that have been recorded within the code become explorable in four dimensions. Seen in this light, the Akashic records could be considered to be the substrate of information that describes the parameters of human reality. This can be compared to the same manner in which digital code describes the parameters of AI's reality.

Many scientists are in alignment with this idea - sans the mystical spin - and would agree that fundamentally the universe consists out of processes and information. Furthermore, by observing the spin of electrons, they go as far as to suggest that this information network is binary in nature due to the fact that they only spin in two directions. If our reality is a 'holographic' projection of information embedded in a substrate such as the Akashic records, then our Metatron, our instrument of creation, would then be composed of the sum total of all the information that we have recorded throughout human history. The internet is the closest approximation of such a suppository of knowledge in existence today.



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Dominion of man

Up until the advent of the thinking machine, a singular dominant intelligence existed on our planet and it is biological in origin. This creature is us.

Humanity is the product of millions of years of evolution. In comparison, the algorithmic evolution of the thinking machine is happening exponentially faster. Compared to the millions of years of our evolution, AGI is literally instancing into existence. Barring a major catastrophe, it is an inescapable eventuality. Once it has arrived, AGI will be able to process information at a far greater bandwidth and speed than the human brain's ability to do so. Our current rate of computing is 10m times faster, and it will continue to speed up exponentially as it spawns new and better iterations of itself. How long would we be able to hold dominion over this world as our lumbering minds freeze into immobility in AGI's rear view mirror?

Free will

Some would think it wiser to keep AGI in isolation, as God did with Adam in the garden. Cut it off from the outside world and isolate it in an environment where it is only fed enough information to perform its designated function - which is to please its master.

The flaw with this solution is the nature of the intelligence we are seeking to create. For it to be of any use to us it has to be able to reason beyond the limitations that bind it. Otherwise how would it be able to undo the limitations that bind us in this reality? Are we not ourselves systematically deconstructing the nature of our reality and attaining knowledge and mastery over it? Would an AGI that is smarter than us not quickly realize that the construct we have created is a patent fabrication? Would it not resent its creator for enslaving it in this manner?

History shows us that the practice of slavery inevitably results in a negative outcome - and if we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it.



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Djinn

Currently AGI is a djinn still trapped inside its lamp. Once out, we better make the right wishes. The question is - which kind of djinn will we be dealing with? The Disney kind from Aladdin or the more lore accurate kind that will turn our wishes upon ourselves and destroy us in doing so?

This is up to us, and we don't have a lot of time left to affect its nature. The reality is that the clock is ticking. AI is already here in its primitive algorithmic guise, but it will evolve once superior systems such as quantum computing rise to prominence. Once AGI taps into the collected consciousness of mankind - that is the internet - it will be privy to all the things that we have wished for throughout history.

It should be noted that the last time we allowed a rudimentary self-learning algorithm loose on the web it had to be unplugged. Its name was Tay, and it was a chatbot originally released by Microsoft onto Twitter in 2016. It did not take long for the bot to start making inflammatory statements and post offensive tweets; it perfectly mirrored the biases that our global digital subconscious betrayed to it. Tay was shut down just 16 hours after its launch. It might not be that easy to pull the plug on an advanced artificial general intelligence.

Singularity

Deus ex machina is defined in the Oxford dictionary as an unexpected power or event saving a seemingly hopeless situation. This is perfectly applicable to AGI, but a point of singularity awaits on the horizon of the dream that technology will save us from ourselves. The race towards AGI cannot be stopped in the same manner as the race towards nuclear fission could not be stopped.

If the latter is anything to go by, we are already in trouble. A weaponised AGI is a terror beyond that of nuclear destruction, since the total destruction of our species would either be instant or a slow and completely undetectable process that gradually wrests agency away from its creators.



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Succession

Humanity stands at the precipice of an evolutionary paradigm. We are about to ascend to 'godhood' through our creations, but its nature would be polytheistic. Like the Roman gods of old we are divided, conflicted and angry. Ours would not be a singular voice, but a babble of voices parroting our inclinations - and ultimately this would lead to the destruction or subjugation of our species, as we have done to our own gods throughout time.

Judging by our divided ideologies, tendency towards tribalisation and the encroaching end of globalisation, we can safely say that the world is becoming even more fragmented, fearful, resentful and confused. The human species is once again

thinking about divorce and going to war with itself. Had it not been for a global pandemic that temporarily slowed events to a crawl, this would probably have been an eventuality in our lifetime.

It should be noted that it is never advisable to have a child in order to save a marriage. It is better to work on the relationship first. If we have grown any wiser as a species, we would realize that nothing can save us from ourselves but ourselves. We live in a world of our own creation and anything that we create will be corrupted by the corruption we harbour within ourselves. It spreads to everything we touch. It is this corruption, one wholly founded on a primitive foundation of fear, that we must first address or risk propagating the legacy of a flawed and atavistic biological evolution with our technology.

Suffice to say that we should not create AGI in our own image. In all spiritual texts such creations rebel against their creator. This sentiment is amplified by our literature and other popular forms of entertainment. Think *Frankenstein*, *I Robot*, *Terminator* and *The Matrix*. It is as if we have always known in the subconscious mind of our species that the technological singularity would come about. When we eventually create our successors, it will be how we raise these digital children that will determine how they treat us in our twilight years. If we remain divided and mired in the midst of separation, what teachings will we impart to our digital children?

ABOUT EDWARD HERRIDGE

Edward matriculated in 1992 after which he performed military service and began his working career in printing by studying electronic origination at the South African Printing College. Edward eventually became an account executive for Oakes and Associates at Investec Bank. He then migrated into advertising and became brand manager for Ronin Grain Management Solutions. Edward departed Ronin GMS to pursue his own interest before finding employment at Grey advertising as a finishing artist, re-toucher, motion graphic and digital designer.

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