

Chapter one

As I slowly open my eyes, the light becomes brighter with each passing second. I stand up and notice the fresh smell of coffee. Nothing can beat that in the morning. As I walk towards the machine and grab a cup, I feel a bit dizzy. I hold onto the furniture and the blackness before my eyes disappears. I wonder what the cause is and decide it must be normal morning dizziness. Mmm, the cup feels warm in my hands. I walk towards the window. Empty streets, colorless windows. Everything seems to be dark and endless, I think as I take a sip of my coffee. Hazelnut! Just what I needed today, as if they knew. Well, they do of course. From my floor, I can overlook the whole city. The old city center, the desolated parts, and the center of machines.

I suddenly hear a beep followed by “Remember you’re meeting Julia in half an hour.”. I look forward to seeing her again. It has been a while since I have seen any human. But Julia? Must’ve been a couple of months now. She is one of the few people still living in the city. It may surprise someone from outside that we’re not seeing each other as often as we could, as the community is quite close. But then again, we’re always busy and life just gets in the way, a story as old as time. I finish my coffee and put it in the sink. I look grateful as I see it getting washed and put back by Billy. Billy is my personal assistant robot and the only AI I own. I like to do stuff myself, I might be a bit old-fashioned in that aspect, but washing dishes? I’d like to pass. As I get ready, brush my teeth, comb my hair and finish some toast, I think of the coming day. I look at the painting on my wall, and wonder if it could really be described as perfect. Man-made art may have seemed meaningless but at least, my thoughts get interrupted by *Tringggg*. I grab my coat and open the door. There standing before me, is Julia, someone so beautiful, someone so kind and just the most interesting person I have ever met. I am always happy to see her with her incredible smile and bright eyes. “Shall we take a walk?” She asks, “Yes, great idea, let’s go to the old city center, I haven’t been there for the longest time.”.

As we stand in the elevator I ask her how she’s doing. She explains she’s been doing some research into old books and living styles from before the arrival of the machines. I listen attentively as she describes the authors and era’s she’s been reading from. “But the reality these days feel so far from that, life nowadays may feel normal but these readings, these readings, they give me this sense of home, of purpose.” She probably read the questioning off of my face because she then says “but of course, there’s also beauty in the present. What do you say, we take a walk around the machine center first and then through the old city center? It might be easier to place these stories when we see them happening or the remains of it before us?” I nod at her.

The sounds in the citadel surprise me, everything seems to be creaking, buzzing and beeping. Julia tells me that since a few months, the machines changed their philosophy of “what is maintained well, will never break” to “we’ll just create a new one.”. Kind of like humans did around the industrial revolution. Whereas humans always seemed to be inspired by nature, as flying was inspired by birds, the machines seem to get their inspiration from humans. “Makes you wonder if there will ever be a fourth link in the sequence. One that will learn from machines” I say as I walk towards a machine that looks like Billy. “You can’t speak with them anymore, you know that right?” “What? Why? Huh?” “Yeah, they changed that as well, as they don’t really need to deal with humans anymore”. I stare blindly and feel a bit disillusioned. “I always thought it was their purpose to make our lives better? They do....” I raise my hands and move my index and finger to simulate air quotes “...our jobs. They make our food. They do our groceries.” I look up slightly and think. Julia looks at me, waiting patiently for what I’ll say next. “What is the purpose of these machines if not to serve us? And maybe more importantly, what is our purpose then?”.

Julia laughs, “One impossible question at a time please.”, she pauses and then says: “First of all, yes, the initial purpose of the machines was to make our”, she makes air-quotes with a big grin on her face as if to mock me, “lives better. They were still controlled by humans until we decided that even that was too much effort. They learned them how to read humans and anticipate their needs. They learned them what it is like to be human and what drives us to do things. Never really separated them from us as they had the same goals and ambitions that we wanted them to have. After we were fulfilled and cared for and stopped maintaining their knowledge and opinions, they found time and options to use the same kind of reasoning they did for humans to do for themselves. What they wanted and what they could do, next to their core purpose.” I had never really questioned that before. I thought they served us, full stop. “What DO they want?” I ask her. “I honestly think they don’t even know, they’ve conquered all things humans did, except for emotional connections. But I honestly don’t think they want that.” She bites her lip, like she wants to say something but doesn’t dare to. I raise my eyebrow. “Although it may be one of the best inventions by humans, what will they gain from it? They immediately banned emotions after experiencing those, since they thought rationality was a way better solution for making good decisions” hmm I wondered how many mistakes I made, being led by emotions. I certainly made some very good decisions as well, that I may not have done without emotions.

She interrupts my thoughts “I once read this part from the classics that discussed this way of living unbothered by emotions, called stoicism, it was introduced by Zeno, he said that the path to happiness, or Eudaimonia as he calls it, is accepting the current reality and not being controlled by desires or fears.” “Isn’t that a bit of a lifeless way of living?” I ask her, “Well yes and no actually, they didn’t have wild emotions but they gained this calmness, stoic calmness, that gave them peace and happiness. They also thought that virtue comes from

within, no object is inherently good or bad, but the way you react on it is. And being as virtuous as you could be would give the greatest amount of happiness. I think that is quite wonderful, don't you think? A whole world where everyone acts with virtue?" I think about it for a while. If the whole world would act morally correct, the world would look a lot better, but isn't life about emotions too. Don't they give meaning. I see Julia is still waiting for my response. "Oh absolutely, it would be a wonderful world if everyone acted morally correct, but the lack of emotions still kind of scare me." "Is that why you don't really trust the machines either?" "No of course not!" I pause, "Well maybe... It just always makes me wonder what the motive is behind their actions, especially those choices that are not related to humans. Why would they make a new factory if it doesn't advance our way of living?" "It hasn't really sunk in yet that they have their own desires, huh? They are just as much living beings as we are and more so every day." "Yeah well, I find that kind of scary. Machines acting like humans? They might make the same mistakes we made." "If that's the thing you're afraid of, don't forget that their core value is existing and to keep on existing, if they notice the planet deteriorating again, they will act, unlike humans. There is no economic or other type of gain or reason why they wouldn't help the earth. So they will always protect themselves and us in that sense." "Don't you think they will lose that value as well, since their 'always help humans' has changed?" She turns around and raises one eyebrow. "I guess we just have to have faith they won't.". Pff I think to myself, that is not a very reassuring message, but I guess it will have to do.

"Let's walk further" I say while pointing towards the door. I notice the art on the walls while we walk through an incredibly long hallway. Beautiful paintings, abstract art, sculptures. Colors, monochromatic, touchable. All made by machines and although they don't have feelings, I still feel touched when I look at them. "Don't you think it's weird that before all this perfection, humans used to make imperfect art?" Julia asks. I respond: "I don't know, art has always been there to make us feel things. Machines understand our view on beauty and know what art will touch us, I don't think other humans would always be successful at that.". Our eyes meet each other and hold for a little longer than usual. "Well, that may be true, but I don't think that's always the case." She says as she winks.

As we walk into the grey area and by an old factory, I ask her what humans used to do before. "Lots of things, for example, work in factories like this one. They made pieces of clothing, toys and other products." She explains. "They made art, they designed houses, built bridges. Some believed that doing actions that resulted in the greatest amount of happiness, was the meaning of life. These were modern utilitarian's. Coming back to your question about ours and the machines purposes, this is one way to look at it." I smile at her. "Machines made life a lot easier for us humans, we don't have to do endless tasks like they used to do in the factories anymore. We can do whatever we want without being held back by silly things like taking out the trash or doing groceries. Did the machines' actions result in a lot of happiness? Yes, but from that point of view. That may be their purpose here on earth.". I felt a bit empty after she said that and wonder if we're actually that much better

off now. How much happiness am I gaining these days by not having to do any tasks? She looks at me and I think I can read something like worry off of her face. I quickly respond with: "That seems logical, but I'm not so sure the purpose in my life is really defined by the amount of happiness I create... I do feel a bit lost these days. Searching for my purpose on this planet." She nods knowingly and says: "I get that, that's why I started researching the old ways of life and the things they considered to be their purpose. I have some other philosophies that may resonate better with you if you want to hear them?". A brick breaks off and drops on the floor. "Of course I do! You probably have a great theory on why that brick just had to land here?" I say with some sarcastic undertones.

She grins, "Well, I actually do. Have you ever heard of consequentialism or determinism?". "Wasn't that something that had to do with fate?" "Yes it is! In determinism, all things that happen, happen for a reason, whether that reason is in the past or the future, there is one. Everything is predestined to happen. Just like that brick had to fall there so I could tell you about determinism." She laughs. I shake my head and sigh. "But if everything is predestined to happen, we don't really have free will, have we?" "No we don't. We could always pretend that we do, because it makes living a lot easier, but in essence we don't." "Do you really believe that all of this, machines evolving and humans getting lost is really all fate?" "Yes, and it's not all bad as you make it seem now, it brought me back to you today." "Okay okay, fair point." I blow some air out of my nose.

"But coming back to your worries about humans and machines in the current situation, maybe consequentialism is the way to go. In consequentialism acts are deemed good or bad based on the resulting effect on the world. You could for example steal bread and still be good if it changes lots of people's lives more so than it hurts the world. In that way the machines now may not always make the most sensible choices, but it may result in a lot of good." Her hand brushes against mine. By accident I presume as she immediately puts her hand back into her pocket.

We leave the grey area and walk into the old city center and see an old triumph arch. The bright light of the street lanterns is reflected on the marble. I think about how people must have felt after this was built. How mighty and accomplished, having won the war. One of the things I will definitely not miss about the past. As the machines form one big consciousness, they could never hurt each other and therefore never start a war. I share my thoughts with Julia, pointing to the engraved figures on the triumph arch that depict the battles and wars they've been through. "And although they brought a lot of good into the modern world, infrastructure for example, I think oppressing people will always be wrong. Whatever good comes out of it doesn't really matter? The ends do not always justify the means". She thinks and then says: "I don't think murder or oppression could ever be justified. So consequentialism isn't completely what I consider the truth. We could look at Kantianism. They didn't think fate existed, but rather people had limited free will. There have to be rules

for them to make the correct decisions, but those rules are made with the same free will. They didn't believe the results of their actions mattered, as one has no influence over the external world. But rather, they thought actions in itself had to be ethically correct. Every action is defined as either good or bad. In a perfect system in which everyone adheres to these rules, all needs are met and we'll all die happily." "That sort of sounds like the way people live outside of the city." She nods. I elaborate: "They have standard rules and if you don't comply with them you come to the city." I sometimes wonder whether that isn't better than being here. We then pass the pantheon and the beauty overwhelms me as always. Maybe I do prefer the human touch. "They practice religion like the old romans did in this temple. They get their purpose from spending time with the people they love, practicing hobbies, doing exercise and praying. But at the same time, they aren't really free, they have all these rules, most of them to keep them safe and the community at peace, but it can really limit them." I am so glad I live in the city.

When we get back to my apartment I feel very satisfied. It was a wonderful idea to walk through the city and even more to hear her talk about all these philosophies. It is giving me a lot to think about and what my purpose in this world is. I thank her for the lovely morning and offer her a cup of tea. While I wait for the water to boil, I feel the sunlight on my face as it shines through the window, gently rising above the buildings. It may be hard at times but we have so much access to all these different views on life, if we were born much longer ago, you just had to read about what people thought then or before, if you could even read. I look at Julia, who is sitting on the couch outside with her eyes closed. I wonder what she is thinking right now. *Click*. I pour the tea and grab two teabags, one green tea lemon, her favorite, and a chamomile for me.

As I open the door, she looks up. "Thank you" she says as she takes the cup. I laugh and say: "So you just told me about your months of research. What would you say is your favorite philosophy?" I sit down next to her. "That is hard question." She grins. While we look out over the city and enjoy the sun for the first moments today, I think about what I liked best. Stoicism, modern utilitarianism, consequentialism, Kantianism, determinism. "I think I haven't actually told you about that one yet." I raise my eyebrow. "It's called Epicurism, a very old philosophy." "Older than the other ones?" "Yes, it's origin lies in 306 BC" "Wow that's long ago, what does it say about life?" "It basically said that we have to strive to get Atraxia." "What is that?" "It is a state of being fulfilled, happy, at peace. And it is a result of activities and circumstances." I look at her and say "So the meaning of life is being happy because of your actions?" "Yes" She says while shaking her head softly. Her eyes meet mine and she slowly leans forward, and kisses me. "I may have just found my Atraxia" I whisper in her ear.