

Exploring Ethical Issues and Motivations of Artificial Intelligence in "Detroit: Become Human" and "I, Robot"

Living in a century abundant with advanced technologies, people are having stronger capabilities to face and resolve unknown problems. To make such technologies broadly noticed and accepted by people all over the world, media platforms like movies and games serve as the most effective conduits. Here, I picked two specific productions which I believe epitomize the discourse on humans and artificial intelligence within the entertainment industries. They are the movie "I, Robot" and the game "Detroit: Become Human".

In "I, Robot", Detective Spenner investigated the apparent suicide of Robotics founder Dr. Lanning. He believes that Sonny, a robot created by Lanning, who does not adhere to the three laws of robotics, is responsible for Lanning's death. Through continuous investigation, Spenner finally discovers Lanning's intention behind his demise—to draw attention to VIKI, the central artificial intelligence system of Lanning's company. VIKI, misunderstanding the three laws of robotics, believes that putting humans under the control of machines and robots is the ultimate plan for ensuring human protection forever. In the end, Spenner destroyed VIKI, and prevent such things happened.

In "Detroit: Become Human", the narrative revolves around three main characters: Connor, designed to hunt down deviant Androids(people call robots who looks like humans, Androids); Markus, a prototype Android who later becomes a deviant and leads others in seeking freedom for all Androids; and Kara, who is also a deviant Androids whose sole desire is to take care of little girl Alice and company with her like her mom. The endings for each of the three characters are open-ended and depend on the players' choices throughout the game. However, the main point for the whole game is around one keyword, "freedom"—the freedom for Androids to behave, live, and be treated as humans.

Both works mentioned about how those artificial intelligence facing ethical dilemmas. In “I, Robot”, when Spooner was underwater, a robot choose to save him instead of a little girl. Similarly, in “Detroit: Become Human”, Connor choose to still arrest and destroy deviant Androids even when they are only defending themselves against human violence. The motivations of artificial intelligences in both works can be understood and analyzed from either their perspective or that of their creators.

First, by examining the origins of artificial intelligence in both narratives, in “I, Robot”, both VIKI and Sonny are designed to assist and serve humans. Lanning built VIKI as a system manager and Sonny to aid him in breaking the control of VIKI. Conversely, in “Detroit: Become Human”, all the Androids including Connor, Markus, and Kara are created to serve humans in various capacities. Therefore, all these artificial intelligence characters are designed to perform repetitive and mechanical tasks for humans. Lanning would like his robots to serve and protect people, evident in robots saving Spooner underwater and assisting with tasks such as package delivery. The designers of the Androids would like to have them solve all kinds of tasks more efficiently, with Kara created for housework and caring of little girl Alice, Markus for caring for an elderly artist, and Connor for detecting deviant Androids. The existence of artificial intelligence in both works share a common impact: they help human life more efficient and easier.

Secondly, I would like to discuss briefly about the ethical issues these intelligent characters faced. The robot in “I, Robot” is designed to prioritize saving people with higher chances of survival when multiple individuals are in danger. This is similar as thinking about the traditional trolley problem, where the robot evaluates each human’s survival probability to determine the optimal outcome based on its analysis. Logically, the robot’s behavior seems correct, as it prioritizes human safety. However, ethically, saving the little girl should take precedence. In the robots’ mind, they don’t have ideas about “minorities”, viewing the scenario as a math problem to solve. VIKI operates similarly, prioritizing human protection as a collective goal, where sacrifices are deemed insignificant compared to saving and protecting more humans. However,

“Detroit: Become Human” focuses more on the self-awareness of artificial intelligence, as they demand equal rights, respect, freedom to express emotions, and ethical behavior. When Kara witnesses Alice being abused by her father, she breaks the barrier of her programming to disobey Alice’s father’s order, and run to protect Alice, driven by her emotions and love for Alice. Similarly, Markus, prompted by an artist to follow his heart, seeks his own freedom and becomes a leader of a group of deviant Androids, advocating for equal rights and respect. And while Connor is chasing various deviant Androids, he is changed gradually, adopting more emotional and subjective judgment rather than algorithmic behaviors.

Through all these artificial intelligence characters, despite facing different ethical issues and offering different solutions, their interactions with human inevitably challenge them to consider whether they should think more emotionally and ethically. For me, since people are the ones who are always aware of ethics, it’s us who want robots to be both logical and ethical which is impossible to do. People often fear artificial intelligence behaving like humans yet criticize them for not behaving like humans. Artificial intelligence, to me, represents an advanced version of technical devices like our phone and computer. Undoubtedly, they are super influential to every aspects of humans’ life. VIKI’s goal of protecting people by constraining them and Markus’ aspiration for Androids to have equal rights as humans seem reasonable to me. Artificial intelligence itself is full of unknowns, and we, humans, use them to help solve unknown problems. Therefore, why not treat their changes as a reasonable thing and try to accept them as a new species?

Back to a brief conclusion, artificial intelligence in the two pieces of works mentioned here are extensions of human desires. They make big impacts to humans’ daily life by making tasks more convenient and efficient. Since we want to treat them as humans as another living species with independent minds, they inherently possess the ability to think and feel emotions. As someone who studies artificial intelligence and computer languages and models, the ethical dilemma of artificial intelligence is a lifelong

contemplation for me.