
WORLD:
On ChatGPT and AI — I

A Brief Evaluation of How We Treat AI

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February 12, 2023

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1 Introduction and Motivation for This Entry

This entry has arisen due to the emergence of a program called “ChatGPT”. It’s essentially an AI chatbot, and an impressive one at that. It’s made by OpenAI¹, and is incredibly versatile, answering homework questions, being able to compose music, lyrics, and programs. Just out of interest, I tried talking to it in Japanese, and it worked.

But anyway, this triggered me to think about just how we are treating these sorts of technologies, and what we are expecting them to do, as well as what they may be capable of. And so, this new program has served as motivation for this entry.

This entry isn’t focused so much on what AI might be able to do in the future, or how AI works etc., but more on what AI *should* be doing, and what it *should* be used for.

¹Source: Wikipedia (of course).

2 Current State of Affairs Regarding ChatGPT

So, as it stands, ChatGPT is currently just a very well programmed machine. As far as I'm aware, it's not an AI in the full, true sense. But then again, the text it generates is very convincing, and I may as well be talking to a human to be honest.

However, I would like to talk about how people seem to be using it. The first time I heard about it, people were joking about how they used it for school homework, or to write code, and do tasks they would otherwise have to do themselves. It is this phenomenon that I think is most notable. People have started to use it for things that were previously thought only possible for humans to do. Even if I am over-exaggerating a bit, the time soon will come when this is more obvious. Now, ChatGPT has its limitations I'm sure, but only time will be needed most likely to smooth those out, in the direction we are heading. And also, only time will be needed for everyone to be delegating more and more to bots like ChatGPT.

It is this aspect of its use that I begin to ask, should we rely upon AI, even if it could solve all our mundane problems?

But first, I will briefly talk about AI in general, in the next section.

3 Computation and AI

As it stands, there is essentially no true AI in existence, at the level of human intelligence.

Now, this is just my theory, but I don't think it is possible to create an AI that has human level intelligence/sentience. I think this for two main reasons.

Firstly, we don't even know how/why our consciousness works ourselves, nor do we know the true basis of our intelligence/reason. Maybe at best we know parts of the above, but we certainly don't/can't know the full picture. And so, how on earth could we be able to build something we don't know the true composition of.

Secondly, our language is by its very nature, imperfect. In other words (pun not intended), each of our words only point to the true meaning which is intended (i.e. an action or object etc.), and never contain in themselves the fullness of what they point to, because they are only references/pointers to their meaning. Yet, it is our own language that is used to program computers and program AI/chat bots. Therefore, since computers cannot experience/live in our reality and world, they can never begin to comprehend the full meaning of all of our words, because they have never experienced falling, or seen a fire up close, feeling its heat. Now, one may say we only need to feed it tonnes of visual/audio data, all the information from a lifetime's worth of memories. That may be the case, but there are also words like 'sad' and 'happy', which for certain, a computer cannot experience by its very nature. Also, not least because we struggle to define those terms ourselves. So even if computers could logically process human language, nearly all true meaning would be lost, and all that can be done is simply the act of simulating human responses (which is what current technology does).

With these two reasons, I think that true AI cannot exist.

3.1 What Should the Purpose of Computation and AI Be?

Now, here I will assume, given all my objections, that true AI is possible to build some time in the future, and that all current and near-future AI will be basically flawless. This is a big assumption, but it is in line with what many people hope. But it is exactly that 'hope' which I seek to bring into question here.

In order to do that, I will simply ask these questions:

1. What are computers? Are they just tools? Should they just be tools? Should rely on computers if they are more than mere tools?
2. What do we consider to be intelligence?
3. Are we making AI to better humanity? How really helpful is something, if it steals our independence? How much good does something do, if it steals away the means and jobs by which people have lived? How much human skill are we willing to sacrifice to make it more ‘efficient’ in a machine?
4. How much money are we spending on trying to create AI? How much money is needed to maintain all the supercomputers that suck up electricity that could support a town?
5. Finally, what reasons do we have to give more time, effort, and resources, to teach a metal box cheap tricks, than to teach our children and the next generation how to live good lives, and do good in the world?

Now, my thinking is hopefully obvious in these questions, although some questions may be a bit clumsy.

3.2 My Concerns With How We Currently Treat AI

My questions in the previous section hopefully show the obvious dangers of using computers/AI in an over-reliant way.

If we are saying that AI will help humanity, can we justify the ridiculous amounts of electricity needed for that sort of computation? Can we justify it still, when children don’t have electricity themselves to access work and textbooks via the internet for their own education? What about the money needed to invest in AI research/production? Can we justify not giving that money to WaterAid? Can we really say we are helping the world, when we are avoiding the obvious and most effective ways of helping the world and people *directly*.

If we are saying that AI will create more jobs, are we then to dictate the kind of work we expect everyone to do, regardless of their ability? In other words, if robots could clean rooms and buildings perfectly, should we get rid of human cleaners, even if it may be the only thing they can depend on for a living? What about farming? If robots replace such jobs, are we not implying that those jobs should not be done by humans? Are we not saying that humans *should* be doing “better” or “higher” jobs? Then what about those who simply are not able to, the people that simply aren’t as intelligent? Don’t get me wrong, my point is precisely that the meaning of life is not to be intelligent (especially not in a logical manner that AI is focused upon). Yet, how much are we implying that intelligence is the

metric for life, when we strip certain people of their livelihoods which are deemed less “intelligent”?

Finally, I wish to give my main concern. I think that if we depend too much on highly complex computation and AI, our skills as a society will be diminished.

I wonder sometimes, what would people of the past think of the world today. Would the skilful Victorian engineers be too happy when they see me shove a simple partial differential equation into a computer to solve it, as an engineering student? Would all the past scientists, mathematicians, and even computer scientists/programmers be too happy to see the majority of people (and students especially) shove things into a computer to solve all their problems? I’m sure they would marvel at the computers we would be using, but I think they would have many doubts about the quality of our human formation/education.

I truly think that if we see students rely overly on computers and AI tools, then those students aren’t being formed in the basics of their trade. And to be honest, if there’s one thing I’ve learnt from university, it’s that the basics really are the most important.

Furthermore, if societies and companies become over reliant on AI, then the companies that develop AIs will basically become monopolies very quickly. These are, in a nutshell, my concerns with how we may be using AI and computers, and my concerns with the consequences of relying too much on them.

4 My Concluding Proposal on What to Do Next

Overall, I would like to propose a few points on how we should treat computers and AI, so that the concerns I outlined earlier may be mitigated:

1. Treat computers and AI as tools. That really is what they are, and what they should be. Therefore, if we are to use them, let us first teach and show people how they work. The most obvious reason for this is that otherwise in 50 years, no one will know how to design the CPUs that we would have become so reliant on.
2. If there are people in the world still unable to access electricity, water, or food, let us sort that out first, instead of pouring millions and millions into AI research.
3. Even if AI is genuinely capable of replacing jobs that humans would do, let us not then replace that job with a robot. At the very least, update the job role so that employees are capable of using the new tool. What I think is better, is to keep the job being done by a human, and devote more resources and time to training that that person. After all, if we have the money to train an AI, surely we have the money to train an actual person.
4. Alongside the previous point, let us not deem any job as unimportant. And furthermore, let us not say that any job in society is less worthy than another.
5. If we have the time, resources, and attention to build an AI, let us instead better the education of our children. We should give priority to bettering our own education. Or, at least, let us focus on creating AI only after there are no children left in the world seeking a good education.
6. Finally, let us not think that we can teach our children with AI bots. There is more to education/formation than learning logical reasoning. Human reason is key, and is the one thing an AI can never have nor teach. An AI cannot teach us how to live a good life, nor how or what constitutes good actions. If we have the resources to teach an AI how to teach, then let us teach actual teachers how to teach well.

These proposals may of course not be as good as I intend, and are naturally limited due to my limited knowledge. However, I hope, and truly think, that they are a step in the right direction.

I have no problem at all with AI, as long as we are clear that computers are tools. What this means is that we must always keep humans as

managers of tools like AI, and always understand exactly how the tools we use work. This can mean that “less” efficient tools are used because their more complicated alternatives are not understood by the people that use them. This I think is no problem, since the time will come when the tools break, and the people won’t know how to fix the more complicated ones. Furthermore, the people won’t know how to make the more complicated tools even more efficient, yet those with the originally “less” efficient tools will actually know how to improve them.

Therefore, a tool’s power is not equal simply to the tool’s potential alone, but also the tool’s potential to be used confidently and well by us.

The reason why I think AI and computers should only be tools is because it should be obvious that we ought to decide things ourselves. From a practical perspective, we have enough trouble suing people for misdeeds, now imagine the pain of the legality surrounding the responsibilities of an AI, or its developers. Therefore, humans should in all cases be at the top of command for every task, no matter how small. This also, will mean that people on the job learn how to be effective leaders, which is just one skill that would diminish if we become over-reliant on AI.

I have been talking about AI, but I think we seriously need to step back and take a pause, and re-evaluate all the digital/computational tools we have, and re-evaluate how we use them. This should be plainly obvious with things like social media. Only since 20 or so years ago, have we not only been subject to vast amounts of information, but also have had children grow up in social circles that are fundamentally disconnected from direct reality. At no other time in history has a culture or set of values been promulgated through a medium which is detached from reality like social media. In this regard, we must be lying to ourselves if we are saying we not in a huge uncontrolled social experiment. And the worst thing is that we have adopted everything in this experiment without question.

And so, I would be incredibly inclined to step back and reset things, ditch social media, ditch our trust in highly complex tools (that we don’t/can’t understand), since at least then our societies will gain a confidence, resilience, and collective skill that frankly I’ve rarely seen at all. Maybe this would be a topic worth pursuing in another series.

But then, I could be wrong.

Thank you for reading.

END