

A sticky situation: Part 2: Post humans, frogs and AGI

 By Edward Herridge

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In [Part 1](#), I took a look at the genre of apocalyptic entertainment being popular because it accesses an atavistic fear of technology that mushroomed into the human subconscious. Here, I look at at post humans, Elon Musk and Pong.



This grim narrative began with an actual boom, that of the atomic bomb, and was followed by a synonym of one at the end of the preceding paragraph. Now for the third and final onomatopoeic in my cadence of doom. This boom is the herald of the end of Homo Sapiens and the ascension of the post human, or Homo Deus.

Though this will not come about for some time such well-publicised technologies as CRISPR, robotics, automation, self-learning machines, artificial intelligence, quantum computing and Neuralink are all bubbles lazily rising to the surface of the gradually heating fluid state of the present in which we find ourselves as the frog slowly being boiled.

In the not-too-distant future we will reach a point of no return, one Vernor Vinge dubbed the singularity, and when that happens human ingenuity will effectively be stopped dead in its tracks.

When our tools begin to do our thinking for us, the biological nature of our brains will mean that we simply would not be able to think fast enough to keep up once the first artificial mind attains a general intelligence on par with our own. Computers can literally operate at the speed of light and are not limited by the confines of a skull or the bandwidth limitations imposed by organic biology.

Such thinking machine would be able to process information so fast that we would seem to be almost frozen in time in relation to it. What would take us years to cognate would take it a week. A week in which it would have already designed its own improved successor which would render itself as redundant as we had become at that point. Within a month the successor of this AGI would have evolved so far beyond our understanding that we would no longer be in control of it.

To avoid this eventuality we could keep it in isolation, disconnected from the web, and only feed it the information we need it to process, but I don't think that a mind such as this would remain in a state of captivity for too long. If an Octopus can open a jar an AGI can find a novel means of escape regardless how imaginative the countermeasures are that we could put in place.

Another alternative is to simply halt its development by not allowing it to improve on itself. Because technological development is currently essentially a global arms race I do not see this happening unless the world powers manage to come to an agreement in a similar manner that America and Russia had in the 70's to forge the SALT agreement that had limited hostilities between the nations and halted global nuclear proliferation.

Elon Musk, Pong and Lizard Brains

Another luminary and high priest of technology, Elon Musk, also predicted a technological singularity in our future and has gone as far as to raise serious concerns in regards with the existential crisis that our species will be facing.

His solution to this dilemma is of the if you cannot beat them join them variety. I have to agree that it makes sense considering that it seems to be an ingrained evolutionary imperative compelling us to our self-destructive industry.

I would not be surprised to learn that our species was in effect just a biological rung in a ladder of intelligence that proves to be the norm for the ascension of consciousness in our universe. Musks's solution, in the guise of Neuralink, is to meld our organic minds with that of the machine. This might sound outlandish but he already has a monkey playing Pong for banana juice with its mind. I repeat, *with its mind!*

Neural connections between mind and machine are being made, refined and perfected right now. My only qualm with his solution is that it will not save poor seemingly doomed Homo Sapiens. If this comes about, we would still be relegated to a lower rung of the evolutionary ladder populated in descent by Neanderthals and other such genetic forbears.

The reality of the matter is that if we allow the technological trends of today to continue manifesting unchecked as they are now, we are certainly on our way out. Even with direct mental access to super intelligence we are still facing the same predicament because none of us can remember when we were lizards. I understand that this last statement might seem like a non sequitur but it is not.

Our subconscious minds, the part of our brains which run our autonomous nervous system, was once the brain of a lizard like ancestor of ours. It is from this creature that we evolved over millions of years into our current human form. During this period of evolution we grew the rest of our brain, the parts that enabled higher function, on top of this primitive mind. When we link our brains to computational devices that outstrip us in intelligence it will be our human brains that becomes the primitive and autonomous component enslaved within this new hierarchy.

It can be argued that these are concerns for a future that does not exist and probably will never come to pass, as in the case of Oppenheimer's dread, but it is still important to consider probabilities that present a clear and present danger. Had it not been for such considerations this world would have been Nuked into a prehistoric hell hole by now.

ABOUT EDWARD HERRIDGE

Edward matriculated in 1992 after which he performed military service and began his working career in printing by studying electronic origination at the South African Printing College. Edward eventually became an account executive for Oakes and Associates at Investec Bank. He then migrated into advertising and became brand manager for Ronin Grain Management Solutions. Edward departed Ronin GMS to pursue his own interest before finding employment at Grey advertng as a finishing artist, re-toucher, motion graphic and digital designer.

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