The dawn of a new organism

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05. October 2021

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What is the organism?

Out of a complex system, a behaviour may arise that is impossible to predict from the original system, such as consciousness coming from the brain. Even with its massive array of neurons, it seems bewildering that something like consciousness could come out of it. Another example is an insect colony. If even with access to the genetic code of an ant and even a single live ant, it would be hard or even impossible for the scientist to determine that these ants together could form something like a colony. (Assuming that we had never heard of insect colonies before.)

Can we create something like consciousness, or at least a *simulated consciousness* as an emergent behaviour of a complex system? What if we already have, via the massive system of interconnected computers that is the internet? People like to think of artificial intelligence in popular fiction as entities like the Terminator. However, that is only one conception of an artificial intelligence. Intelligence need not be centralized and have a discrete brain like we do.

Consider the network of computers, connected together, and augmented by the processing powers of human brains. Signals are sent from brain to brain quickly using computers, and this causes actions to be taken. Locally we take these actions for our own purposes, but as a whole, all of our behaviour together creates a unified purpose that mimics the behaviour of a single entity.

Before the internet we had letters and telephones, and that could also be a similar but more primitive organism. However, in previous instances, I do not believe there was sufficient critical mass of technology to consider technology combined with us to be a new organism. The crucial point is the attainment of a critical mass of technology so that something like simulated awareness is achieved.

Suppose that we can define happiness so that it corresponds to a level of self-actualization and freedom that may vary across individuals. The sum of this happiness over all individuals on earth gives some quantity, the happiness health of the entire society. And happiness should also include nonhuman organisms as as well since those are also crucial for the functioning of the planet. Then society should work to maximize this happiness. In fact, before the age of sufficient technology, the earth in a sense functioned as a single organism as well. However, we are replacing so much of that natural organism with our creations that we are killing the natural organism and replacing it with a technological one.

I don't mean to imply that we are separate and distinct from the environment. Because we are a product of this earth, there is a sense in which what we create could also be considered natural. However, the effects of what we create are so damaging

that it is useful to use the term artificial for what we create and natural for everything else. This distinction is similar to saying that both salt and cyanide could be called poisons since they are both deadly in certain amounts, but the relative danger and ease with which it is easy to die via cyanide still merits calling cyanide a poison and not salt in every day parlance.

Regardless, the system we have constructed with technology will push us very far away from maximizing the happiness of life on this planet. We have created a huge system whose only concern is its continued growth, and it will grow as much as possible and we will be its mindless drones. In fact, we are already mindless drones to some extent.

It is important to note that on a small scale, things like a trading economy and tools may not necessarily be bad. Therefore, I am not making the argument that everything that is artificial is bad and everything that is natural is good. Only that the specific system of our modern technology combined is worse for everyone.

Similarly, an individual computer is not necessarily bad. When they were invented, computers did not pose a threat because interfacing with them was abstract and mechanical. They did not store much. Even when personal computers were available to people, they mostly stored documents much as if we had written then on paper. However, as technology progresses, they become less like an independent tool and more a part of our own body, even if the are not physically grafted onto us. As this merging process continues over time, computers begin to augment our minds and memories and naturally with that comes a great modification of human behaviour.

If the augmentation of modern computers and human beings have made up some new organism, then we cannot say exactly when it came into existence. It is like the transition from the single-celled organisms to the wolf. The single cells don't have sentience whereas the wolf does but it is impossible to have a clear demarcation. It is irrelevant when it came into existence because it seems useful to think of it existing now.

Why should we even consider this? Because now we are at a critical point where the organism has done so much damage to the earth that it may be the only way forward, and that will lead to almost total destruction. The technological organism wants to survive and therefore may want us to keep destroying more natural resources. Since the organism is so abstract, it is much different than a typical enemy and we cannot always rely on our intuition to fight against it.

How is the organism harmful for us?

Is the technological organism harmful to us? I believe yes, and in several ways. The first is that one of the prerequisites for human happiness is the ability for each individual to have enough time to think, so that they can figure out what makes them happy. However, if everyone were able to do that, then the technological organism would not be able to thrive since very few people would care so much about constant technological advancement.

Therefore, the technological organism bombards us with information. Of course, people create a lot of the information. However, it is the algorithms we have created that siphon this information and distribute it around the world. The algorithms are artificial intelligence, and they work for the good of the organism.

Humans have a natural inclination to absorb new information, because in the cave days it was crucial to be attentive to all information. Any new fact might mean the difference between life or death. We can't turn that off, but we have created a monster that spreads information so rapidly that it overwhelmed us all. Of course, some individuals have some time to think, but it is hard to do so for most people.

The organism also isolates us in two ways. First, it isolates us from nature, makes us more likely to stay inside, and makes it necessary to be in front of a screen. It tricks us by giving us tools to display high-resolution photographs of nature so that we can feel some shadow of being connected to nature.

The second way we are isolated by technology is through independence from others. Technology allows us to be more independent of the people that are around us. We no longer have to rely on people if we need answers because most answers are just a search away. We no longer need as many local specialists because Youtube presents millions of tutorials on every possible subject. We no longer need our neighbours to borrow anything because we can have one-day shipping on Amazon, and so forth.

Isn't this increased efficiency a good thing? Yes, for our short-term financial gain. However, the only reason why this is even important is because of overpopulation, which the organism loves, because more people interacting with it makes it grow faster. In the long term however, what we lose are the fundamental human connections that we would have made if we were more dependent on each other. These are also precisely the types of relationships that could allow us to become more easily independent of the technological organism, which is another reason they are being eroded.

It is true that innovations have been giving us more independence gradually since the start of humanity. However, if we defined a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means we have no independence and 100 means every human is completely independent from every other human but completely dependent on technology, then development up until the 1960s has probably pushed us to 20 out of 100 whereas the modern internet is pushing us closer to 80 or even 90 out of 100. It is this extreme form of independence that is bad for us.

Growth through economic advantage

The growth of the organism happens through technological innovation. At one time, innovation was beneficial to this world and to humanity. However, for every avenue of creation there is a point at which the law of diminishing returns kicks in and life can no longer be improved in a meaningful way. However, because innovation gives slight economic advantages to individuals over time, they are in a sense **forced** to develop new technology. Consumers often have no choice but to buy new technology.

For example, when most of the world shut down their 2G cellular network, everyone whose phone supported only 2G protocols had to discard their phone and buy a new one. We could say that more advanced networks benefited some. But we can say that of every technology. But what about the carbon dioxide and other pollutants created during this advancement? At some point, all of these debts to the environment will add up and kill many more people and other organisms. The technological organism wants this, because the more we suffer the more we look towards incremental improvements to protect ourselves and the more dependent on technology we become.

At each an every point of innovation, we introduce a convenience that makes us more efficient. We don't really need to be so efficient, but if your neighbour is, you better be as well. That is the prisoner's dilemma. So both you and your neighbour need to become more efficient. But then we become eventually dependent on the technology that made us more efficient and we can no longer do without it. We are stuck with it, and we are stuck manufacturing it or its successors forever, thereby creating more garbage and pollution that we have to dump somewhere.

Therefore, this prisoner's dilemma is one of the key mechanisms for growth of the technological organism.

Growth through our brain's reward center

Some people actively want the organism to grow, because they have become addicted to new advancements and want to keep seeing them. They become excited through the news media of announcements of new phones, new computers, and new methods of entertainment. Of course, I have experienced this myself. Our basic drive to recognize things we can use in the short term make us want to create new innovations.

We are also given new tasks that simply would not exist without technology. New hobbies are created and new problems are presented for us to solve, just because more technology exists. Would we really be interested in the vast majority of these problems if it were only for our own sake or the benefit of our own small communities? Probably not.

Think of problems like optimizing an SQL database, machine learning to make advertising more effective, or building a social network. If all technology were to self-destruct right now and we had to go back to a more primitive way of life, would anyone care about these problems? Probably not. Now, that does not mean they are not interesting. The problem is that they are interesting to many people, so we happily just solve them to pave way for more efficient technology.

At every step, technology actually takes away from us activities that we once would consider fulfilling. We only don't notice because they are replaced with different tasks, or existing tasks are distorted into the extreme. We are also deceived because we think we are making life easy. But in reality, we are making life efficient and reducing struggle. At some point, life will become so efficient that we won't really have to do anything. The people that want to do intellectual tasks will solve nearly meaningless problems like optimizing more algorithms and the people that don't want to do such problems will do nothing except consume media.

Growth through fear

The organism grows through fear. By creating a huge network capable of storing and transmitting a near limitless amount of information, human beings are made aware of almost every possible danger. Once that fear has been sufficiently propagated and introduced into minds around the globe, technology offers a way to mitigate or eliminate the fear. Of course, most people will take the technological solution out of our will to survive. Again, this instinct is perfectly normal, but when put under the lens of our incredibly advanced technology, is is magnified and turned into a new horror.

Think of what would happen if COVID occurred at a time where we had no technology and very little scientific understanding. Well, at those times, there probably would be insufficiently many people to even spread it much, but let's assume that there were enough people around so that most people would get COVID. What would happen? Very little. Most people would get the virus, some would suffer some permanent damage, and many would die. However, humanity would go on, and live as they lived before. Many people would get the virus and be totally fine. As an entire population, we would not be seriously hampered and life would continue as always.

However, since we have advanced scientific knowledge, we could isolate it and identify the COVID virus. Because of technology, we had the choice to completely isolate ourselves. Moreover, we developed even more technology because of COVID and even became more reliant on it. Everybody has been convinced of how horrible COVID is and how SAFE technology is keeping us. This will just prompt even more technological development. Every time we discover a new way to prevent some sort of death, no matter how unlikely the danger, we will take it. However, death is a part of life and to so completely avoid it is leading to something very far from a natural and wholesome way of life. Of course, the dilemma is that we are so good at analysing every danger, that we cannot help but avoid all of them. That is just human nature.

Some phones have a program to help you keep a good sleeping schedule via alarms and notifications. Is this a good thing? Well, chances are if we didn't have so many screens and devices, we wouldn't even need this technology. Anyone who has tried camping in the woods knows that living there for a few days makes it very easy to go to sleep at the same time and have a good sleeping schedule. That is how technology works. It helps in one area, hurts in another, and then solves the second problem while creating a third. However, with technology, the successive problems just become worse because society becomes so dependent on technology that we just move further and further away from humanity. We don't realize it because most people will never accept

that eradicating danger and making us even more safe can be anything but a good thing.

How does the organism protect itself?

If the technological organism is truly bad for us, why have we not destroyed it? It is because it protects itself.

The basic mechanism of technology is that it makes us dependent on it, making individuals less reliant on other individuals. This in turn restructures society so that going backwards is almost impossible.

In this society, if people become emotionally distraught for long periods of time due to its immense weirdness, they are often given labels like depressed. People who are depressed become despondent and cannot function well in daily life, so we think they are abnormal and prescribe them drugs. They take the drugs so they can return to staring at a screen for eight hours a day, five days a week. Basically, if people cannot plug into the machine, they are drugged so that they can return to it.

The technological organism also brainwashes us. I just randomly searched the internet and found a website called "Teach Your Kids to Code". The first sentence on this page is: "If we want to set our children up for success, every child should learn to code". There are hundreds more sites and organizations like this. There is obviously a very strong push, backed by multi-billion dollar corporations like Microsoft, to force coding on children. This site claims that "Coding has many benefits beyond the computer including skills in critical thinking, logic and creativity." That is probably true. However, coding is also the evolution of the technological organism, and have we ever asked ourselves if it makes sense to subject young children be even more involved in staring at a screen?

Of course in this society, it does because that is the new normal. But companies like Microsoft couldn't care less about the happiness of children or people. They just want drones to build their massive empire. Individuals of course care about their own children but I am not talking about individuals, but the technological organism. It allures people in with the promise of wealth and every sort of materialistic experience imaginable, in return for being plugged into an artificial environment separated from the natural experience of the earth. The promise is true, and the sacrifice is great.

We see that over time, so many new activities and skills have been created that only benefit the technological organism. For example, if a new product like a faster computer is created, individually we may not need it. But if only one person buys it, they will have an economic advantage so everyone buys it. Well, maybe everyone benefits from that? It's possible, but then again, maybe not. The point is, we **never**

ask this question. We just happily invent new things all the time, and let the economy decide. Most people who have everything they will ever need support this innovation by obtaining way more than they ever need.

What can we do?

Unlike some people, on most days I feel that the situation is generally hopeless. There are many things individuals can do, such as: (a) do not buy new technology as much as possible, (b) spend as little time as possible with technology, (c) protect the environment and pollute less, (d) take some time to figure out the true nature of happiness, etc. One could go on about various positive measures to take.

However, without a sufficient mass of people doing this, we would just have a minority of people that don't use much technology, similar to the Amish but without necessarily having the religion.

Government regulation is another possibility. In fact, this is already happening to some extent. The right to repair movement will slow the development of new technology if it makes devices last longer and allows people to use them for longer. So perhaps as resources become more scarce, more severe regulation will arise to put penalties on technologies that destroy the environment. However, I fear this will be insufficient, mainly because by the time resources are so scarce that production will be regulated enough to stop the technological organism in its tracks, almost everything natural will be gone.

Another possibility is that the damage we are doing to the environment is so great that horrible disasters happen, like floods. If a person is caught in a flood and washes up on a beach next to a pile of broken iPhones often enough, it might be enough to convince everyone what a horrible mistake we have made. Hopefully, we could realize this before the disasters. If we could realize it, we could could have a strong global taboo against the use of too much technology. Developing machine learning algorithms, hundreds of new models of phones every year, companies like Google and Apple, would all be sufficiently hated so that they could not survive.

Some like the biologist Edward O. Wilson have suggested that if we could only devote half the Earth for the natural world and not live beyond our ecological means, then we could foster a sustainable society that could last for hundreds of years without us destroying everything. It might even be possible that technology could actually help with this.

Therefore, the technological organism could either become a rabid dog, killing everything in its path, or a docile, tamed animal that eventually stabilizes and learns not to destroy. It is hard to predict at this point and perhaps collectively we will move towards a nice equilibrium. In any case, we need to be wary of all new technology and not welcome it unconditionally because the technological organism only cares for its own survival, which could be very possible long past our own death. We need to slow

down our technological innovation and even discard some of it. We need to consider the environment just as important as human survival, and perhaps we can avoid the runaway growth of the technological organism.

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