Machine intelligence will eclipse human intelligence within the next few decades — extrapolating from Moore’s Law — and our world will enjoy limitless computational power and ubiquitous data networks. Today’s iPod® devices portend an era when biology and information technology will fuse to create a human experience radically different from our own. Already, our healthcare system now appears on the verge of crisis; accelerating change is part of the problem. Each technological upgrade demands an investment of education and money, and a costly infrastructure more quickly becomes obsolete. Practitioners can be overloaded with complexity: therapeutic options, outcomes data, procedural coding, drug names etc. Furthermore, an aging global population with a growing sense of entitlement demands that each medical breakthrough be immediately available for its benefit: what appears in the morning paper is expected simultaneously in the doctor’s office. Meanwhile, a third-party payer system generates conflicting priorities for patient care and stockholder returns. The result is a healthcare system stressed by scientific promise, public expectation, economic and regulatory constraints, and human limitations. Change is also proving beneficial, of course. Practitioners are empowered by better imaging methods, more precise robotic tools, greater realism in training simulators, and more powerful intelligence networks. The remarkable accomplishments of the IT industry and the Internet are trickling steadily into healthcare. The Medicine Meets Virtual Reality series can readily see the progress of the past fourteen years: more effective healthcare at a lower overall cost, driven by cheaper and better computers.
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