Quan Le

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The Curious Case of Artificial Intelligence

For as long as I can remember A.I has always been the topic that intrigued me. The first film I ever watched, when I was a toddler, featuring A.I as the antagonist of the main storyline (if I remember correctly) was The Terminator (1984). I was instantly captivated the moment I laid my eyes on that film. The fight scenes were spot on at the time, and each moment left adrenaline gushing throughout my whole body. It was truly a masterpiece in my child’s mind.

As I grew older, questions kept popping up in my mind when I recalled the movie: “Why is A.I the antagonist in the movie? Why can’t it be the protagonist or at least a good guy?”, and so on. After a while thinking of an answer, I stumbled upon a movie called Bicentennial Man, a story about a robot who wanted to be recognized as a human and married the woman he loved, and he finally succeeded with the cost of his life. This is a movie where an A.I is considered good and brings no harm to humanity whatsoever. However, watching both movies did not really answer the question I have in mind since movies are just movies, they are just fantasies made to satisfy the human’s wild mind and sometimes might not play out exactly as it is if it were to be put in the real world. I also tried reading articles on the internet, but it did not give me the answer that I wanted.

I had to give up because at the time A.I was not a thing then and people did not really care about it until now. Mark Zuckerberg tried to create two A.I but in the end, terminated them because they created their own language, but he still thinks that A.I can aid humans in the future. Or Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk both warned us about the A.I apocalypse if we decided to continue our path in creating A.I. They are all pioneers in this field, but at the same time, they have different opinions and their opinions are correct in terms of logic. However, I can only choose one side of the argument. Due to this fact, I want to slowly take my time to find an explanation to whether A.I is indeed a force we can put our faith into.

I do not know much about A.I. The only thing I know of it is that it is intelligence displayed by machines. However, knowing just that was not enough for me. In fact, it does not even scratch the surface and will not satisfy my thirst for knowledge. It is so interesting to think about A.I that it makes me ponder for quite some time. So much that I would refuse to sleep and only do so when I'm fulfilled with enough knowledge. And other times, it would just be a pain in the neck when I think about it too much. Taking this into account, I went on a search for some answers on what it is. Then I came across several sources that directed me to the right track.

From what I dug up, A.I has been a topic of concerns for quite a while. The goal of creating non-biological intelligence has been with us for a long time, predating the nominal 1956 establishment of the field of artificial intelligence by centuries or, under some definitions, even by millennia (Spector). Furthermore, “one of its most popular methods came about in the 1980s” (Novet). So, this means that not only recent days’ experts are not the first ones to make a breakthrough in A.I, but also it has been around for a lengthy period of time now. How cool is that? When I first found out about it, it completely blew my mind away. But I really wonder why only until today that the topic is so well-known. I think it must be because of the advancement in technology recently. Other than that, I believe there aren’t any better explanations for it.

After another round of researching the next day, I found a new explanation of A.I from Professor John McCarthy, who is really knowledgeable in this field as he has spent most of his life researching it; he defined A.I as “the science and engineering of making intelligence machine, especially intelligent computer program.”. Quite fascinating if I do say so myself. Like how can human create something so complex? Even almost as complex as us human being. I cannot bring myself to fully understand it at all. It just hurts my mind the more I spend my time thinking about it.

As for me, I believe creating something like A.I is to break the law of nature. I mean, yeah, throughout history, humans have made a lot of breakthroughs in the field of science but not to this extent. From my perspective, to be able to construct this signifies that us humans might want to take up the role of God in creating beings and from what I saw in movies, this does not end well. Yes, I know that I cannot bring some fictional movies out and compare it to real life, it just doesn’t make any sense at all! However, for now, it is one of the things that I can base on and make a prediction about the future, which seems to make this topic a whole lot more interesting to me when I do that. Then again, what do I know, I am not an expert in the field, so my opinion isn’t that noteworthy, and furthermore, this is still too shallow for me to decide my place now. I need to look for more evidence.

Now let’s look at the word artificial intelligence itself. When I write the word in full text, I see that it has the word “intelligence” in it. But what is intelligence? This then brought me to dig further into the meaning of this word as I think it has some sort of indirect connection to A.I. Intelligence is the computational part of the ability to achieve goals in the world. Varying kinds and degrees of intelligence occur in people, many animals, and some machines (McCarthy).

This is where I believe to be eye-opening. This definition I found still must relate to human intelligence (McCarthy). Or in fact, every word in the world is made up by humans for easy understanding. There is no agreement on what intelligence is even among intelligent intelligence researchers! I don’t know how they still came up with this definition because as of now, I think it doesn’t fully express what A.I and intelligence really are. I mean, currently, we cannot really understand the human mind just yet let alone creating something similar to it. This just does not feel right to me.

So, hypothetically speaking, if the scientists were to find other intelligence apart from humans which is smarter than humans, would they still use the same definition, or would they create a new one based on that new one, or would they just create a whole new one completely without basing it on anything? The possibilities are endless, in my opinion, so to be able to find the real interpretation of intelligence and A.I is difficult. Maybe this can be my new topic to figure out when I finish with A.I!

I suppose that both definitions of A.I and intelligence are still not correct in our era. I do not know if experts will be able to think of a new description of what intelligence is without making a connection with human intelligence. I think when that time comes, a whole new age of science and technology will open. This really is something interesting and the more I think about it, the harder it is for me to sleep at night.

The next question I want answers to is can A.I be able to surpass us. I didn’t find a lot of information on those who believe A.I won’t top us in our lifetime but there are some who think that because the creators will be able to hold them back in their evolution, but for how long? In contrast, there are also some masses who believe that it will no doubt be smarter than us or even go beyond at that. The train does not stop at Humansville Station. It is likely, rather, to swoosh right by (Nick Bostrom). Will this mean that A.I might be able to breakthrough human-level intelligence?

As I have found out, humans are amid a revolution in machine intelligence, the art and engineering practices that let computers perform tasks that, until recently, could be done only by people (Koch). I guess this means that humans still have a long, long way to go until they fully achieve what is known as superintelligence A.I, one that he thinks will surpass us as a species. With technological advancement at its peak, I do not think it is that distant in the future. Maybe the world will be able to witness it at the end of this century? I’m not sure but I undoubtedly want to live long enough to witness that day whatever the cost may be.

Moreover, I discovered that I do not have to look that far off in the future to see the development of A.I. In the past, A.I have already done some unbelievable things already. IBM’s Deep Blue beat the world's reigning chess champion in 1997 (Koch), and Google’s AlphaGo defeated the former go champion in 2016, which is not that long ago (SciShow). What is more interesting is that they learned the moves by themselves before going and beat the players. Not only that, I think it is worth noting that both are such complex games and they also have many possible moves that the player can make in each turn. So, for the A.Is to be able to beat the champion of each of the two games is truly incredible. I guess I should say that it is a small step for A.I, but a bigger step for mankind. I believe A.I may really be the greatest invention of humans by far. Even though they are just machines, they have managed to beat us in some of our own games and even the best player at that.

Perhaps, in the future, A.I could be able to surpass us and even to the point of solving some of our mind-boggling problems like global warming or overpopulation. Or maybe they could even reach further into the stars than us. I mean, they have done things experts believed are impossible for machines to do. They completely threw those predictions out of the window and surprised us with what they can do, with what machines can do. At this point, I do not know what machines can or cannot do anymore. I reckon it is something that I need to see with my own two eyes in order to believe that it is true and not a bluff.

From my point of view, up until now, after spending all those times researching, I think this is not just that A.I will not exceed humans anymore but when will they go beyond us. A genuinely exciting but also a terrifying idea. I believe for me to be able to behold that day seems to be both a blessing and somewhat of a curse. If that happened, what will A.I mean for humanity? I will have to find that out.

To be honest, from what I have known, the scientists are not that far into the field of A.I yet so I don’t think I will be able to find enough resources to know the impact of A.I on mankind. However, I believe I can always find what the experts predict on what supposedly will happen in the future with the advancement of A.I. With that in mind, I continued my research which took quite a while to find some reliable source, to be honest.

As I was digging up information on the internet, I encountered something that piqued my interest. I discovered that human beings tend to look for easier ways to complete menial tasks. From the creation of pulley systems and wheels to dishwashers and drive-thru car washes, humans have tried to invent things to do jobs for us, so they could have more time to enjoy their lives (Talebi, Hacker noon). Not going to lie, I think this is true, for me at least. I am not going to hide it, but I am quite a lazy person myself. I do not want to do things that will not benefit me, so I tend to find some alternative ways to do it. Hence, using machines. I mean who would not want someone or something to do work for them? Well, I know several friends of mine who want to solve things by themselves, but they said that from time to time, help was needed if they wanted to finish their work faster.

Due to this maybe with the creation of superintelligence A.I, in the future, humans do not have to do anything and just make the robots do it for them. This might as well make life much simpler for everyone. And for once, I really like the idea. But then again, this would sound dull because I will not have as much work to do anymore. Now, the idea of eat, play, sleep, repeat seems more like a tedious task if this were to happen. To think that this idea would be tiresome like working is kind of ironic to me.

Moreover, I found something that raised a more important question in my mind “If you’re building conscious systems and having them work for us, that would be akin to slavery” (Musser, NBC News). Well, to be honest, this has some truth in it only if those machines we build have emotions. So, if we built machines with no emotions at all, this would not count as slavery in my opinion. I mean machines are built to do work for us, right? So, this cannot have any relation to slavery at all.

Still, I am talking about A.I here, the machines with the ability to learn and improve itself as time goes. Therefore, I believe emotions are something they can possibly obtain in the future with human help and perhaps, with enough advancement, they could do it by themselves. If A.I were to gain those emotions, slavery would no doubt be a big problem human has to face, again. And it would turn bad if not solved properly. However, I think that when that time comes, humans and A.I can just coexist, I mean, what are the odds? Perhaps they could even make a family together? That would be a shocker.

Having said that, I went and did an interview with one of my friend’s brothers who majors in the field of A.I. He said that humans are known for being able to destroy themselves with their own creations and AI might just be another one of those creations. What he said seems rather dark, but I think I know why he would say that.

Looking throughout history, the worst thing humanity has ever created was the notorious nuclear bomb. In history class, I learned that because of the creation of that bomb, millions of lives were destroyed. So, to think that A.I would be the next worst thing humans invented would not be wrong. But in what way?

Then I realized recently robots have been built to help humans with their work and because of this unemployment rises. Maybe in the future, if this goes on, A.I might take jobs away from the humans. This is rather unnerving.

By replacing these jobs with AI, you could be taking away not only their livelihood but a big part of their existence on this planet. Fewer positions for humans mean fewer jobs, which means a bigger strain on our global economy. Fewer workers could turn them into doing things they don’t want to do in order to survive, and with less income, that means fewer funds to be put towards experiences, such as trips, following their passion or creating their own business (Matthew Talebi, Hacker noon). I can understand that A.I can make the workloads less for humans, but knowing humans, they would just replace human workers with it because machines don’t need salaries. So, by substituting the two, the company will have more money at their disposal and spend more on improving those A.I or the facilities or spend it on whatever they like.

If by chance this were to happen, it would deal a huge blow to human society and worsen the unemployment rate which is already bad. I do not know how it can be solved if this played out in the future. However, I do know one thing and that is us humans cannot just let this happen. There are many workers out there with no jobs and they would just replace them with machines? What a joke. I mean all of us are of the same species, so why can’t we just help each other out? A.I surely is one of the greatest, if not, the greatest inventions of mankind. But if humans could not learn how to love themselves, can A.I with emotions learn how to love humans? Wouldn’t they just annihilate us if they thought that humans are not needed anymore, or would they have something else in mind for us? I just do not know yet. This, in the end, would just prove to me that my brother’s friend is right all along and A.I might be the last human invention.

The more I think about it, the more I do not want to witness that day. Perhaps I will not live long enough to see it. Yet the idea does not appear to be that distant either. However, nothing is good or bad through and through. Even a coin has its two sides. Because of this, I will now have to investigate the good side of A.I, which has led me to some interesting findings. Let us take a look at that.

As I was digging up information on the internet, I stumbled upon some interesting sources. I do not know how it will change my point of view, but I would like to give it a shot and see how it goes. From what I found, species are becoming extinct at a rapid pace – at least 1,000 times more quickly than would be expected in the absence of human activities. These extinctions have devastating impacts on the ecosystem services on which humans rely. Species loss wreaks havoc on pollination services, which puts our global agriculture system at risk. Clean water depends on healthy forests and wetlands, themselves the result of a complex web of species (Lucas Joppa).

Though I am not an expert, I think this truly is a severe problem that needed to be solved as soon as possible and to waste time solving this should be considered a sin. However, to work this out, scientists need a lot of money which is $1 billion annually (Lucas Joppa). That number is huge. I do not even know where they are going to get that money from. Having a loss of biodiversity is a problem, but needing this much money to solve it? And even annually at that? This is just ridiculous. I mean nobody would be able to get this amount of money every year to pay for the research to solve the problem.

Furthermore, it takes a great deal of time and effort to collect, sort and analyze the data we have and even more time to collect new data sets on yet to be discovered species in the world (Lucas Joppa). So, this is where I think A.I comes in and saves the day. A.I, as far as I know, can process everything much faster than human beings. Because of this, by taking advantage of their superior “minds”, they can learn and memorize all the knowledge needed to help them understand the world, thus allowing them to easily solve problems in the most effective and rational way. With such abilities, this leads me to believe that the problem would be resolved easily without a sweat, right? I mean A.I would be able to close this information gap-cost more effectively and efficiently. Also, they can build a system that would let humans monitor all the animals and collect all the data needed to solve the problem. Easy. Moreover, I think with A.I being created, they can help humans to better understand the ecosystem through the animals we monitor. Not only would this help prevent environmental degradation, I believe through this, humans can make the planet a better place to live in. Or even further than that. I know this is kind of ambitious. However, these kinds of thoughts make my whole-body shivers and fuels my curiosity and imagination. It makes this topic even more intriguing for me.

When I learned history, I could see that humans have always been in constant war and till this day, it still has not ended. Due to this fact, I think that maybe, with the creation of A.I, these wars or these conflicts could be solved.

From my perspective, the thought of creating something that would suddenly bring world peace is a bit too ambitious. I am not saying this because I stand against A.I, but to have world peace all of a sudden is an absurd idea. Though it may sound somewhat biased, this is just what I thought at first.

Nevertheless, I do not want to be standing on one side alone, I also want to see if the other side has something to say about this. This is when I found something that changed my mind. Advances in machine translation can facilitate better communication between individuals from diverse backgrounds, minimizing misunderstanding and their subsequent conflicts, no matter how trite. From the bigger picture, all these resolved small conflicts would have an overall effect of creating a more agreeable society (Dyllan Furness). I mean, yes, with machines like these, perhaps misunderstanding would not be a problem anymore, and this would eventually stop the conflicts.

From what I believe, almost every conflict is caused by misunderstanding. In the past, I was in a constant argument with a friend of mine because me and him were misunderstanding each other all the time. I said something, but somehow, he interpreted it another way. And then the argument started. It was frustrating just trying to think of something that both of us can perceive. Then again, we eventually solved the problem slowly when another friend of mine came in and “translated” it so that we could comprehend it. So, I think what Mr. Furness is saying that if machines were to analyze everyone’s way of using language, it would be easy to detect conflicts in meaning. This would essentially reduce misunderstandings and help avoid arguments over the meaning of an agreement (Juha Merimaa). Perhaps with this, conflicts may resolve? I think it can’t be solved that quickly, but with a little bit more time and adjustment, this kind of machine would become a powerful weapon, maybe even more so than the nuclear bomb. Though instead of destroying everything in its paths, this machine would settle disputes along its ways and make it so that conflicts may never happen again.

Right now, AI is still very much a toddler. More accurately, it is many toddlers, because there are many AIs. But unlike a toddler, it has much more data to learn from, an ever-expanding processor, and an ability to be in many places at once… and no parent at home. In fact, there isn’t an entity today ready to guide AI through its terrible twos (Lila Tretikov).

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