

The Future of Mankind

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I've long had a sense of what is in store for mankind, likely after I am gone, for at least thirty years. Now, as we see some of it unfolding, I thought I would jot those thoughts down.

1 Artificial Intelligence

Man thinks. Assuming it's not magic, there is a process going on. Processes, once understood, can be duplicated. The chance that man would develop artificial intelligence (AI) someday has been a clear certainty for me.

Man's ability to think has given us vast understanding and the ability to improve our lives. The discovery of the wheel has given us transportation. The discovery of fire has given us warmth and cooked food. The discovery of electricity has given us more things than I can list. The limitation of all of these discoveries is that each discovery has given us the benefits of that particular discovery. These discoveries have also been used as a stepping stone to discover more. But like the next step, it too was but a step.

AI is different from all that man has developed in the past. If you invent AI, the AI can invent more! So, AI is the only invention that can invent things itself! AI will be the single most valuable invention man has ever made!

Imagine thinking devices that don't grow old and die, that don't forget, that don't get sick, or need to sleep. Imagine thinking machines that can share their knowledge exactly and without ambiguity or a lot of time. Imagine a machine that has the ability to think that far surpasses that of any human ever alive! This is AI!

Could this thinking device be a threat to mankind? Perhaps. I do not know. I do know you can't stop people from inventing. Thus, although we can certainly make it difficult and slow it down, ultimately the development of AI will happen.

Once true AI has been developed, the beginnings of which we now see, the speed of future developments in science, math, physics, medicine, and even things like art and music will accelerate to levels unimaginable.

Keep in mind that we're not just talking about devices that can think. Once a thinking device has been developed, it is a pretty straightforward next step to put it into an automaton that can perform all of the physical tasks man now performs. This means these machines are not just capable of performing mental tasks but physical tasks as well. This also means we don't need people to build these devices; the devices can build themselves!

2 Economics

Man has needs such as food, clothing, shelter, transportation, entertainment, etc. Man has to work in order to produce these things. In order to incentivize people to work and create an association between what is produced and what each person can consume, we have money. Although there will always be a need to limit each person's resource consumption, there will no longer be a need to work. The machines can do all of that. Although man can do as he pleases (e.g. build a house, create art, build a garden), there is nothing the machines can't do or that man must do.

Once these machines arrive, although there will be no need for work, there is still a need to assure some degree of equality with regard to resource allocation. This means money is still needed. However, rather than having to work for it, it will need to be periodically distributed on a regular basis. Some resources, such as healthcare, would be allocated and prioritized on an as-needed basis.

I see the transition from an economy based on work to one based on the equal distribution of available resources to be very difficult. Those currently on the bottom and middle of the wealth scale will cheer the transition on. Those at the top will fight it with everything they have. I expect a lot of immense civil conflict until things are finally settled.

3 Life Extension

One of the things I would expect the AI to figure out at some point is how to extend human life. In other words, it will find a way to slow and eventually arrest and reverse the human aging process. Although there will be bumps along the road to this development, nevertheless, it will happen.

This situation raises some very significant problems. Our planet can only support so much life, and if deaths are far more rare, the Earth would quickly be overrun. Birth rates are already dropping in the developed countries. In addition to this trend, additional legal and procedural steps will have to be adopted to assure a balance between what the Earth can support and the number of people. Colonizing other planets may also be a possibility at some point.

This transition too will cause immense civil conflict until it is resolved.