

Artificial Intelligence and truth about us in time of confusion

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Where we stand

Twenty three years ago, the late Peter Augustine Lawler observed that **“the modern individual is an abstraction, an invention of the human mind.”**

Rémi Brague, the late Peter Augustine Lawler, Chantal Delsol and others are right - **most of the modern lines of thought are unable to legitimate human existence, let alone assign any dignity to it.** At best, they can make man his own project. However, as Brague has put it succinctly,

“Self-creation turns into the destruction of the self by the self.”

The Legitimacy of the Human (2017)

Where we stand, cont'd

In the world without *logos*, to quote again from Brague,

“From the point of view of technology, man appears as outdated, or at least as superfluous.”

And nowadays an able philosopher David Chalmers does not rule out that the world we live in is a virtual world, we are in a simulation (see his *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, 2022).

Artificial Intelligence - what it is, how its (and our) future may look like

Artificial Intelligence is that quality that enables machine to function appropriately and with foresight in its environment. Write “an entity” in lieu of the word “machines”, and you get an operational definition of intelligence as such.

Cf. Nils J. Nilsson, *The Quest for Artificial Intelligence:*

A History of Ideas and Achievements (2010)

Artificial Intelligence, cont'd

AI works well in very narrow or not so narrow environments, let it be the game of chess (AlphaZero of Deep Mind) or the game of go (AlphaGo), AI-powered fighter pilots, drones and much more for the military (Heron Systems in 2020, Shield AI, and other companies), including the use of Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCI being used for curing diseases too, e.g., by Neuralink Corp.), LLMs like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and others, discovering new medicines via molecular studies (e.g., AlphaFold of Deep Mind - Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2024), medical imaging, genome studies (e.g., for prenatal diagnosis and in IVF labs), etc.

Artificial Intelligence, cont'd

Possible blessings it offers and dangers it poses are obvious. Regarding the latter, in a nutshell:

- Becoming enslaved by the state due to its ways to surveil us
- Succumbing to AI systems' dictates (AI "advisors" included) and becoming a thing in the Internet of Things
- Succumbing to AI systems' dictates in the workplace
- Succumbing to AI system's dictates in combat
- Accepting our moral degeneracy by introducing such endeavors as designer babies, in vitro gametogenesis (e.g., for multiparenting), and the like

Artificial Intelligence, cont'd

In any case, AI is a tool, capable of assisting us in our endeavors.

More often than not it surpasses our human abilities in more and more domains. But, so what, unless we do not apply it for immoral or otherwise wrong goals.

AI is a tool which has its roots in Machine Learning (founded on mathematical logic and mathematical statistics) and (Artificial) Neural Networks. Already now it is brilliantly successful in surprisingly many applications thanks to such breakthrough innovations as Deep Learning and Generative AI (with a kind of self-learning from scratch included).

Artificial Intelligence, cont'd

Most importantly: **AI rests on calculations and engineering genius, and nothing else, by no means it understands anything.**

Some would say that AI has been trained to work like the left hemisphere of our brains. As a mathematician, I would say that **AI works like a set of Turing-computable mathematical models.**

A naturalist will say, pretty correctly, that we are more than a machine executing computable functions, since we are a **mind-body continuum.**

Artificial Intelligence, cont'd

Yet, in the world without *logos*, confusion abounds and, e.g., Henry Kissinger, Eric Schmidt and Daniel Huttenlocher write in their otherwise valuable book:

- “the advent of AI will alter humanity’s concept of reality and therefore of itself. [...] If AI “thinks,” or approximates thinking, who are we?”

The Age of AI: And Our Human Future (2020)

Artificial Intelligence, cont'd

Saint Irenaeus wrote in *Against Heresies* (Book 2, Ch. XXV) that

”indulging in trains of reflection opposed to your nature, you will prove yourself foolish; and if you persevere in such a course, you will fall into utter madness”.

All this is not against AI, whose progress is both awesome and fascinating. What has been stated so far, is against using AI for wrong goals and, even more importantly, cherishing reflection opposed to human nature and pushing the West into utter madness.

Artificial Intelligence, cont'd

The progress of AI will be continued, from the AI's today's status to computer programs and perhaps robots capable of self-replication, what is less probable and in a more distant future, to robots capable of thriving in some sense (as, e.g., a cactus is), and - what is much less probable and in a much more distant future - with an animal self-consciousness of sorts.

Why not assume that we shall be able to produce artificial beings with vegetative and, **to some extent, with animal nature as well** (cf. Brian A.J. Boyd, *Will AI be Alive?*, *The New Atlantis*, 80, Spring 2025).

What to say about human nature, as opposed to the nature of other species?

(in this section I follow closely the exposition by Edward Feser; see, in particular, his *Immortal Souls. A Treatise on Human Nature* (2025))

Intellect is that faculty by which we grasp abstract concepts, put them together into judgments, and reason logically from one judgment to another.

It is to be distinguished from **imagination**, the faculty by which we form mental images, and from **sensation**, the faculty by which we perceive the goings on in the external material world and the internal world of the body. **Thought** is irreducible to sensation and imagination.

What to say about human nature?, cont'd

The concepts - which are the constituents of intellectual activity - are **universal** while mental images and sensations are always essentially **particular**. Mental images are always to some extent **vague** or **indeterminate**, while concepts are most often **precise** and **determinate**.

We have many concepts that have some connection with mental imagery. While we cannot visualize humanness or triangularity, we can visualize a particular human and a particular triangle.

We also have concepts - such as law, logical consistency, square root, infinity - that can strictly be associated with no mental image at all.

What to say about human nature?, cont'd

Humans are rational animals endowed with language that performs **four functions** (distinguishment by Karl Popper): **expressive, signaling, descriptive and argumentative.**

Some non-human animals are capable of the first two functions, but only human beings are capable of the latter two functions. Such language is required to have these three - concepts, thoughts and arguments.

Seemingly, **it is only humans who possess such language.** Animals feel pain, but have no concept of it. Had it been otherwise, they would have told us about it in some way.

What to say about human nature?, cont'd

Material things are never determinate or exact in the way universals or concepts are. Any material triangle, for example, is always only an approximation of perfect triangularity. In general, universals are determinate and exact in a way material objects and processes cannot be.

All this points toward stating incorporeal character of human rational nature.

What to say about human nature?, cont'd

To put a long story short, e.g., when we are adding numbers, the physical processes in the brain cannot tell us if it is carrying out addition or some other process which, in this way or another and at least so far, has given us a proper outcome.

Moreover, naturalistic theories of thought are unable to explain in a convincing and coherent way how material processes inside our brains can produce thoughts of this and not another meaning, this meaning being unambiguous and unequivocal. The more so with logical inferences.

What to say about human nature?, cont'd

On top of that (I borrow here freely from Feser's *Immortal Souls*), within naturalism, one must take thinking to consist of nothing more than the transition from one material symbol to another in accordance with causal laws.

The neurophysiological properties of material symbols alone are what determines which further symbols are generated.

However, a symbol could serve as a rational justification of another symbol only by virtue of the meaning or conceptual content associated with the symbols.

What to say about human nature?, cont'd

In sum, Edward Feser states:

Causal relationships of the kind a naturalistic theory posits in order to account for our thought processes could at most explain why, as a matter of *psychological* fact, we *consider* an inference to be reasonable. But they cannot underwrite the supposition that, as a matter of *logical* fact, it really is reasonable.

What to say about human nature?, cont'd

The problem with naturalistic theories is that they reject Aristotelian - Thomistic hylomorphism, formal and final causes. How to analyze intellectual activities with substantial forms claimed to be nonexistent? How to analyze them, as well as our volitions, without formal and final causation?

In fact, without formal and final causation, efficient causes do not suffice to infer from the observed (from the past) about the yet unseen.

What to say about human nature?, cont'd

As of now, it is only the hylomorphism that can account for **the substantial unity of an immaterial principle - form, intellect, soul - and body**. As St. Thomas Aquinas writes:

“Although the intellect abstracts from the phantasms, it does not understand actually without turning to the phantasms.” (*Summa theologiae*, I.85.5).

A word on the foundations of mathematics and the alleged nonmechanical character of human mind

The 1930s brought a revolution in our understanding of the limits of mathematics and our mathematical abilities. Kurt Gödel, among others, proved in particular (roughly put):

- Any consistent formal system F within which a certain amount of elementary arithmetic can be carried out is incomplete, i.e., **there are statements in F which can neither be proved nor disproved in F .**
- For any such system F , **the consistency of F cannot be proved in F itself.**

A word on the foundations of mathematics, cont'd

Another eminent mathematician, Alfred Tarski, proved in particular the following, again informally stated:

- ***Tarski's Undefinability Theorem:*** Let F be a consistent formalized system that contains a sufficient amount of arithmetic. Then **the concept of truth cannot be defined by a formula in the system.**

While the concept of truth is undefinable within system F , it can be defined for F in a stronger (or wider) system, which includes F as its part.

A word on the foundations of mathematics, cont'd

We have already hinted to the fact that **all the machines (computers) can do today** is to perform calculations - they obtain solutions by executing sets of mathematical functions that are each computable in the Church-Turing sense. These are **purely syntactic operations**.

It is only us who ask about truth, which is a semantic category. Indeed, it is only us who perform semantic operations. **Semantics (e.g., the concept of truth) transcends syntactics**.

A word on the foundations of mathematics, cont'd

Mathematics as a whole is inexhaustible in that it cannot be expressed within one consistent system of axioms. We need wider and wider systems, but each of them will stay incomplete. Perhaps this is what contributed to Kurt Gödel's decision to prove a theorem on the necessity of the existence of God.

In lieu of a conclusion

“Is it not reasonable to suspect that if existence were pointless and the universe devoid of meaning, we would never have achieved not only the ability to imagine otherwise, but even the ability to entertain this very thought - to wit, that existence is pointless and the universe devoid of meaning?”

Leszek Kolakowski, *Horror Metaphysicus* (1988)

And to paraphrase Peter Augustine Lawler from one of his essays:

Love is not an illusion, and we have been fitted by our nature to know the truth. But then it follows that both love of each other and love of the truth spring up from our spiritual souls.