# A Glance into Robotic Humans

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Whether by intention or not, Isaac Asimov provides us with one of the most intriguing ideas on how to govern today’s emerging technologies in his work more than 50 years ago. Specifically, I refer to his work in *I, Robot* — the three fundamental laws of robotics. The content of the laws is widely known enough that I will not list them here, but it is the format of such laws that concerns this essay. In the world of *I, Robot*, the robotic laws intend to regulate robots as our humans’ laws regulate us. However, they regulate like fundamental laws of science, where the robots cannot break the fundamental laws no matter how much they “want” to. A quick example to illustrate its function. Picture a robot named Adam that has been developed to a point where it has consciousness and emotion, and it acts on its own accord. One day, Adam’s owner decides to cruelly torture the robot and it develops hatred towards the owner. Normally in this scenario, the robot would fight back and hurt the human, simply based on our parameters for the robot. In Asimov’s world, no matter how much the robot is tortured and how much it hates its owner, it will not be able to hurt its owner. Like molecules obeying the laws of physics, the robot must obey the laws of robotics. The only difference is humans created these laws, and the laws of physics belong to nature. Whether or not the fundamental laws of robotics are fitting to rule over robots has been a popular topic for a long time. The idea gained so much attention that the European Parliament briefly considered the possibility in their report on civil law rules in robotics. (Nevejans) The book *I, Robot* itself has a negative stance on the issue, judging by the contents of its stories. Asimov has adequately proved through a series of innovative maneuvers that the content of the three laws of robotics cannot govern advanced robots. What remains interesting is the format of such laws, where the rule of law is followed in a law of science manner. Yet even this debate has been fruitfully explored in many conversations. Instead, this essay explores a courageous but dangerous proposition: as our emerging technologies close in on the possibility of sophisticated robotic enhancements for humans, should we use Asimov’s laws to govern humans?

Before I delve into my thoughts on the issue, I would like to describe the thought experiment that I intend to revolve my arguments around. This debate specifically pertains to a world with the following qualities:

1. Robotic enhancements are at an advanced stage where they have become an integral part of the human body. Humans are stronger, faster, and smarter, due to mechanical implantations.
2. These robotic enhancements can be hardcoded to follow laws similar in nature to robots following Asimov’s three laws of robotics.
3. Entire legal fields can be coded into these enhancements, i.e., Criminal Law, Torts, Civil Law.
4. Once enhancements are codified, they will stop humans from committing actions that are forbidden by the law.

I believe most would immediately answer “no” to this world. First, there would be a severe feeling of our freedom being threatened. Countless more concerns would arise, and I list only the bare minimum here:

- Is the freedom to commit a crime part of our freedom as a human right?

- If coding commands for robots can control our actions, are we comfortable with the potential of constraining more of our freedom? All of it?

- Who governs the codes? Will we be able to entrust any actor to oversee them?

- What happens when there are mechanical errors or software bugs?

The overwhelming response will be a hard “no.” So, in service to academic and ethical exploration, I intend to explore arguments that might give this preposterous world some credit.

The first philosophical theory I want to introduce is Oliver Wendell Holmes’ prediction theory, sometimes called the bad man’s view of the law. He first introduced this theory in *The Path of Law,* where he argued that the law is defined by the consequences it brings when violated. (Holmes) When a bad man lives in a lawful society, he does not care for the moral codes and justices that lie behind a piece of law. All he cares about is the limits of what he can do, and what will happen if he breaks the law. If murder is not a law that exists but still violates our moral code, the bad man would murder with no reservations. This controversial theory is the basis of legal realism, one of the many takes on what law is. Suspending the never-ending academic debates on this theory and simply examine it, I think this view of the law is very beneficial for us to validate the topic at hand. If we truly take a realistic view of the law, prediction theory is pragmatically correct. In the countless fields of business, many financial opportunities stem from businessmen finding loopholes in the law and capitalizing on them. Because at the core of the law, there is a need to regulate. That is the first priority of its existence. Following this understanding, it is only but a logical step to conclude that consequences give law its authority. If the moral code behind the law is what governs people, then there would not be a need for laws in the first place. Only when there is a possibility that people would break moral codes and commit injustice, will the need to regulate arise. Here is a simple example to illustrate this point*.*In the *Path of the Law*, Holmes recalls a conversation with a German professor, where he states:“A German population would rise if you added two cents to the price of a glass of beer.” (Holmes, 9) The reason behind raising the price can be countless. However, without a powerful consequence behind a piece of law, it holds no authority, and cannot truly be called “good law”. Applying our understanding of the bad man’s theory to the thought experiment in this essay, the idea that consequences define law can provide some justification for using hardcoded laws to regulate humans. The reason consequences matter for the law is because it is concerned with results and not motives. In Holmes’ words, the law should not be confused with morality. What can produce better results than physically prohibiting humans to violate a law? In this sense, I believe coding laws into humans truly fulfils the fundamental purpose of the law.

Although the results of coding laws into humans are highly satisfactory for law, I believe the main concern of many is the ethical implications behind it. After all, an absolutely peaceful society at the cost of sadistic methods is not a peaceful society at all. Here, I want to introduce Rousseau’s Discourse on the Origin of Inequality. I intend to use his philosophies to gives some moral justifications for the thought experiment in this essay. In his work, Rousseau imagines humans in a primitive state where the only inequality amongst men is the natural inequalities of physical capability. (Rousseau) In this state, no one bows down to anyone else, and there is no looming authority either. All a man is concerned with is their own living. As society develops, more and more inequalities begin to form. Some men become more powerful than others, and humans begin to fear each other due to expanding imbalances in power. Ultimately, he postulates that the modern creation of laws and property have corrupted the natural man, creating many unnecessary inequalities and injustices. Again, the goal of this essay is not to provide a stance on certain academic debates, so I will not comment further on the merits of this theory. What can be accepted is that there are some truths to this hypothesis. Example one: there are many cases where the law forbids overworking employees, but employers do so anyways for more financial gain. Example two: unlawful police brutality and racism in the legal system and law enforcement is widespread in today’s world. Example three: businessmen and elites constantly find loopholes in the law, exploiting unfair advantages to gain more power and wealth. These general but very much realistic inequalities amongst humans are serious injustices. All of these issues could be resolved by coding laws into humans. Before a police officer assaults an individual, the mechanical parts of his body would detect the individual as well as whether there is a racist motive in the police’s mind. If there are, the police would be physically unable to assault the individual. In summary, some of the inequalities that Rousseau feared has arisen with modernity could be remedied by coding laws in humans.

Amongst all the possible riots against coding laws into humans, the greatest would be the deprivation of freedom. However, it can be argued that this has already been chipped away for the benefit of security. One of the most famous theories on this is the social contract, first theorized by Rousseau. (Rousseau) The basic concept is a trade-off between the freedom of the individual for the protection of the state. In recent years, there have been drastically more areas in society where such theories are relevant. A controversial example is predictive policing. Predictive policing is a recent law enforcement method where police utilize advanced surveillance and computing technology to predict crime and make arrests in advance. This is a clear example of trading freedom for security, and security is indeed increased with the sacrifice of freedom. For example, in a 6-month program by the Santa Cruz police department, predictive policing was used to arrest individuals with a high percentage chance of committing a crime. Over that period, burglaries declined by 19 per cent. (Friend)

After examining multiple theories, a big part of this debate seems to be boiled down to one conversation — freedom or security? This is a question that I do not intend to answer. However, I want to end this essay by sharing a personal experience. As a Chinese national living outside of China, I tend to pick up a lot of inconsistencies between my country and the world. One of such inconsistencies is our citizens’ stance on freedom versus security. When I talk to friends outside of China, freedom is chosen over security more often than not. To many, it seems inconceivable how one could live in peace, knowing they have their freedom taken away from them. This can seem like a life not worth living to some. However, whenever I tell peers about how we treat freedom vs. security in China, they are always shocked at our values. Contrary to the popular stance, most of the citizens of China would choose security over freedom. This could be due to a variety of reasons, from the ruling party to ancient philosophy. Whatever the reason, the point is that most of our citizens still live a happy and safe life. I cannot say what that implies in the debate of freedom or security, but I believe my experience can open the conversation to wider possibilities. To conclude this essay, I am well aware that hard coding laws into humans is probably very unlikely to happen. What I hope this essay does is expand the depth of what our ethics can consider.

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