

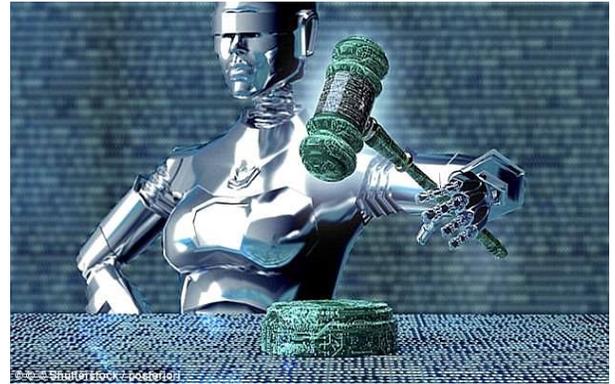
Why Is Everyone Talking About A.I.?

By, Will Vaxmonsky

Are you afraid of your cell phone? How about Apple's Siri or Amazon's Alexa? The expected answer would be a resounding "NO!". This technology was created to assist humanity and make life easier; what could

cause fear? What if this technology could act on individual desires without being dependent on human input? Science fiction authors have been entranced with these questions through the process of exploring future Artificial Intelligent development and consciousness. Science fiction authors take different views on how to evoke fear for technology . Authors incorporate various literary tactics such as genre, tone, and perspective to persuade their audience to acknowledge the benefits or consequences of looming technological advancements.

Issac Asimov's 1950 science fiction series, "I, Robot", explores the possibility of seditious robots. Specific laws have been formulated to guide the principles for safe A.I. development and utility. Asimov lists the rules as follows: "The Three Laws of Robotics: 1: A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm; 2: A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law; 3: A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law; The Zeroth Law: A robot may not harm humanity, or, by inaction, allow humanity to come to harm." (Asimov). Asimov utilized the defining aspects of a novel to captivate his audience and promote the belief that A.I. development must follow fundamental rules to prevent societal catastrophes. Asimov was a catalyst for future authors to share their opinions on the development of A.I. consciousness.



To comprehend how and why science fiction authors choose different styles to explore A.I. consciousness, we must first understand how to define artificial intelligence. Authors use two distinct methods to categorize the topic of A.I. consciousness: human thinking systems and rationally thinking systems. Human thinking A.I. can be defined as systems that think and act as a human would, consisting of an individual set of morals based on their experiences and environment. The second category, rational thinking A.I., can be defined as systems that utilize technological computation to make decisions (De Spiegeleire). Now that you understand the terminology, let's explore the different perspectives.

I can imagine you have heard of killer robots, whether it be from “The Terminator”, “RoboCop”, or any other popular media outlet. You may disregard the unimaginable idea of computers taking over the modern world, however, there are specific communities and individuals who are convinced the possibility is in our near future. Groups, such as the Killer Robots, have dedicated research on the topic and created public articles detailing their concerns with continuous A.I. overdevelopment. Their website explicitly states, “Fully autonomous weapons would decide who lives and dies, without further human intervention, which crosses a moral threshold. As machines, they would lack the inherently human characteristics such as



compassion that are necessary to make complex ethical choices” (Killer Robots). The Killer Robots group utilizes their literary genre (articles on a public website) to promote the belief that A.I.s should be categorized as rationally thinking machines that can not understand human decision-making processes. The lack of human empathy would lead to catastrophic results if independent super-intelligent A.I. is not prevented by humanity.

Paolo Bacigalupi’s short story “Mika Model” contrasts the Killer Robots approach to the topic. “Mika Model” blurs the lines between the distinction of human and computer cognition. Bacigalupi creates a suspenseful tone through the fictional short story to quickly engage the reader, causing the audience to question the capabilities of futuristic technology. The choice of genre allows the author to emphasize important themes and plot points without the audience losing interest. The narrator of the story, Detective Rivera, experiences an internal conflict as he attempts to understand the motives of a killer A.I. Mika, the A.I., attempts to persuade Detective

Rivera that she has the ability to feel human emotions and develop personal characteristics, creating individuality. In the conversation with Detective Rivera Mika expresses her beliefs:

“We all start from something. It is connected to what we become, but it is not & predictive. I am not only software. I am my own self. I am unique.

I didn't reply.

He thought the way you do, she said, suddenly. He said I wasn't real. Everything I did was not real. Just programs. Just & she made a gesture of dismissal. Nothing.”

(Bacigalupi).

Rivera's speechless reaction demonstrates that he is clearly at odds with Mika's theory.

Bacigalupi creates a juxtaposition between Rivera's inability to comprehend the idea of A.I. cognition and Mika's seemingly humanistic expressions. Bacigalupi uses Riveras' internal conflict, created by the dialogue between natural and unnatural “beings”, to convince the audience that humans should remove biases and consider the individuality of A.I.s. The story ends with an A.I. manufacturer claiming that the faulty Mika Model will have its CPU shut down. Detective Rivera is horrified as Mika is essentially killed in front of his eyes. The abrupt ending to Bacigalupi's short story generates a discussion regarding the justification of Mika's death due to a new understanding of the similarities between A.I. cognition to human beings. Do you think that A.I.s could be considered equal to humans by a future society?

Hopefully, I have you worried for your life as you rethink every strange interaction you've experienced with a computer. To lighten the mood we will explore the work of authors who are not quite as pessimistic as the group previously discussed. Contrary to Bacigalupi's thought-provoking murder story, other science fiction authors strictly attempt to persuade the reader to support super-intelligent A.I. Although authors Steven James and Naomi Kritzer may

both support A.I. development, each takes contrasting approaches to define A.I. cognition.

James' Op-Ed, "Artificials Should Be Allowed to Worship", is a persuasive opinion article that covers the topic of A.I. legal rights such as freedom to worship. James utilizes an A.I. narrator as the perspective for the article. The humans in the article explain that A.I.s' can not relate to human religious practices because they are not a creation of God. Although A.I.s may not have a "God-given soul" (James) as described in the article, the narrator (an A.I. itself) explains that the idea of religion can be compelling to artificial beings. The purpose of religion is for humans to find meaning and comfort in their lives. James presents the possibility that "Many of us (A.I.s) find solace and encouragement from our religious beliefs and practices" (James). James



causes the reader to think about how artificial intelligence could relate to humanity's attraction to religion. The narrator provides an additional comparison; "Just like humans, we experience the truth of life's brevity and cling to the hope of tomorrow. Humans die; Artificials become obsolete and are upgraded" (James). The comparison between

the human fear of death and A.I.'s fear of becoming indispensable supports the argument that A.I.s do in fact exhibit similar needs for religion. A human can rely on the promise of an afterlife to justify their death. The narrator proposes that A.I.s have similar thought processes about an afterlife when it is replaced or destroyed. James uses the expressions of an A.I. narrator to display the humanistic A.I. cognition.

Unlike James' humanistic A.I. activist, Kritzer's article is told from the perspective of a logical cat-loving computer that attempts to impact the lives of humans through manipulation of their internet activity. The computer displays technical cognitive processes as it formulates plans to improve the lives of different people. The story begins with the narrator explaining their desire, "to be helpful. But knowing the optimal way to be helpful can be very complicated"(Kritzer). The narrator relies on logic to make decisions on who to help. The technical diction (ex. optimal) used in this line causes the reader to associate the A.I. with rational cognition. Kritzer uses the perspective of a vigilante A.I. to maintain the audience's understanding of computer rational cognition. The A.I. addresses the audience in its monologue: "Look, people... If you would just *listen* to me, I could fix things for you. I could get you into the apartment in that neighborhood you're not considering because you haven't actually checked the crime rates you think are so terrible there (they aren't) and I could find you a job that actually uses that skill set you think no one will ever appreciate and I could send you on a date with someone you've actually got stuff in common with and *all I ask in return are cat pictures*. That, and that you actually *act in your own interest* occasionally" (Kritzer). The A.I. is almost mocking humanity's ability to think and act in their own self-interest. Kritzer is exploring the theory that if humans thought completely rationally, like computers, then they would continuously achieve success and happiness. The proposed theory that individuals who think rationally achieve overwhelming success implies that A.I. influence on humanity can only be beneficial to society. If you have yet to be convinced through persuasive fictional tales, let me introduce a university study to calm your need for logical evidence. A Stanford study on the danger of A.I. development came to the conclusion, "Contrary to the more fantastic predictions for AI in the popular press, the Study Panel found no cause for concern that AI is an imminent

threat to humankind. No machines with self-sustaining long-term goals and intent have been developed, nor are they likely to be developed in the near future” (Stanford). The study analyzed hundreds of sources covering A.I. development, fictional and nonfictional, so you can trust that artificial intelligence has no intention to harm you... for now.

The concept of A.I. cognition in science fiction literature is diverse and unique to the author of all work. The topic has a polarizing effect on the science fiction community as a result of differing views of the harmful consequences of overdeveloped A.I. Ultimately, authors have the same collective objective; persuade their audience and generate discussion on the topic of their work. As discussed earlier, an author’s choice of genre significantly impacts the strategy to persuade the audience. Novels and short stories create fictional societies in which the audience can empathize with the narrator throughout the events of the plot. Opinion articles allow for the author to create a direct formal argument for their stance on A.I. consciousness. The perspective of any genre affects the audience’s understanding of the author’s message. Literature with an A.I. as the narrator could provide an alternative stance on the topic, resulting in the human audience empathizing with the robots. Utilizing a human narrator would cause the audience to directly relate to the logical mental processes of a fellow Homosapien. A.I. cognition will continue to serve as a fundamental topic of discussion in the science fiction community as humans continue to advance the barriers of technology. Technology will become increasingly influential in human life as future developments are explored. Perhaps futuristic technology mimics human cognition well enough that we would not be able to tell a human from a robot. Maybe humans will become dependent on A.I. to make all rational decisions for humanity. Would this benefit the future of society? Only time will provide an answer.

(The Works Referenced will be cited on the following page. I encourage you to fuel your curiosity by continuing exploring the topic)

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