

Re113: *Uncertainty, Fear and Consent* (Technological Danger, Part 1)

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Beliefs, and the feelings they cause, determine what chances we take; but possibilities don't care about our beliefs.

A prediction about safety, security and freedom; decisions about two problems of life and the problem of death; uncertainty, history, genes and survival machines; technology to control the environment of technology; beliefs and feelings; taking chances; prerequisites for action; imagining possibilities; beliefs that do or don't lead to consent; policing, governance and motivations.

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Prediction: freedom is going to decrease

The freedom-security-safety tradeoff will continue to shift toward safety and security.

Over the next 20 years, 2023–2032, you'll continue to be asked, told, and nudged into giving up freedom in exchange for **safety** (which is about unintentional danger), in addition to **security** (which is about intentional danger).¹

(**Side note:** We have no particular leaning, one way or another, about whether this will be a good or bad thing overall. Frame it one way, and we yearn for freedom; frame it another way, and we crave protection from doom.)

For more on this, consider:

- [Wiener \(1954\)](#);
- [Russell \(1952\)](#);
- [Dyson \(1997\)](#), [Dyson \(2020\)](#);
- [Butler \(1863\)](#);
- [Kurzweil \(1999\)](#);
- [Kaczynski & Skrbina \(2010\)](#);
- [Bostrom \(2011\)](#), [Bostrom \(2019\)](#).

Decisions: two problems of life and the problem of death

First introduced in Re27 ([Retraice \(2022/10/23\)](#)) and integrated in Re31 ([Retraice \(2022/10/27\)](#)).

Two problems of **life**:

1. To change the world?
2. To change oneself (that part of the world)?

Problem of **death**:

1. Dead things rarely become alive, whereas alive things regularly become dead. What to do?

Uncertainty

We just don't know much about the future, but we talk and write within the confines of our memories and instincts.

We know the Earth-5k well via written history, and our bodies 'know', via genes, the Earth-2bya, about the time that replication and biology started. But the parts of our bodies that know it (genes, mechanisms shared with other animals), are what would reliably survive, not us. Most of our genes can survive in *other* survival machines, because we share so much DNA with other creatures.²

But there is hope in controlling the environment to protect ourselves (vital technology), though we also like to enjoy ourselves (other technology). There is also irony in it, to the extent that technology itself is the force from which we may need to be protected.

Beliefs and feelings

- a cure, hope;
- no cure, fear;
- a spaceship, excitement;
- home is the same, longing;
- home is not the same, sadness;
- she loves me, happiness;
- she hates me, misery;
- she picks her nose, disgust.

Chances

Even getting out of bed—or not—is *somewhat* risky: undoubtedly some human somewhere has died by getting out of bed and falling; but people in hospitals have to get out of bed to avoid skin and motor problems.

We do or don't get out of bed based on instincts and beliefs.

Side note: von Mises' three prerequisites for human action:³

1. **Uneasiness** (with the present);
2. **An image** (of a desirable future);
3. The **belief** (expectation) that action has the power to yield the image. (**Side note:** technology in the form of AI is becoming more necessary to achieve desirable futures, because enough humans have been picking low-hanging fruit for enough time that most of the fruit is now high-hanging, where we can't reach without AI.)

¹Schneier (2003) pp. 12, 52.

²On creatures as gene (replicator) 'survival machines', see [Dawkins \(2016\)](#) pp. 24–25, 30.

³von Mises (1949) pp. 13–14. See also [Koch \(2007\)](#) p. 144. See also [Retraice \(2022/11/27\)](#).

Possibilities

- radically good future because of technology (cure for everything);
- radically bad future because of technology (synthetic plague);
- radically good future because of humans (doctors invent cure);
- radically bad future because of humans (doctors invent synthetic plague).

The important point is to remember the venn: there is a large space of possibilities, within which a small dot is what any individual human can imagine.

If you believe x, do you consent to y?

- no one has privacy, privacy invasion;
- entity *e* is not malicious, open interaction with entity *e*;
- VWH (the vulnerable world hypothesis), global police state.

“VWH: If technological development continues then a set of capabilities will at some point be attained that make the devastation of civilization extremely likely, unless civilization sufficiently exits the semi- anarchic default condition.”⁴

The “the semi-anarchic default condition”:

1. limited capacity for preventive policing;
2. limited capacity for global governance;
3. diverse motivations: “There is a wide and recognizably human distribution of motives represented by a large population of actors (at both the individual and state level) – in particular, there are many actors motivated, to a substantial degree, by perceived self-interest (e.g. money, power, status, comfort and convenience) and there are some actors (‘the apocalyptic residual’) who would act in ways that destroy civilization even at high cost to themselves.”⁵

□

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⁴Bostrom (2019) p. 457.

⁵Bostrom (2019) pp. 457–458.

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