AI and Culture

Many people will look at this section and think “AI and culture? How does AI have anything to do with culture?” Well the truth of the matter is that artificial intelligence has already become a large part of our daily lives. Whenever a credit card is swiped, an intelligent program makes sure that money gets to where it needs to go. Whenever a traffic light turns green, an artificial intelligence saw that there was traffic there. The general population see’s artificial intelligence as these amazingly sophisticated machines who go on rampages or accidently cause World War III but in the end they’re simply man’s answer to doing benign jobs that no one wants to do anymore.

This isn’t a current trend in the history of artificial intelligence. Creating programs that help human’s in their everyday jobs has been common practice since 1988. (Patil, 1988). In 1988 scientists did research concerning artificial intelligence in medical diagnosis and mad some key ideas that would go on to shape the future of artificial intelligence. The idea was, if doctors didn’t need to diagnose a patient and instead would only have to be involved with treatment. What if there was an intelligent program that could take in all of the patient’s symptoms and create a reasonable hypothesis of that patient’s ailment.

Patil and Schwartz’s report eventually conclude that such a program would take years to create but also lay down the foundation for solving some key issues such as overlapping conditions and the probability of rarer disorders. Needless to say some head way has been made into this field a little over 20 years later.

Meet Isabel. Isabel is labeled as a “diagnostic checklist” program. Doctors input information from tests and observations already made and Isabel generates a list of likely disorders the patient might have. This allows doctors to make a more informed choice as well as check possible, lesser known diseases. The program, while not perfect, is the child of the idea Patil and Schwartz presented nearly 20 years ago. While most people may never see or use this program its cultural significance is simply that doctors are beginning to use artificial intelligence in conjunction with their own and are seeing only good results come of it such as lesser hospital stays and fewer unnecessary and sometimes painful tests being ran. (Isabel Healthcare, 2011)

Most artificial intelligence programs still require human input or assistance in order to function. However scientists over at the University of Cambridge have reported the first autonomously functioning robot researcher. “Adam”, the name of the machine, utilizes an advanced intelligence program combined with robotics to hypothesize and perform experiments on its own. (Greenmeier, 2009) Adam performs biological experiments on yeast, a compound biological researchers use to study complex organisms. Adam then records its results in a understandable form so that any promising experiments can be recreated faithfully. There is also work on a new lab partner (code named “Eve”) that will create experiments in order to find new drugs to combat diseases. (Greenmeier, 2009)

These intelligence’s are culturally significant simply because they effect society in small but meaningful ways such as helping a doctor make the right decision or researching potential cures to humanities most deadly diseases. But what about a project that is so useful that within a few years it will save thousands of people? A project that takes away the most dangerous aspect of an average workers day? Driving to work.

Since 2004 DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) has been creating challenges for several teams to create a self driving car. For 4 consecutive years, the cars were tested on different tracks for efficiency and safety tests. (Markoff, 2007) However in 2010 Google unveiled that it has had cars driving around California without the assistance of a driver. Utilizing the skills of the teams competing with DARPA, the Google team advanced the technology to the point where the cars only accidents on the road were human errors by other drivers.

The onboard intelligence of the cars uses laser scanning both in front and behind the vehicle in order to keep it straight on the road. It also utilizes Google’s map technology in order to plot efficient routes to and from locations. While the project is still extremely experimental, Google hopes to reduce the 1.2 million lives lost to traffic accidents each year. (Hachman, 2010) If there were ever any effect artificial intelligence could have on culture that would be it.

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