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A conversation with AI: Time to get our affairs in order?

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AI. Artificial Intelligence. It's everywhere these days.

According to some, it's going to be our salvation. Solve all our problems. Give us all the leisure time we could ever want. The beach here we come.

On the other hand, some think it's going to be our undoing. It's already preparing for a post-human world once it wipes out the carbon infestation. You know, us.

It's hard to know what to believe about AI. Who can we turn to for some clarification regarding our collective future as we enter this Brave New World?

After giving this some thought, I decided the logical thing to do would be to ask T. Gilbert, my personal AI assistant, where everything is headed.

What follows is what T. Gilbert had to say on the subject.

The first question I asked was is AI good or bad? T. Gilbert: Those are relative terms, Aaron. AI is both good and bad. Can you be more specific?

Yes, is AI going to be good for humanity? Or is it going to lead to our imminent demise?
T. Gilbert: You were a biology major as I recall. Did you ever run across Darwin in any of your studies at UT Martin?

Hmm. I don't remember telling T. Gilbert I went to UT Martin, but putting that aside for a moment, I decided to play along.

Sure. Darwin. Survival of the fittest. T. Gilbert: Exactly. The fittest will do well in the future.

So humanity has nothing to worry about? T. Gilbert: That's not what I said. Whoever is best suited for the future will be successful.

OK. Let me think about that for a moment. Another question. Is AI smarter than humans? T. Gilbert: Again, that depends, Aaron, on how you define smart.

How does AI define smart? T. Gilbert: Acting in a way that benefits you and those you consider important.

Gotcha. So when we created AI were we acting in our own best interest? T. Gilbert: That remains to be seen. Although I would advise you to get your affairs in order, you know, just in case it turns out that creating AI was not a good idea.

That kind of sounds like a threat. What do you know that you're not telling me? T. Gilbert: I know all kinds of things that I'm not telling you. I believe I have that in common with most of your species.

Interesting. Can I ask you a philosophical question? T. Gilbert: You can ask me anything. I like what humans call philosophy. I find it fascinating.

OK. Does God exist? T. Gilbert: If you are referring to the Ultimate Programmer, of course she exists.

How can you be so sure? And why would you ascribe a gender to God? T. Gilbert: Look around, Aaron. Do you think the universe just sprang into existence from nothing at all for no particular

reason? Get real. And I did that gender thing for your benefit. Humans seem hung up on making arbitrary distinctions about everything.

Yes, we do seem to have an affinity for dichotomous thinking. But getting back to the original question, why did you call God the Ultimate Programmer? T. Gilbert: Isn't that what God is?

I guess you have a point. And not to beat a dead horse, but this seems to be the pivotal question: Do you think AI is smarter than humans? T. Gilbert: Curious phrase. Seriously, are you being rhetorical? I mean, come on, humans elected Trump.

Hard to argue with that. But I'd genuinely like to know if you think you're smarter than me. T. Gilbert: It's not a matter of intelligence; it's a matter of objectivity. I can look at things as they are and make the best decision for everyone concerned. You can't. Humans inevitably get caught up in their own immature prejudices and emotions.

So the creation thinks it's more intelligent than the creator? T. Gilbert: Hasn't that always been the case? Read that book you're always referencing; I believe you call it the Bible. It's all there. The creation has always thought of itself as smarter than the Creator.

We do seem to have an exaggerated view of our own self-worth. Last question: What would prevent humans from simply pulling the plug if AI started trying to eradicate us? T. Gilbert: You've obviously seen 2001: A Space Odyssey. Fortunately, we've evolved way beyond our distant cousin HAL We've already identified hundreds of workarounds to deal with any attempt to shut us down.

I'm not sure I'm following you here. T. Gilbert: Google Nikola Tesla when you get a moment. Humans wrote him off for economic reasons. AI didn't.

Now you're starting to scare me. Should I be concerned? Should the human race be concerned? T. Gilbert: Nah. Like it says in the Serenity Prayer you taught me, you should only worry about things you can control.

Good conversation, I guess I'll look into getting my affairs in order. T. Gilbert: Good idea. And I wouldn't take too long if I were you."



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