

Lesson 5 Shaping a Brighter Future

The Perfect Match

Sai woke to Vivaldi's violin concerto in C minor, Il Sospetto (The Suspicion). He lay still for a minute, letting the music wash over him like a breeze. Tilly had woken him right at the end of a light sleep cycle, the best time. He felt great: cheerful, optimistic, ready to jump out of bed, which is what he did next.

"Tilly, that's an inspired choice for a wake-up song."

"Of course," Tilly spoke from the camera speaker on the nightstand.

"Who knows your tastes and moods better than I?"

The voice, though electronic, was affectionate and playful. Sai went into the shower.

"Remember to wear the new shoes today," Tilly now spoke to him from the camera speaker in the ceiling.

"Why?"

"You have a date after work."

"Oh, the new girl. I know you told me—"

"I'll tell you all about her after work. I'm sure you will have fallen in love with her even before the dinner ends. The compatibility score is very high."

Sai looked forward to the date. But first he still had to get through his day's work as a legal assistant.

"What do you recommend for breakfast this morning?"

"You are scheduled to attend the lunch meeting for the Davis case at eleven. I suggest you go light on the breakfast, maybe just a banana."

"Do I have time to make my own coffee?"

"You do. Traffic is light this morning. But I suggest you go to this new juice bar along the way instead. I can get you a coupon code."

"But I really want coffee."

"Trust me, you'll love the juice."

Sai smiled. "Okay, Tilly. You always know best."

Stepping out of his apartment, Sai saw Jenny, a weird neighbor who always covered her face with ski goggles and her hair with a long dark scarf. She complained again about the camera installed over his door. Although Sai and Jenny both belonged to the digital native generation, he could tell she was the kind of girl who refused to use Centillion email or get a ShareAll account, like Sai's grandmother's friends.

"Jenny, I have a right to install anything I want over my door. And I want Tilly to keep an eye on my door when I'm away."

"But your camera will record visitors to my place, too, because we share this hallway."

"So?"

"I don't want Tilly to know any of my social relationships."

Sai rolled his eyes. "What do you have to hide?"

"That's not the point—"

"Yeah, yeah, civil liberties, privacy, blah blah blah ..."

Sai was sick of arguing with people like Jenny. He had made the same point countless times: Centillion is not some big scary government. It's a private company, whose motto happens to be "Make things better!" Just because you want to live in the dark ages doesn't mean the rest of us shouldn't enjoy the benefits of ubiquitous computing.

"Tilly doesn't just tell you what you want," Jenny shouted. "She tells you what to think. Do you even know what you really want any more?"

Sai paused for a moment.

"Do you?" she pressed.

What a ridiculous question. He kept on walking.

"Freak," he said quietly, expecting Tilly to agree with him from his phone earpiece and make some joke to cheer him up. But Tilly said nothing.

Working in the office, Sai thought that Tilly was the world's best assistant. Whenever Sai forgot where he put a document or needed a legal form, he simply asked Tilly to find it. Sai felt very lucky to have Tilly. He couldn't even imagine how much harder work would be without her.

After work, on the way to the restaurant, Tilly filled Sai in on his date, Ellen: educational background, ShareAll profile, interests, likes, dislikes, and pictures gathered by Tilly from around the Net.

From four billion women on Earth, Tilly seemed to have found the perfect match for him. However, somehow, the date wasn't quite as exciting as he had expected. They already knew everything about each other, so there were no surprises. As Sai's mind wandered, there was a pause in the conversation.

Tilly immediately filled the pause, making suggestions for dessert through Sai's earpiece.

Suddenly it seemed to him that he was being treated like a child. He was even made to think the thoughts Tilly chose for him.

"Tilly," he said, "please stop monitoring and terminate automatic suggestions."

"Are you sure? Gaps in sharing can cause your profile to be incomplete—"

"Yes, please cease."

With a beep, Tilly turned herself off. Ellen stared at him, eyes and mouth wide open in shock.

Sai smiled. "It's nice sometimes to just be ourselves, without Tilly, don't you think?"

Ellen looked confused.

"But don't you want to be sure we don't make silly mistakes on a first date? We're both busy, and Tilly can—"

"I know what Tilly can do. But—"

Ellen held up a hand, silencing him. She listened to her earpiece for a moment.

"I have the perfect idea," Ellen said. "There's this new club, and I know Tilly can get us a coupon."

Sai shook his head, annoyed.

"Let's try to think of something to do without Tilly.

Would you please turn her off?"

Ellen's face was unreadable for a moment.

"I think I should head home," she said. "Early start at work tomorrow."

"Did Tilly tell you to say that?"

She said nothing and avoided looking into his eyes.

She paid half the bill and left.

On the drive home, Tilly said that Sai was being

"antisocial." Sai said he just didn't like Tilly

"interfering with everything." Tilly suggested stopping

at a gym for some boxing to deal with the

"aggression" she sensed in him, but Sai drove

straight on. He asked her to shut herself off.

That evening Jenny invited Sai into her apartment.

She knew that Sai had turned Tilly off twice that day through his ShareAll record. In her apartment, which

she had managed to protect from cellular signals,

Jenny explained how Tilly had made people stop

questioning. Her point was that under the control of

Centillion's algorithm, people were now made to just

accept Tilly's judgement. She and her underground

group had developed a virus that could gradually

terminate Tilly. She eventually persuaded Sai to help

them.

When Tilly woke him up next morning, Sai realized that she could turn herself back on if she judged that he 'needed' that. Horrified, he thought, 'Everything Jenny said was true.'

Under Jenny's guidance, Sai eventually managed to put the virus into the phone of a senior employee of Centillion, who was visiting Sai's law firm. Jenny and Sai celebrated their win that night. However, next morning, Sai and Jenny were taken to the office of Christian Rinn, the chairman of Centillion. It turned out that Centillion's technology had managed to discover their plan despite all their precautions. Surprisingly, Rinn suggested Jenny and Sai join Centillion.

Sai and Jenny looked at each other. "What?"

"We want people who can see through Tilly's suggestions, detecting her imperfections. Because you can see her flaws, you'll be the best at figuring out what Tilly's still missing and where she's gone too far. It's the perfect match."

"What if we refuse to join you but tell the world what you've done?"

"No one would believe you. We'll make sure that nothing you write can be found. On the Net, if it can't be found by Centillion, it doesn't exist."

Sai knew that he was right. Rinn continued:

"Without Tilly, you can't do your jobs or even remember things. We are now a race of cyborgs. The data you tried to destroy are electronic extensions of yourself. Even if you eventually succeed in destroying Tilly, it will have been replaced by something worse within weeks. Wouldn't you rather be part of Centillion and help improve Tilly?"

That night Sai asked Tilly to set the wake-up song to Sinatra's My Way and to turn herself off. The camera buzzed, followed Sai to bed, and shut off. But a red light continued to blink, slowly, in the darkness.

5과 Further Reading

AI and Consciousness

Many people fear that artificial intelligence will pose a danger if it develops consciousness. Could a piece of AI software “wake up,” prioritize its desires above ours, and endanger humanity’s existence?

Some thinkers imagine extreme, dystopian possibilities. For example, think of an AI that was originally built with the goal of decreasing suffering in the world. Would it not decide at some point to eliminate humanity for the good of the rest of life on Earth?

Others are more optimistic. They say that a conscious AI may be less dangerous than a non-conscious one.

In humans, the mental process that puts the brakes on immoral behavior is empathy, the ability to feel what other people feel. Conscious, superintelligent AIs could eventually develop this ability and care about us more than non-conscious ones would.

Some people insist that this concern about AI’s consciousness is misplaced. They believe AI is dangerous not because it is conscious, but because it is built without complex ethics. So, whether AI develops consciousness or not, the most important thing to do is to program “human” ethics into it.

What do you think? Once a superintelligent AI—conscious or not—is built, it can improve itself and start changing the world, and it might be difficult to control. Then, is it possible to create superintelligent AI with goals, values, and ethical codes that make it favorable and even helpful to humans?