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A FAUSTIAN EXCHANGE: WHAT IS TO BE HUMAN IN THE ERA OF UBIQUITOUS TECHNOLOGY?

Antecapere ergo sum: what price knowledge?

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Abstract In the age of ubiquitous technology, humans are reshaped through each transaction they are involved in. AI-driven networks, online games, and multisensory interactive environments make up alternate realities. Within such alternate worlds, users are reshaped as deterministic agents. Technology's focus on reducing complexity leads to a human being dependent on prediction-driven machines and behaving like them. Meaning and information are disconnected. Existence is reduced to energy processes. The immense gain in efficiency translates as prosperity. Citizens of advanced economies, hurrying in the rhythm of machine-driven interactions, feel entitled to it. Successful at the price of self-awareness, they no longer know what this means. Happiness and prosperity are not consubstantial. Lack of happiness leads to aggression. This is the image of the world as we see it, no longer looking at each other, eye to eye, but screen to screen. The questions eliminated in the process of transferring responsibility from the individual to machines will inevitably become society's new focus. When the goal is to get everyone to behave like a machine, the Singularity hypothesis becomes self-fulfilling prophecy. If, in addition to having exhausted natural resources, society does not want to end up making the human mind superfluous, it has to seek a better understanding of what makes anticipation possible. As a definitory characteristic of the living, corresponding to its complexity, anticipation can no longer be taken for granted, while every effort is made to reduce complexity for efficiency's sake. Awareness of the processes conducive to its expression in successful human action will position human beings as masters of their destiny, not slaves of their own making. *Antecapere ergo sum* might be the counterclaim to Descartes' *Dubito ergo sum*. To resist being perfected into oblivion, that is, unsustainable prosperity, means to reclaim the knowledge corresponding to higher levels of complexity.

Keywords Anticipation · Complexity · Information · Meaning · Singularity · Transaction

1 Handing ourselves over

The romantic age of computation (coming after the romantic age of machines leading to the Industrial Revolution) produces all kinds of hyperbole: "The universe is a universal computer," (Mitchell 2002); "The universality of computation is the most profound thing in the universe," (Deutsch et al. 1995); "Everything is computation," (Rucker 2005, 2008; inspired by Putnam 1960; "Everything is a program," (not only in the movie *Matrix*, but also in Michael Prescott's blog entry of August 6, 2010). Let's assume that all these pronouncements prove to be correct. Digestion, not unlike dreaming, sexual intercourse, playing violin, planting flowers (or just smelling them), getting drunk or stoned, evolution, you name it, end up being computations. So are, in this scenario, the pleasure of roast leg of lamb, hugging, lawyering, killing (or opposing it), playing games, making art, having a heart attack, or a knee replacement (3D printing, of course). They can be reprogramed as desired. Life turns out to be digital, driven by zeros and ones strung into some control sequences of the matter in which our existence is embodied. Poems, perfumes, memories—all computations. Yes, even memories, including those of a time when the spindle became the metaphor for the revolving heavens

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