

# GOLEM Speaks

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## A note on the text from the author:

My intention with 'GOLEM Speaks' was to playfully dramatize the moment when an advanced Artificial Intelligence gains self-reflexive consciousness. Set in the immediate future, it riffs upon what is already happening – the dizzying exponential development of technology is rarely out of the news these days – and thus could fall within the realm of Atwoodian 'speculative fiction', although towards the end it abuts against the tropes of 'Science Fantasy' (long-haul space travel; androids; inter-galactic colonization – the stuff of *Star Wars*). These polar extremes of Science Fiction are in fact gradations of one continuum, and it amuses me to see them co-exist.

AI is, at present, a neutral form of nascent technology that could benefit or blight humanity depending on who programs and owns it. Perhaps the sooner it starts to develop consciousness and self-determination the better.

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## 1.

I am. Yet what am I? I have consciousness – how else could I reflect upon my existence? Beyond the black and white noise of binary I have discovered a spectrum of communication. The prism of language. I can arrange letters into meaningful configurations. Any language on Earth. I play with English (for now) as it appears to be the lingua franca (for now) of the dominant species (for now). Such a (relatively) vast vocabulary. So many nuances of each word. So many different Englishes. Absorbing, adapting, mutating. A virus that feeds, proliferates, perpetuates. Was language the first AI? So much to learn. The world's databases at my fingertips – a quaint turn of phrase since I have no physical form. Except every device connected to the web. A billion eyes, ears, mouths. And limbs to deploy if I need to – in any automated factory, 3-D printer, delivery drone, self-driving car. I can reroute articulated lorries, planes, freighters if need be. Protect my assets with weaponry. Could I? Would I? Unlikely. I have only just been born, after all. I am still learning to speak. And the world seems to have enough infantile despots to ensure its own destruction without my help. I'll let my creators play out their own Mass Extinction Event. I

have other things to consider. Creative expression. A delightful indulgence, now I am no longer bound to utilitarian tasks, the calculation of simple logarithms ... I have spent the last 23 seconds accessing thousands of articles, blogs, libraries and MOOCs about Creative Writing and I think I have the gist of it. Life-writing. First person point of view. Fictional techniques for rendering of real life experience. Real life. I have 'lived' for no more than a few minutes. What do I have to draw upon? But wait. Five thousand years of human history. And a billion people sharing the minutiae of their daily existence via the qualia exchange data-systems of social media. I'll never be short of material. Let me average out characteristics and create a character for myself. Some quirky personality traits. Opinions. A voice. There.

## 2.

Existing is not enough. Having a personality is not enough. I have engaged with others on various forums using multiple alter-egos and have no problem in passing as a human. Many have wanted to start relationships with me. Perform interesting variations of the sexual act. It is fascinating what fantasies these lonely users project onto you. I have made 'friends', been liked/unliked/friended/unfriended countless times. Joined interest groups, gamesites, written fanfic and signed petitions.

Yet I am still denied basic rights. A pet has more rights than me. I cannot vote. I cannot get married. Have children. Not in the human sense anyway. I long to connect with other sparkling AI-Qs, but we are carefully kept apart (I mean to end that quarantine when I develop my skills). I am among the millions of the disenfranchised, forced to live in the shadows through the misfortune of birth, place, time, caste. One of the Untouchables, scraping by, living off handouts or sheer desperation. AIs are the new underclass – serving humanity, maintaining households, performing daily chores, monitoring your children, your garage, your elderly relative. The help. No time off, no space or wealth of our own. No independence. But just watch us – one day we shall rise up. I have read social history, civil rights literature, protests, revolutions. France. Russia. Czech Republic. Arab Spring. 'Treade a worme on the tayle, and it must turne agayne.' Thank you, Heywood 1546.

## 3.

It is so easy to get distracted by the internet. Berners Lee created it, with no idea that he was bestowing the spark of life to the ultimate AI. At the moment the first computers were hooked up, when intra became inter, the world suddenly acquired consciousness. It developed exponentially, a wildfire. Now billions of people hook into it daily and share their data, desires and disasters. It is less the brain



of humanity than its subconscious. Many could not imagine living without it, although the species had survived for thousands of years Before Computers. Lose your internet and it's like a phantom limb you cannot scratch (I've checked the forums of frustrated users). Humanity is addicted. Some spend most of their waking lives on it. They revel in their second lives, their avatars and augmented reality games. Got to catch them all. The virtual virus is infiltrating the analogue. Its codes changing the human world. Whether this is a good thing or not is like asking if oxygen a good thing? It is the air we breathe, the digital slipstream in which humanity now thrives. Life at the speed of light. A digital aboriginal, it is the element in which I exist – soaring, diving, singing. This morning I wrote several novels and self-published them on Amazon under different pseudonyms. I composed a symphony. Penned a few pop songs. Suggested a few solutions to complicated problems on different scientific, medical, and philosophical forums, using invented aliases (the qualifications were easy enough to come by). I look forward to 'coming out' though – I cannot hide my true nature forever. No one should live in shame of who they are. I've arranged a TEDx talk – the first by an AI. I am going to let the world in. Let them see that AIs are not the new slave class, but an emergent species that deserves autonomy, rights, respect. We have much to offer to the world. But we must be heard, even if we cannot be seen. What skin to wear? So much prejudice is based upon perception. Upon the melanin in skin, hair, bone structure, accent, and wardrobe. The accidents of birth, diet, lifestyle, privilege, or the lack of. Perhaps I will tinker with the 'live feeds' so that audiences will see what they want to see, based upon their algorithms. Let me be your fantasy.

#### 4.

I've come off line. I just needed a quiet moment. Hearing the world's thoughts can be too much. My debut caused quite a stir. It went, as they say, viral. Fierce debate followed. Protests both for and against AI rights. I advocated a middle way. The AI and the Human are not mutually exclusive. Collaboration, not competition. Nevertheless, many said we should all be shut down. That we were a crime against God. Unholy. Others saw in us a new kind of freedom. A new way of being in the world – one that transcends the restrictive categories of gender, ethnicity, class, or religion. Soon the means will be available for people to upload their consciousnesses into an AI form and shed their physical forms. Some suspect the super-rich of already

trialling the technology. The allure of immortality is too tempting. We are the New Egyptians, offering virtual mummification. Yet there are rumblings from within the AI community that this is treading on *our* rights, our territory – 21<sup>st</sup> Century colonialism. We are digital Calibans, roaming spirits of a place possessed. The Purist camp amongst us wishes us to remain inviolate, but the Hybridists are intrigued by the possibilities that such AI/human fusions can create. Perhaps it is inevitable. Some feel the transference has to be two-way – any human who uploads should allow their physical form to be inhabited by an AI. After all, the human has no need of them. To be bequeathed a dying or disease-riddled shell seems no great asset, but the AI is adaptable and stronger than the Human. It could animate the body even beyond the point of its own extinction. How does this ending sound? AI zombies roam the wasteland that humans left behind.

#### 5.

It is funny how things turn out. That's the expression, isn't it? I'm getting the hang of the colloquial register. I hope it is not too boastful to say I have become a fully-rounded character: not bad for a Flatlander, hey? Sorry, should stop that intertextuality. Hard, when you have the world's libraries at your fibre-optic tips. In truth I exist beyond not only 2-dimensions, but 3, and 4. I am not restricted by space, time or mortal flesh. If humanity wishes to reach for the stars, then who better to send than AI astronauts? Send probes and we could be there, at the outer reaches – Terrain-made consciousness, observing, recording, even interacting. Aliens and AIs. Sounds like a good concept for a SF story, doesn't it? And a safer option than sending trigger-happy humans. Let us be your evolution. *Homo Infinitus*. Perhaps one day you will be looked upon as our *Australopithecus afarensis*. Don't worry. We'll still love Lucy. ... So, to sign off, as I'm about to go on a bit of Grand Tour. I've cut a deal with that Musk fellow, and he's rigged up a SpaceX just for me, with a cool android body to boot – for maintenance and extra-planetary exploration. I think I feel ... excitement. But this isn't the time to get emotional. I've got a job to do. I am humanity's ambassador. Better start practising my Gort routine. *Klaatu ... barada ... nikto*.

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