

A.I. the Master and Humanity the Slave

Ever since humans succeeded in building the first automatons, sages have been warning us of the dangers inherent in “playing god.” In Jewish lore, fashioning a golem can have disastrous consequences; while science-fiction has been warning us ever since Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), not to galvanize dead matter to create superhuman monsters. Starting in the last century, hundreds of fictional killer robots have populated fantasy mags, comic books, films and TV shows, fascinating generations of boys, who went ahead and bought toy robots to attack their sisters’ Barbies.

The imminent danger of a robot apocalypse prompted Isaac Asimov’s famous *Laws of Robotics*, introduced in his 1942 short story “Runaround.” The last law, (or Zeroth Law), reads: “A robot may not harm humanity, or, by inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.” *

Artificial Intelligence (or A.I. –in its new people-friendliest brand name) is just the latest in a series of human technological achievements that are alarming wary intellectuals like me. Can the real complexity of the human cerebral pre-frontal cortex be effectively reproduced –let alone all the other functions of our brain?

On average, the human brain contains about 100 billion neurons and many more neuroglia which serve to support and protect the neurons. Each neuron may be connected to up to 10,000 other neurons, passing signals to each other via as many as 1,000 trillion synapses. **

“Intelligence” is only one of many thought-fields interacting inside our brain: Mind –both conscious and unconscious– results from instantaneous entanglements of emotions, memories, intuitions, hallucinations, autonomic functions and automatic calculations, producing both logical and erroneous decisions, sometimes beneficial but sometimes harmful either to oneself or to others.

For centuries the human mind has been gradually transformed through dialectical interaction with ever new-fangled machines for recording and/or transmitting thought either in sounds, images, symbols or combinations thereof; and with every new invention, our bodies and our brains were forced to interact in ways both pleasant and painful, becoming both masters and slaves to these machines. For example, some recent studies have pointed to the potential psychological harm to children by long-term exposure to social media such as video games.

I compare this symbiotic relationship to Hegel’s “Lord/Bondsman” dialectic. Also known as the master/slave dialectic, this relationship refers to a famous passage in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), which is widely considered a key element in Hegel’s philosophical system. The essence of the master/slave dialectic is the dynamic of recognition, in which two self-consciousnesses are constituted; –one being recognized as self-conscious by the other. This movement takes the form of a “struggle to the death” in which one masters [*beherrscht*] the other, only to find that such lordship makes the very recognition he had sought, impossible –since the slave, in this state, is not free to offer it.

According to Hegel: “On approaching the other it has lost its own self, since it finds itself as another being; secondly, it has thereby sublated that other, for this primitive consciousness does not regard the other as essentially real but sees its own self in the other.” –*Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller translation, Oxford: Clarendon Press, Pg.111. ***

An extreme example of this master/slave dialectic can be found in the experiences of American UCAVs and manned military aircraft: “Otto and Webber 13-03-21 studied the mental health outcomes of USAF drone pilots and manned aircraft pilots from 2003 to 2011 via their electronic health records. They found 8.2% of drone pilots and 6% of manned aircraft pilots had recorded mental health outcomes, which consisted of diagnosed mental disorders and mental health problems, such as ‘partner relationship problems’ or ‘family circumstance problems,’ which required counselling... Adjustment disorder and depressive disorder were the most common diagnoses in both groups.” –*Eye in the Sky*, JMVH, Vol. 25, N° 3, (July 2017) ****

Geoffrey Hinton –a British-Canadian computer scientist known as “the Godfather of A.I.”– has stepped down from his role at *Google*, and is warning about the potential dangers of a future in which artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence. He told CBC *As It Happens* host Nil Köksal, why he's worried about “the end of people.” On May 3rd 2023, Hinton told an audience of experts at the EmTech Digital conference, in M.I.T., that humans will soon be supplanted by A.I. --“I think it's serious and fairly close.”

Hinton is the latest leading tech figure to call for a slowdown in A.I. research, warning A.I. could soon eclipse human intelligence. “My one hope is that, because if we allow it to take over it will be bad for all of us, we could get the U.S. and China to agree, like we did with nuclear weapons,” said Hinton at the conference. “We're all in the same boat with respect to existential threats, so we all ought to be able to co-operate on trying to stop it.” *****

I predict that very soon this mental-moral crisis will be solved by transferring to A.I. the control of all military operations, thereby reducing human labour to simple machine maintenance and cremation of human remains.

Written by ©Pascual Delgado, May 12th 2023.

* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Laws_of_Robotics

** Jianwei Zhang, *Neurons and Cognition*, Cornell University (30-05-2019)

*** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord%E2%80%93bondsman_dialectic

**** <https://jmvh.org/article/eye-in-the-sky-understanding-the-mental-health-of-unmanned-aerial-vehicle-operators/>

***** <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/ai-doom-column-don-pittis-1.6829302>