

The brilliance of human beings

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It's Saturday evening. I'm lying in a darkened room. My daughter comes up, kisses me on the nose and asks if I need anything else. I've had a bit of a migraine all day, and it's not getting any better. The throbbing pain is worsening, I feel sick and I've completely run out of painkillers. My eyes narrowed to slits, I compose a WhatsApp message to my neighbour. Two minutes later, her son knocks at the door to our flat, two ibuprofen tablets in his hand. My son brings them to me with a glass of water and strokes my back, while I lie curled up in the foetal position on my yoga mat.

HUMAN BEINGS ARE THE MOST HIGHLY DEVELOPED ANIMAL, AND YET SO SIMPLE AND VULNERABLE

That's what it's like to be human. *Human being - 'a man, woman, or child of the species *Homo Sapiens*, distinguished from other animals by superior mental development, power of articulate speech, and upright stance.' (OED)

'Will the artificial intelligence of a computer, robot or machine ever be able to imitate this brilliant complexity? Will we human beings make ourselves obsolete?'

We are the most highly developed animal: intelligent, empathetic, creative, devious, greedy, flawed, brilliant, emotional, complex, manipulative and manipulable. And yet so simple and vulnerable. It's especially in the moments when we feel weak that we realise how human we are. The moments when the only thing that can help is a hug or a kiss on the forehead. That's the brilliance of interpersonal contact, when all our senses cohere into a rich, complex harmony. Will the artificial intelligence of a computer, robot or machine ever be able to imitate this brilliant complexity? Will we human beings make ourselves obsolete? If great thinkers like Yuval Noah Harari are to be believed, *Homo Sapiens* as we know it

today will no longer exist in 200 years. He argues that artificial intelligence will make humans redundant.

I disagree. I regard intuition of nature as the highest form of intelligence, and don't believe that artificial intelligence will ever become the master of nature.

AI is an integral part of our day-to-day lives, and that's not going to change in future. It's comparable to electricity, which has only been used universally in private homes for around a hundred years. Today, we wouldn't want to live without electricity, but it's possible, and it has become a luxury to get away from it. Yoga in the jungle, camping and fishing in the wild. Unspoiled nature has become a luxury, due not to artificial but to actual scarcity.

But that's a natural imbalance, and human beings are part of an ecosystem that is currently out of balance.

WHAT WILL CONTROL OUR LIVES? ONCE IT WAS THE GODS, TODAY IT'S BIG DATA OR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

That's all a matter of semantics. The crux of many things – the old, the new, the innovative. We're quick to talk about something controlling our lives. Once it was the gods, today it's big data or artificial intelligence. But let's think for a moment about the word 'artificial intelligence'.

* Artificial – 'Made or produced by human beings rather than occurring naturally, especially as a copy of something natural.' (OED)

* Intelligence – 'The ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills.' (OED)

Artificial intelligence is currently based on knowledge that is systematically organised by statistical methods. By contrast, natural intelligence, whether

that of a human being or that of a forest, is a process of complex chemical reactions that is constantly evolving. The law of nature is like a moral system that links everything together and keeps things in balance. I don't believe that humans can create a system greater than that of nature and the universe using AI and big data.

INTERPERSONAL CARE CAN'T BE REPLACED BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

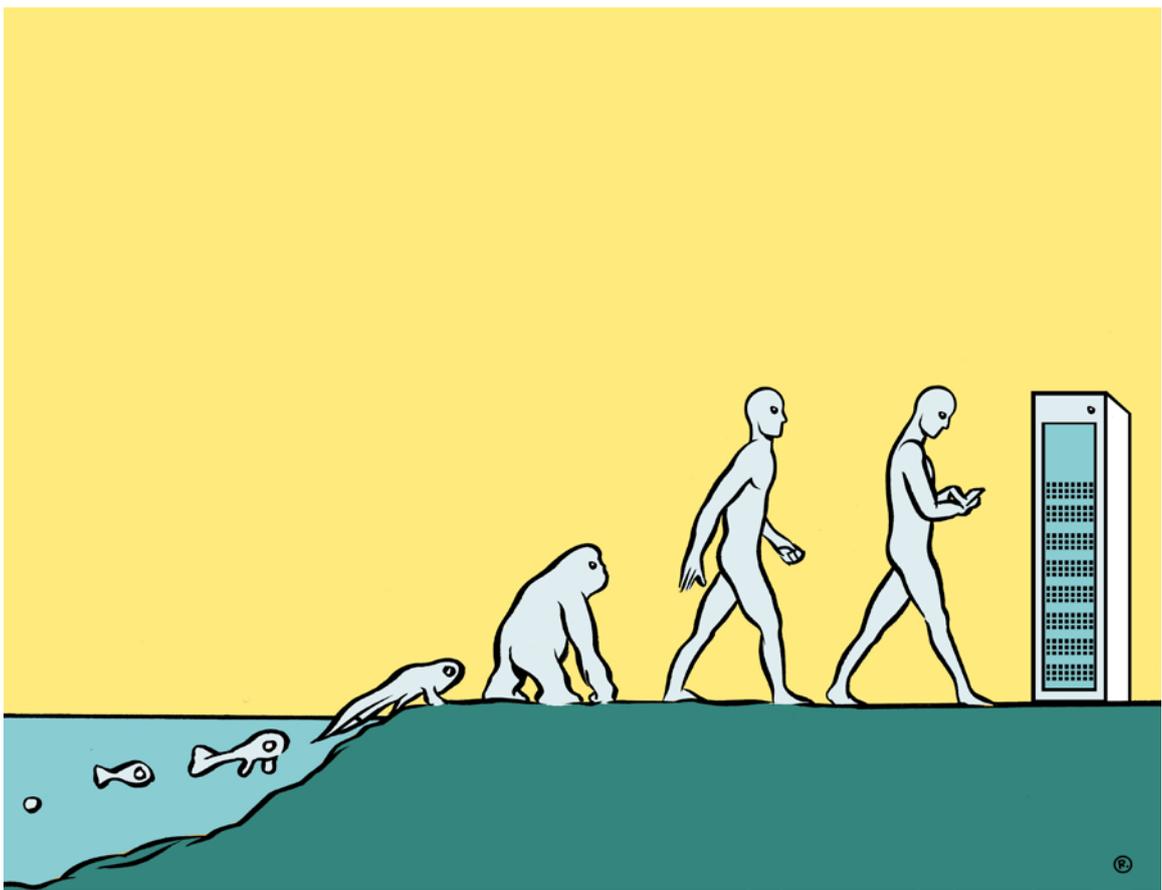
Of course, intelligent machines will change our day-to-day reality in the coming decades and centuries. Driverless cars will make our lives a little easier and massively reduce accident rates, while in healthcare AI-driven data processing will make it possible to diagnose illnesses far more precisely and to custom-tailor treatments to individual patients. But at the same time, I don't believe we'll reach a point where AI can replace interpersonal care by a doctor or nurse, or the simple act of giving a child or parent a kiss on the forehead.

As a human being, a woman, a mother, a daughter, born in a country and a time in which I'm able to live in peace and freedom, I don't have any crystal ball. I can't tell whether humanity will be living in war or peace in 200 years, whether women and men will have equal rights throughout the world, whether children will still be dying of hunger and poverty.

Or whether we'll be living in a world controlled by artificial intelligence. But I trust nature to go on keeping things in balance.

And as long as human beings are still a part of history, I want to impart to my children an appreciation for every single individual, for themselves, for nature. Because as a species, we've brought about a state of imbalance in recent decades. But given all the amazing things we've invented over the millennia, from the combustion engine to flying, from red wine to chocolate, I hope I'm right when I say that human beings will work it out somehow.

I dedicate this article, with the deepest of gratitude, to Stewart Adams, the British pharmacologist who invented ibuprofen and died on Alfred Herrhausen's birthday (30 January), and to my children.





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