Artificial Intelligence

Ray Kurzweil, an inventor, and a futurist has set the year 2045 as the year of singularity. The year when machines surpass human intellect, resulting in unfathomable changes to the human society and ultimately the total annihilation of our species. But before we venture into a sci-fi movie plot we must establish as to what does it really mean to be intelligent at the most fundamental level. Is it emotion? Is it language? Is it the ability to apply knowledge or plan effectively? I believe Albert Einstein (quite conveniently one of the most intelligent people to have ever existed) said it right: “The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but creativity”.

A.I, on the other hand, is a mathematical way of mapping our brain’s faculties and combining them to enable an information processing system to ask the aforementioned questions. But what would be the repercussions when and if such a system co-exists with us?

To answer this question we must identify the types of A.I systems. They’re broadly classified into narrow intelligence and general intelligence. Narrow intelligence is something we all have heard of, courtesy Elon Musk's Tesla. Self-driving cars, restaurant recommendations, traffic routing et cetera. General intelligence, however, is something we can, currently, the only dream of: ‘Ultron’ from Avengers AoU or ‘Sonny’ from iRobot. While narrow intelligence is something we can make peace with, general A.I can lead to a paradigm shift with the ability to spell the end of the human race, a warning issued by Stephan Hawking and echoed by Elon Musk and many others. It has taken us approximately 2-3 million years to evolute, biologically, into our current state of being, an elephantine number when compared with the time taken for computational power to grow into its current state, a measly 72 years. An illustration of this hypothesis would be the success of Deep Blue, a chess-playing computer by IBM, that won a match against the then world champion Garry Kasparov in the year 1996. The incident sparked a debate as here was a machine better than humankind’s best at a game that depended as much on gut instinct as sheer calculation. So, what is the way forward?

I believe that a possible solution is ‘A.I’, with A standing for ‘Augmented’. The term encompasses the inevitable coalescence of machines and humans. ‘Caudate nucleus’ is a part of the human brain that lights up like ‘Delhi during Diwali’ when something looks intuitive enough to our brain. I might be going out on a limb when I say that Sherlock isn’t wrong when he says: “Intuitions are not to be ignored, John. They represent data processed too fast for the conscious mind to comprehend”. Our conscious mind is limited in its perceptivity by our senses. Math has helped us extend our powers and has aided us in grasping the knowledge about our universe and ourselves. Imagine splitting our cognitive capabilities into computational(Sub-Conscious) and strategic(Conscious) segments, effectively making us more sensitive to physical phenomenon and taking humans to the next frontier.

In a nutshell, Artificial Intelligence is a very big step, it has the power to empower us or end us. Unlike the steam engine, industrialisation or the internet A.I has a lot of potential packed into it, we must tread gently.

by

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