

Reconciliation Between Factions Focused on Near-Term and Long-Term Artificial Intelligence

Seth D. Baum

Forthcoming, *AI & Society*, DOI: 10.1007/s00146-017-0734-3. This version 29 May 2017.

Preprint at: http://sethbaum.com/ac/fc_Reconciliation.html

Background: The Divide Over Near-Term and Long-Term AI

AI experts are divided into two factions. A “presentist” faction focuses on near-term AI, meaning the AI that either already exists or could be built within a small number of years. A “futurist” faction focuses on long-term AI, especially advanced AI that could equal or exceed human cognition. Each faction argues that its AI focus is the more important one, and the dispute between the two factions sometimes gets heated. *This paper argues that the presentist-futurist dispute is not the best focus of attention, and instead proposes a reconciliation between the two factions based on mutual interests.*

Root Perspectives

To examine the potential for reconciliation, the paper studies the perspectives at the root of each faction. The futurist faction has two root perspectives. One is an intellectual aspiration of building advanced AI, even if work towards this goal has little immediate practicality. The other is an ethical concern for long-term effects, which is combined with a belief that advanced future AI can have major long-term effects. In contrast, the presentist faction seeks to work on more practical, down-to-Earth matters. They focus on what AI can be built now or in the near future, whether they are developing AI technology or working on societal issues related to AI.

A Reconciliation

Despite their differences, the presentist and futurist factions have a few things in common. First, they share a common interest in AI and belief of its importance, which distinguishes them from most other people. Additionally, there are significant parts of both factions that are concerned about the societal impacts of AI, and also parts of both factions that are more concerned with the AI itself. *The paper identifies these as new factions: a “societalist” faction focused on societal impacts of AI and an “intellectualist” faction focused on the intellectual challenge of building AI.* The presentist-futurist divide can be reconciled by focusing instead on the societalist-intellectualist divide. The paper argues in favor of the societalist faction because it is everyone’s responsibility to help society.

Opportunities to Improve Near-Term and Long-Term Societal Impacts

The paper describes three opportunities for presentist and futurist members of the societalist faction to work together. Each opportunity improves societal impacts of AI over both the near-term and long-term. First, societalists can change social norms in AI so that more AI researchers care about the societal impacts of their work. Second, societalists can support technical research on AI design to make near-term and long-term AI safer and more beneficial to society. Third, societalists can support AI policy that addresses both near-term and long-term AI. These three opportunities offer fertile ground for collaboration among all people who care about the societal impacts of AI, regardless of whether they favor near-term or long-term AI. Pursuing these opportunities can be more productive than arguing over near-term vs. long-term AI.