



Notes & quotes

Dataism

a belief in information as a supreme value and in data as a way to reduce cognitive biases. Existential challenge to the dominant Humanism ideology, authority will shift from humans to algorithms as it will be stupid not to use them for essential decisions given flaws of humans in data processing. Algorithms will be so good at making decisions for us that it would be madness not to follow their advice

The Cosmic data-processing

where humans as merely tools for creating the Internet-of-all-things, which may eventually spread out from planet Earth to pervade the whole galaxy or universe. Organisms are seen as algorithms, shaped by natural selection (algorithmic calculations are not affected by material from which the calculator is built). In this context freedom of information seems the greatest good of all - a completely new value, first to appear since 1789. The greatest sin is to block the data flow

Encapsulating wisdom

When you read the Bible you are getting advice from a few priests and rabbis who lived in ancient Jerusalem. In contrast, when you listen to your feelings, you follow an algorithm that evolution has developed for millions of years, and that withstood the harshest quality-control tests of natural selection. Your feelings are the voice of millions of ancestors, each of whom managed to survive and reproduce in an unforgiving environment.

Knowledge as a resource

there are three kinds of resources: raw materials, energy and knowledge. (...)

For thousands of years the scientific road to growth was blocked because people believed that holy scriptures and ancient traditions already contained all the important knowledge the world had to offer (...). The Scientific Revolution freed humankind from this naive conviction. (...) Increasing stock of knowledge may help to overcome problem of resource scarcity.

Humanism

Humankind was salvaged not by the law of supply and demand, but rather by the rise of a revolutionary new religion –humanism.

The humanist religion worships humanity, and expects humanity to play the part that God played in Christianity and Islam, and that the laws of nature played in Buddhism and Daoism.

According to humanism, humans must draw from within their inner experiences not only the meaning of their own lives, but also the meaning of the entire universe. (...)

For centuries humanism has been convincing us that we are the ultimate source of meaning, and that our free will is therefore the highest authority of all.

Humanism demands that we show some guts, listen to the inner messages even if they scare us, identify our authentic voice and then follow its instructions regardless of the difficulties.

Technological progress has a very different agenda. It doesn't want to listen to our inner voices. It wants to control them.

Cooperation

Humans nowadays completely dominate the planet not because the individual human is far smarter and more nimble-fingered than the individual chimp or wolf, but because Homo sapiens is the only species on earth capable of co-operating flexibly in large numbers."

"the power of human cooperation networks depends on a delicate balance between truth and fiction. If you distort reality too much, it will weaken you, and you will not be able to compete against more clear-sighted rivals. On the other hand, you cannot organise masses of people effectively without relying on some fictional myths."

Warm Social Logic

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Ceaseless upheavals

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Listening to yourself

The number one humanist commandment. In order to really listen to themselves, some people must first turn down the volume of the inner screams and diatribes. According to modern psychiatry, many 'inner voices' and 'authentic wishes' are nothing more than the product of biochemical imbalances and neurological diseases.

As we learn to turn our inner volume up and down, we give up our belief in authenticity, because it is no longer clear whose hand is on the switch. (...)

Many people take great care not to probe themselves too deeply. (...) Wwe sometimes don't really want to hear our authentic voice, because it might disclose unwelcome secrets and make uncomfortable requests. (...)

Anthrophocentrism

Homo sapiens has some unique and sacred essence that is the source of all meaning and authority in the universe. Everything that happens in the cosmos is judged to be good or bad according to its impact on Homo sapiens.

Human superiority

If and when computer programs attain superhuman intelligence and unprecedented power, should we begin valuing these programs more than we value humans? Would it be okay, for example, for an artificial intelligence to exploit humans and even kill them to further its own needs and desires? If it should never be allowed to do that, despite its superior intelligence and power, why is it ethical for humans to exploit and kill pigs? (...)

We want to believe that human lives really are superior in some fundamental way. We Sapiens love telling ourselves that we enjoy some magical quality that not only accounts for our immense power, but also gives moral justification for our privileged status. (...)

The belief that humans have eternal souls whereas animals are just evanescent bodies is a central pillar of our legal, political and economic system.

There is zero scientific evidence that in contrast to pigs, Sapiens have souls.

Inner desires

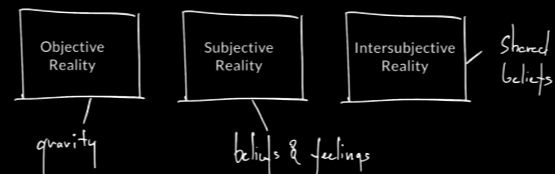
The million-dollar question is not whether parrots and humans can act upon their inner desires –the question is whether they can choose their desires in the first place. (...)

There is only a stream of consciousness, and desires arise and pass away within this stream, but there is no permanent self that owns the desires, hence it is meaningless to ask whether I choose my desires deterministically, randomly or freely. (...) the notion that you have a single self and that you could therefore distinguish your authentic desires from alien voices is just another liberal myth,

Intersubjective reality

is a third level of reality. Intersubjective entities depend on communication among many humans rather than on the beliefs and feelings of individual humans. Yet as long as billions of people believe in its value, you can use it to buy food, beverages and clothing.

"We don't want to accept that our God, our nation or our values are mere fictions, because these are the things that give meaning to our lives. We want to believe that our lives have some objective meaning, and that our sacrifices matter to something beyond the stories in our head."



Objective reality replaced

ideological fictions will rewrite DNA strands; political and economic interests will redesign the climate; and the geography of mountains and rivers will give way to cyberspace. As human fictions are translated into genetic and electronic codes, the intersubjective reality will swallow up the objective reality and biology will merge with history.

Consciousness

The stream of consciousness, in contrast, is the concrete reality we directly witness every moment. It is the surest thing in the world. You cannot doubt its existence. (...)

Robots and computers have no consciousness because despite their myriad abilities they feel nothing and crave nothing. (...)

99% of bodily activities, including muscle movement and hormonal secretions, take place without any need of conscious feelings.

Life = data processing

Organisms as machines for making calculations and taking decision?

This analogy between organisms and algorithms might mislead us. In the nineteenth century, scientists described brains and minds as if they were steam engines. Why steam engines? Because that was the leading technology of the day, which powered trains, ships and factories, so when humans tried to explain life, they assumed it must work according to analogous principles.

3 assumptions

1. Organisms are algorithms, and humans are not individuals –they are 'dividuals'. That is, humans are an assemblage of many different algorithms lacking a single inner voice or a single self.

2. The algorithms constituting a human are not free. They are shaped by genes and environmental pressures, and take decisions either deterministically or randomly –but not freely.

3. It follows that an external algorithm could theoretically know me much better than I can ever know myself.

Authority shift

Shifting of authority from humans to algorithms is happening all around us, not as a result of some momentous governmental decision, but due to a flood of mundane personal choices. (...)

In the twenty-first century the individual is more likely to disintegrate gently from within than to be brutally crushed from without.

Superhumans

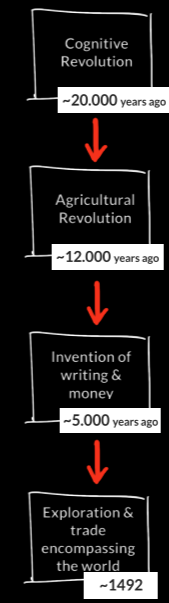
Superhumans will enjoy unheard-of abilities and unprecedented creativity, which will allow them to go on making many of the most important decisions in the world. They will perform crucial services for the system, while the system could neither understand nor manage them. However, most humans will not be upgraded, and will consequently become an inferior caste dominated by both computer algorithms and the new superhumans.

Splitting humankind into biological castes will destroy the foundations of liberal ideology.

Global peace will be achieved not by celebrating the distinctiveness of each nation, but by unifying all the workers of the world and social harmony won't be achieved by each person narcissistically exploring their own inner depths, but rather by each person prioritising the needs and experiences of others over their own desires.

Mental pollution

Consciousness is the biologically useless by-product of certain brain processes. Jet engines roar loudly, but the noise doesn't propel the aeroplane forward. Humans don't need carbon dioxide, but each and every breath fills the air with more of the stuff. Similarly, consciousness may be a kind of mental pollution produced by the firing of complex neural networks. It doesn't do anything. It is just there. If this is true, it implies that all the pain and pleasure experienced by billions of creatures for millions of years is just mental pollution.



connect vast numbers of Sapiens into a single data-processing network.

accelerated demographic growth so the number of human processors rose sharply. Enabled many more people to live together in close proximity, generating dense local networks

field of human cooperation finally overpowered the centrifugal forces. Groups bonded and merged to form cities and kingdoms

"Global grid" and free flow of information. Democracy and free market won because they improved the global data-processing system.

In the eighteenth century, humanism sidelined God by shifting from a deo-centric to a homo-centric world view.

In the twenty-first century, Dataism may sideline humans by shifting from a homo-centric to a data-centric view.

Free information

Since 1789, despite numerous wars, revolutions and upheavals, humans have not managed to conceive of any new value.

Dataism is the first movement since 1789 that created a genuinely novel value: freedom of information.

Dataism got its first martyr when Aaron Swartz, a twenty-six-year-old American hacker, committed suicide in his apartment. (...) In 2008 he published the 'Guerilla Open Access Manifesto', which demanded a free and unlimited flow of information.

He believed that information wants to be free, that ideas don't belong to the people who created them, and that it is wrong to lock data behind walls and charge an entrance fee. He used the MIT computer network to access JSTOR, and downloaded hundreds of thousands of scientific papers, which he intended to release onto the Internet, so that everybody could read them freely. Swartz was arrested and put on trial. When he realised that he would probably be convicted and sent to jail, he hanged himself.

Obsolete tech

Sapiens evolved in the African savannah tens of thousands of years ago, and their algorithms are just not built to handle twenty-first-century data flows. We might try to upgrade the human data-processing system, but this may not be enough.

Dataism adopts a strictly functional approach to humanity, appraising the value of human experiences according to their function in data-processing mechanisms. If we develop an algorithm that fulfils the same function better, human experiences will lose their value.

Global data flow

As the global data-processing system becomes all-knowing and all-powerful, so connecting to the system becomes the source of all meaning. Humans want to merge into the data flow because when you are part of the data flow you are part of something much bigger than yourself.

Humanism holds that experiences occur inside us, and that we ought to find within ourselves the meaning of all that happens, thereby infusing the universe with meaning.

Dataists believe that experiences are valueless if they are not shared, and that we need not –indeed cannot –find meaning within ourselves.

Humans can write poems and blogs about their experiences and post them online, thereby enriching the global data-processing system. That makes their bits count. Wolves cannot do this. Hence all the experiences of wolves –as deep and complex as they may be –are worthless.

Decline of democracy

As data-processing conditions change again in the twenty-first century, democracy might decline and even disappear. (...)

If humankind is indeed a single data-processing system, what is its output? Dataists would say that its output will be the creation of a new and even more efficient data-processing system, called the Internet-of-All-Things. Once this mission is accomplished, Homo sapiens will vanish. (...)

technology has switched from first gear to fourth. Technological revolutions now outpace political processes, causing MPs and voters alike to lose control.

Data religion humans have completed their cosmic task and should now pass the torch on to entirely new kinds of entities.

Techno-humanism Homo sapiens as we know it has run its historical course and will no longer be relevant in the future, but concludes that we should therefore use technology in order to create Homo deus –a much superior human model.

techno-humanism may end up downgrading humans. The system may prefer downgraded humans not because they would possess any superhuman knacks, but because they would lack some really disturbing human qualities that hamper the system and slow it down.