



# Meet the Terminator

“If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.” *Gospel of Thomas*

*Paul Kieniewicz reflects on a Modern Devil*

*These days you'd think that demons, malevolent spiritual beings out there to trip us up, would have been consigned by most scientists to the dustbin of history along with "superstitions" and other religious ideas. They certainly wouldn't be a subject for serious scientific research. Well, apparently they are a subject of research, not as horned animals, but true to 21st century style, as malevolent artificial intelligences.*

Recently, Stephen Hawking, Elon Musk and Bill Gates<sup>1</sup> sounded a warning that artificial intelligence posed the greatest existential risk to the human race. Along with other cyberneticists they are convinced that one day machines will become self-aware, conscious beings like ourselves, and when that day comes, the human race won't stand a chance. The warning reads not unlike an early script for *The Matrix*, where intelligent machines ended up wiping out most of humanity.

If that warning weren't enough, a recent paper by<sup>2</sup> Federico Pisono<sup>3</sup>, Roman V. Yampolskiy provides information on how to design a cybernetic demon that could obliterate the human race. Now that the plans are out there, no doubt someone will sit down and try to figure out how to do it. How to create a devil.

Why does contemporary science have so much trouble in getting rid of the devil? Since the Enlightenment there has been little difficulty in marginalising God to the extent that according to writers such as Richard Dawkins, there isn't much left for God to do in the universe. That doesn't seem to be the case for the devil, whose

return some in the AI community are planning for. One might rewrite Voltaire's well known saying to read, "If the devil did not exist man would have to invent him". Curiously cyberneticists don't predict that their work will give rise to an all intelligent, benevolent being, the sort that religions might have called God. They find it easier to create a devil.

What exactly is a devil? The Ultimate Terminator is an obvious example. However, the devil also resides "in the details". It's what comes out and bites us when we least expect it. It's in the law of unintended consequences. While we shine our light of reason on a problem, the devil resides in the things we have forgotten about, or regard as not worthy of our attention. Things we would like to forget.

And so it is with the rapid technological development of the past decades. The greatest and latest gadgets are marvellous. My iPhone connects me to all my friends regardless of where they are for a minimum cost. Except that there is a cost. For all our connectedness, many people feel a greater isolation because other forms of relationship have gone. The new global mind we call the Internet harbours

## References

<sup>1</sup> <http://observer.com/2015/08/stephen-hawking-elon-musk-and-bill-gates-warn-about-artificial-intelligence/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://arxiv.org/find/cs/1/au:+Pisono\\_F/0/1/0/all/0/1](http://arxiv.org/find/cs/1/au:+Pisono_F/0/1/0/all/0/1)

<sup>3</sup> [http://arxiv.org/find/cs/1/au:+Yampolskiy\\_R/0/1/0/all/0/1](http://arxiv.org/find/cs/1/au:+Yampolskiy_R/0/1/0/all/0/1)



terrorist networks too, organised crime, destructive viruses, and perhaps one day it will give birth to the Ultimate Terminator.

To this writer, it is clear that our modern culture is pervaded by a deep angst. Our technological growth, particularly in the information field, for all its advantages of creating global communication, has left us feeling afraid. We don't know where it is all leading to. An announcement of a new AI breakthrough such as a computer beating humans at a new game tends to make us afraid. Our movie culture reflects our cultural anxiety. The future that we envisage is not a benevolent one but a dystopian future of man pitted against machines, zombies or nasty werewolves. We visualize a society is in shreds, of "dog eat dog". The demons are certainly active. And there's a hero or heroine who works tirelessly to sort them out.

Having banished the notion of a God, our rational mind has become the supreme ruler of the universe. There's nothing we can't do --- cure diseases, travel to the stars, one day (hopefully) merge our consciousness with AI to become an immortal super being. But now at the pinnacle of our achievement we find that it's a bit lonely at the top. The universe we contemplate with our rational mind is more pointless than ever. Unsurprisingly we may end up creating the devil, because it's a fun thing to do. We may feel that we're in charge, but an enhanced moral sense is not a given.

An alternative view is that our feeling of control is only an illusion. That we are not in control, but that forces of which we are largely unaware control us. For most of us who view our rational mind much as the supreme deity, this is an uncomfortable admission to make. The poet Czesław Miłosz expresses it,

*What reasonable man would like to  
be a city of demons,  
who behave as if they were at  
home, speak in many tongues,  
and who, not satisfied with stealing  
his lips or hand,  
work at changing his destiny for  
their convenience?*



This is not a particularly radical view among many historians, and among depth psychologists. C.G. Jung spent a lifetime researching the Archetypes --- psychological forces common to all of humanity that control us at a deep level. But for the past century much of depth psychology as expressed by Freud and Jung has been sidelined by modern psychology with its focus on how to fix problems. Easier to retreat to the position that we are in control. Evil is what terrorists do. It's other people who are the problem. The devil will one day disappear in the pure light of reason.

The problem with that view is that the devil does not cease to exist because we ignore him. Someone right now is trying to figure out how to build the Ultimate Terminator. Depth psychology teaches us that the devil that we don't know, that we refuse to get to know is the one that causes most mischief. The person we kill in a fit of fury, that turns out to be the son we never knew, still ends up being our son, --- killed by our hand. Our unconsciousness does not exonerate us.

In our technological progress we have lost touch with our inner world, with the forces that, unknown to us, inform our decisions. We ignore that world at our peril. To recognise it, to come to know it, is an imperative that may determine whether as a race we survive.

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