

End-Times Tech: Is This the Artificial Age?

The news is aflame with stories about the wonders of artificial intelligence. Are we now entering the artificial age?

Artificiality has already made great inroads into our society. Things such as artificial plants have been around for a long time, requiring no care, but having no life. We have artificial meat and artificial milk for those who would rather not eat or drink the real thing. We even have artificial Christianity, where those who do not like the living God can worship an artificial, plastic god that requires nothing from them.

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But it was computers that brought artificiality to a brand-new level. You can create an artificial version of yourself on the internet so you can impress people. You can also have artificial friends on the social network, all concealing their real selves. You can pay for it all with artificial computer-generated cryptocurrency. And if you prefer, you can live your entire life in the artificial world of the internet and never have any real personal relationships.

Now comes AI, promising to solve all our problems by upgrading the dull machines of today into the intelligent, superhuman machines of tomorrow. The secret of this artificial age is a massive increase in computing power, generated by enormous complexes of energy-gobbling servers, all which has to be funded by real money, not artificial money. We are told all the power and money spent on AI will lead to a better world run by machine-generated wisdom.

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But can AI live up to its promise, or will it grow like a giant weed, consuming vast resources but producing no fruit—or bad fruit?

For all of their AI capabilities, computers must in the end be designed and programmed by people—people who bring their weaknesses and prejudices with them. Computers can “learn” what they are programmed to learn, but no more. For example, the Chinese AI breakthrough announced this week could provide fast answers, but would not answer any questions about the tyrannical government of China.

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