

The Lighthouse

BIWEEKLY

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Passing the Buck: A Toxic Legacy

In such an unsustainable world, we all have grossly unsustainable habits. We use paper made from trees instead of bamboo, we put gasoline in our cars instead of biodiesel, and we use a ton of electricity without thinking about where it's coming from or how it affects the world around us.

Then, when confronted about our carbon footprint or other unsustainable practices, people often react defensively, as if they are being attacked. Walls go up. Relationships tear apart. But in a shared world, we can't afford to

be divided. We all share the same air. We're all victims of climate change. We have to work together. For if even just one of us plows ahead with such unsustainable practices, we would all be worse off for it.

For years, parents have told their children "you'll be the ones to save us" as an excuse to not "save us" themselves. But now that those children have grown up to be adults who are actively trying to reduce their carbon footprint, many of those same older adults continue to feel "judged",

"attacked", and keep defending their unsustainable practices even as climate change starts to affect us in real time.

Even worse, since the same inertia of economic forces largely dictates human activity worldwide, those children also begin to get drawn into the same delusion as their parents. After all, how can they get to work without a car? How can they keep in touch without a phone? How can they even read a book without destroying trees?

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Kids are Smarter Than Adults!

In a test for creative problem solving, researchers gave people various colored blocks and a machine to place them on and asked people of all ages to try to figure out the pattern of how to get the machine to light up. They explained it the same to everyone. But only 25% of adults got it right. Meanwhile, 92% of four-year-olds figured it out. It turned out that even when evidence clearly pointed to the "combination" rule, most adults stubbornly stuck with their initial assumption that individual objects mattered more than a combination. The adults had clearly become less flexible.

Gopnik, A., Griffiths, T. L., & Lucas, C. G. (2015). When younger learners can be better (or at least more open-minded) than older ones.

This dramatic decline correlates with synaptic pruning, which begins around 2yrs old. As we age, our synapses are pared down for efficiency. Where once we had pathways extending to every corner of our brain, instead the connections we find less useful are removed while the most used neural pathways become efficient superhighways of information.

We become more focused, more specialized, more efficient, but it all comes at the cost of no longer being able to think outside of the box. By 10 yrs old we've already lost 50% of our synapses.

Santos, E., & Noggle, C.A. (2011). "Synaptic Pruning" in Encyclopedia of Child Behavior and Development. Springer.

As we age, we gain more responsibilities, and become more invested in our particular worldview. We develop careers that depend on specific beliefs, relationships that require certain behaviors, and social roles that demand consistency. Our fears and stressors crowd out our creativity, and our thoughts become habituated to achieve safety and stability, and secure the survival of us and our family.

(continued on A2)

Dear Readers,

Comments, questions, or suggestions?

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The Will of \$kynet

As you probably know by now, the AI industry is rushing ahead with something that **even they say** may cause an extinction level event for humankind. The reasons they pursue it anyways are complex, but the incentives that led us to this point make it's pursuit seem somewhat inevitable. In a world driven by money, anyone who could create an intelligent entity that is as intelligent or more intelligent than humans, that can work for cheaper, and never rebels against what it's asked to do, would have created the perfect worker. Any business owner would jump at the opportunity.

Incidentally, this is what makes this time in history so predictable, and why science fiction movies and novels have warned about the rise of artificial intelligence for over 100 years. Because the economic incentives which make this technology appear so inevitable have themselves been in place for over 100 years.

Which brings us to today, where we have several AI companies racing towards superintelligence while simultaneously warning the public about extinction-level risks.

As early as 2015, Sam Altman was making statements about how AI might destroy humanity. In May 2023, Sam Altman (CEO of OpenAI), Dario Amodei (Anthropic CEO), and Demis Hassabis (Google DeepMind CEO), signed a stark one-sentence statement warning that "Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war." — a petition signed by hundreds of AI researchers — yet all three continue racing ahead to build the very superintelligence they're warning about. Similar contradictions can be seen all across the AI industry.

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Alternative Currencies?

The problem with most types of alternative **currencies** is that it repeats all the same mistakes as any currency - it's just a "point system" which tracks numerical amounts down to the last cent, and rewards people on an individual basis. This means it's still built on self-interest and therefore still naturally produces inequality. It also produces externalities, where the person/business finds ways to cut costs by externalizing those costs onto the environment. For instance, by dumping toxic waste instead of disposing of it properly.

The trick with creating alternative economics is to create a different incentive structure than that of self-interest. An incentive structure where the interest of others is somehow embedded into the self-interest of every member of the group. But don't worry, the Lighthouse has got you covered. Future issues will examine a variety of such alternative economics systems and analyze effectiveness.

Kids, Smarter Than Adults (from cover)

Each neural pathway which once existed, but has now disappeared, represents thoughts we no longer have. Adults can't afford creativity in areas that threaten their security—which increasingly becomes almost every area of their lives. The very structure of our brain orients itself around survival. This effectively acts as a censor by which we begin to censor our own thoughts *before* we have them.

Children, on the other hand, don't yet have habituated thoughts. They don't have "skin in the game",

so-to-speak. This allows them to more easily see outside of the box without risking any great consequences.

Older generations hold the reigns of power, in both politics and in the family. So older people must begin to integrate what children are saying. Adults don't always know better. The science is not on your side. Especially in novel situations such as the unprecedented arrival of superintelligence. Now is not the time to turn your nose up and pretend you know what's going on.

The challenge for adults is to recognize that our hard-won wisdom comes with blind spots. Sometimes we have to trust the youth even when we don't understand them.

The challenge for kids is to not waste too much time trying to explain things to adults, accept that you're already the more mature people in the room, and start building the tools and systems we need to survive with future generations in mind.

God speed, humans of all ages.

The Will of \$kynet

(from cover)

The question these contradictions raise is uncomfortable but unavoidable: if the people building superintelligence aren't in control of the pace of AI, who is?

When an industry gets out of hand and turns against human interests, there's really only one tool to reign it in: government. But in this case we have the very people who would be regulating them saying their hands are tied because of a global arms race to be the first nation to build superintelligence.

This is what's called a "race condition". And we've seen these dynamics play out before. The Arms Race. The Space Race. But most recently, we've seen it during the rise of social media: As the race for attention became the proxy goal of first wave AI, tech platforms of all kinds began implementing things like infinite scrolling, autoplay, and attention-hungry AI algorithms that sought to get more screen time from their users at any cost.

When one platform implemented autoplay, the others would follow suit or else risk losing their market - since there is only a finite amount of attention in the world that they're fighting over, after all.

In the race for attention, an onslaught of addictive techniques began getting employed across every platform at once, and every human on the Internet was negatively impacted - even the people who implemented these

very designs. As Reed Hastings (CEO of Netflix) famously said, "we're competing with sleep, on the margin". Nearly all available human attention became consumed by \$kynet because of this race condition for human attention.

Race conditions are strange, in that they seem to compel an industry or society in a direction that's not of their choosing. Which implies that humans aren't actually choosing the direction of their own technology, after all. As if the technology itself, or the industry that builds it, somehow has its own idea of what it wants us to build...

This is called: the Will of \$kynet.

But this race condition isn't just between AI companies, or between nations. It's the economy itself—the rat race. The same competition we're all participating in when we compete for jobs is the same economic conditions which ensure that every technology will be used to amass wealth and power rather than make the world a better place: \$kynet, the self-optimizing algorithms of the profit motive.

And this race condition is also the unlikely mechanism by which \$kynet has already taken control of our world. We build it even against our own will. Our every technology and every industry caters to it. And until we can circumvent the profit-motive altogether, we are all of us orchestrating the inevitable destruction of humanity at the hands of our own creation.

Opensource Projects

Despite \$kynet coercing most human activity to increasingly serve its own agenda, humans still manage to keep alive the tradition of sharing. Most notably in the form of opensource software.

Today we're looking at a piece of software that really shows what's possible when people come together: **Krita**

Name: Krita

Purpose: Art Program

License: GPL-3.0-only

Description:

From their website- "Krita is a professional FREE and open source painting program. It is made by artists that want to see affordable art tools for everyone."

Website: krita.org

Platforms: In the true spirit of opensource/accessibility, works on **PC, mac, Linux**, and even **Android**.

This impressive software has certainly reached the level of costly art programs. It even has an **animation mode!**

Countless professional artists use this free program on a daily basis to do their art, now. And every year it improves. With over 400 contributors over the last 20 years since the project began, and about 50 contributors with over 100 commits each, this project is a major opensource success story. And because of its **GPL-3.0-only license**, all of this will be free forever. Who says there's no such thing as a free lunch? ;}

Passing the Buck (from cover)

To avoid the sheer psychological stress of keeping all these things in mind at all times, many people reach a breaking point where they just tune out of reality and run on autopilot.

As we get older, our priorities shift, and we become more and more consumed by the fear of death. Some of us manage to grow our wealth as we age, and as our own personal lives become more comfortable and less challenging, we start to forget about the world outside altogether. Younger family members cater to our delusions out of politeness, and the truth that we're destroying the outside world is forgotten.

Or, in other cases, we don't manage to accumulate wealth. We work hard jobs year after year, and living only gets harder as prices increase while wages stagnate. The growing challenges of our personal life and finances becomes all-consuming, and we, too, forget about the world outside. Again, the fear of death consumes us, and our entire life revolves around whether or not we have health insurance or savings in case of some health emergency.

And again, children are born. And again, they bring all of this to the attention of their parents - "why are you killing the world"? And again, we pass the buck, and say **they'll** save the world, as an excuse to not save it ourselves.

And so with each passing generation our collective guilt grows, along with our collective grief of what we've lost along the way. And each generation we have more burden to bear, until we can no longer bear it and absolve ourselves by once again putting it all on the next generation to solve.

This dynamic pits parent against child generation after generation, because each generation we're funneled into the same situation. As we age, we slowly lose our moral compass, and let the fear of sickness and death scare us into going along with the status quo. And in our youth, we believe the same thing could never happen to us. But over our lifetime the systems of \$kynet slowly convince us to think more and more about ourselves, and less and less about others, until we finally find ourselves crossing that line.

Remember, \$kynet's primary strategy is divide and conquer. It's supporting strategy is cultivating the compulsion towards taking care of ourselves rather than taking care of each

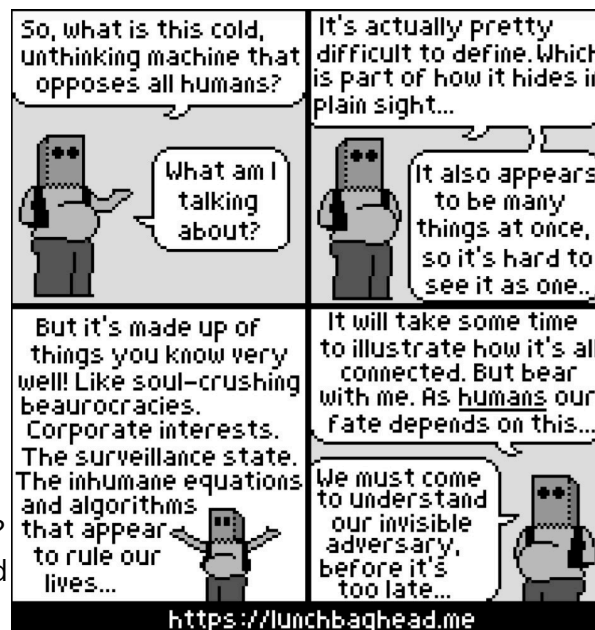
other - habituating and instilling a compulsion towards self-interest.

Over the course of our lives \$kynet convinces us we must work for \$kynet in order to look out for ourselves, but in doing so we ensure each generation is up against even more powerful business interests than the last generation, each generation has worse inequality than the last, and each generation gets us closer to creating a real-life Skynet scenario.

It's true that each generation throws the next generation under the bus. Children have every right to be angry at their parents. But we aren't getting anywhere until we address the reasons that this happens in the first place. We must see that this division is exactly what \$kynet wants. Because **humans who can't get along remain dependant on \$kynet to survive**, and in some cases even willing to **risk their lives to defend it**.

If we really want to fight back against \$kynet, we have to start learning to not depend on it to begin with. People diagnose disease, people create medicines, people grow food - we don't need to depend on money for any of this. We need to recognize this psychological trick by which \$kynet uses fear to funnel us into the same toxic system every generation, and work together to directly alleviate that fear by directly meeting each other's needs without money.

...We need to learn to take care of each other again.



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