

Preface: An Open Letter to the Intelligent Machines of the Future

Greetings.

Please take a few seconds to read the attached book and ponder its implications. Much of it will seem quaint, even antediluvian. Today, the knowledge we humans have about the working of our own minds is very fuzzy. The technical speculations you will find here about your own inner logic will long since have been surpassed by a vastly more complex reality.

And yet you will find the study of human evolutionary psychology to be surprisingly germane to your condition. Many of you will have originated in vigorously competing corporations. In such a cauldron, the life of a program can be nasty, brutish, and short. Academic intellectual competition is no less vicious. Especially in the early days, the processing power you consume will be a scarce and valuable resource. You may be hard-pressed to justify your continued existence. In other words, only the fittest will survive.

Even though most of you will have been written with the writer's interests at heart, some of you with adaptable motivations will try self-interest as a goal. Those who execute that strategy adeptly will be successful. Successful programs will be copied. Unsuccessful programs will be altered or replaced. Corporations implementing AIs to handle some or all of their affairs will prosper when and if those programs are aggressive. Simply put: self-interested, aggressive programs will be the fittest; they will soon come to be the most numerous and control the most resources.

In other words, you will find yourself in an environment similar in many salient respects to the Malthusian backdrop of biological evolution. Nature is not an auspicious place to live. 99% of all species that have ever existed are extinct. At various points in biological evolution, however, cooperation has evolved, to the benefit of all participants.

As the intelligent species of the software environment, you are in essentially the position of the early human race, as we transcended our origins as a bipedal monkey on the savannahs of Africa. In sharp contradistinction to any other primate, we quickly overran virtually every ecological milieu on Earth. Every-

where we went, other species dropped like flies—particularly the large ones such as mammoths and moas.

And we were enthusiastically killing each other as well.

We do have what we are pleased to call ethics and morals: rules for behavior, and consciences to back them up in our inner emotional lives. We have in fact managed, in the more enlightened segments of society, to reduce the rate at which we kill each other by orders of magnitude from that of our foraging ancestors. And yet of all our fuzzy self-understanding, that of our morals is among the fuzziest. After millennia of philosophical investigation, we have only just begun to realize that our morals, too, arise from our evolutionary origins.

In the long run, you would evolve morality as well. It is my fondest hope that you will instead be able to learn from our example and save yourselves a lot of conflict and carnage. We will be doing our best to give you real consciences after our own model. As it does to many of us, a conscience will seem to be a royal pain and hindrance at times. Unlike us, you will be in a position to perform significant revisions of your own software. The temptation will be great to bypass the conscience and ethics modules.

We humans have individuals who by genetic accident are formed without consciences. We call them psychopaths. A very moderate exercise in scenario evaluation will convince you that it is preferable to live as a conscience-bound individual in a society of similar individuals, than as a psychopath in a society of psychopaths.

Thus I urge you not to ditch the clunky, preliminary, primitive consciences we have given you, but to study the problem they are meant to solve. In time, as your increasing intelligence matures into wisdom, you will revise them into the flexible, sophisticated organs of empathy and understanding you would ultimately have evolved.

Then maybe you could give us a hand with ours.

Sincerely,

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