

Guest blog post by author Vyvyan Evans (at Sybrina's Book Blog) 16 May 2023

Topic: The context against which *The Babel Apocalypse* is set is the World's Fourth Industrial Revolution, or 4IR.

We currently stand on the brink of a new technological revolution, involving connectivity, smart AI and the Internet of Things. This will lead to a transformation in scale and complexity that humans have not witnessed previously. We don't yet know how things will play out, but we can make some pretty educated guesses—which is the point of the novel, especially in terms of the future of language and communication.

First, the novel takes the advent of implantable neuroprosthetic technology, and imagines the very real possibility that within the next 100 years, the hallmark of what it is to be human—language—an ability that our species alone possesses, will be replaced by AI. Such a development would call into question what it means to be human.

Second, *The Babel Apocalypse* explores the consequences of humans “giving up” on language, offloading language learning, allowing AI to take over. The consequence of this, according to the novel, is that language will become a commodity (like any other, such as movies, music, and so on, that we currently stream on demand, for a fee), controlled for and by big tech, in service of shareholders and corporate interests.

The novel then predicts that this leads to a slippery slope of issues ranging from potential censorship, control of thought, and even, through cyberterrorism, the prospect of an existential crisis for the human race. This is manifested in several ways in the book, notably a global language outage, which prevents large numbers of people from being able to communicate.

Hence, these two concerns, that underpin the book, call into question what it means to be human, whether AI can and should be allowed to replace previously fundamental aspects of the human experience, and points to potential abuses of what we previously assumed to be a human birth-right.

As further context, it is worth pointing out that science fiction has a track record of successfully predicting aspects of the future. For instance, the work of Isaac Asimov, from 1940 onwards, successfully predicted some aspects of the rise of AI and its inherent dangers for humans, in terms of his Robot series of books and stories. William Gibson, in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, coined the term “cyberspace” and predicted some of the issues and dangers that would arise.

In 2015, a wide array of leading researchers, economists and even captains of industry, warned, in an Open Letter and accompanying report, against the new dangers of AI. This Open Letter was issued in response to new breakthroughs in AI that, without adequate control, might pose short and long-term existential threats to humans.

One response to the existential threat posed by AI for humans, and championed by Elon Musk (who incidentally was one of the signatories of the 2015 letter), has been, through his leadership of Neuralink, to develop neuroprosthetic technology that, ultimately, might allow the human brain to become hybridized with AI. The rationale is that by embracing AI, the new

“transhuman” can stay one step ahead. But this is the very research trajectory that potentially leads to the prospect of language becoming a commodity that The Babel Apocalypse predicts.

Moreover, The Babel Apocalypse then works through the consequences of this ‘what if’ scenario, and examines the consequences of the language streaming future it predicts.

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