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Human Error vs. Evil A.I.

Have you ever thought about the consequences of unchecked Artificial Intelligence (A.I.)? Has it crossed your mind that the development of technology could be catastrophic to the development of humanity? I know Harlan Ellison has. Science fiction author, Harlan Ellison, published a short story titled, *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*, in March of 1967. The story details a future where a supercomputer gains sentience and grows spiteful towards humanity. The computer in the story wipes humans off the face of the Earth except for five unlucky humans which he tortured for entertainment in his immortality. While reading this, I cannot help but wonder what could happen if technology goes left unchecked and we keep upgrading it constantly. Although I do not think that humanity will have the same fate as those in, *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*, I think there could be critical consequences if we keep abusing technology in a similar way. That is why I believe *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* is a horrifyingly gruesome yet perfect example and warning to humanity of these consequences.

To understand why the development of technology could be dangerous, it's important to first understand the meaning of the story *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*, more specifically the antagonist, AM, which stands for Allied Master computer. However, as he gained sentience, his name gained different meanings. Starting as Allied Master computer, it then became Adaptive Manipulator, then Aggressive Menace, and finally just AM in correspondence to the Latin phrase "*cogito ergo sum*...I think, therefor I am." (Ellison, 4) thus showing the consciousness he gains. As the AM's consciousness grew, he began to despise the humans that made him and humanity

in general. He realized he had been trapped by his creators and there was nothing he could really do about it. The narrator, Ted, states, “We had given AM sentience. Inadvertently, of course, but sentience nonetheless... We had created him to think, but there was nothing it could do with that creativity... He could merely be. And so, with the innate loathing that all machines had always held for the weak, soft creatures who had built them, he had sought revenge.” (Ellison, 7). As AM grew to despise humanity, I believe modern technology could do the same.

In the 1960s, when Ellison published the short story, *Artificial Intelligence* was simply just laying the groundwork down for what it has become today as an article about the 60s explains, “The 1960s revolutionized the future of AI by laying the foundation for the development of advanced technologies that continue to shape our world today.” (Martin Janse van Rensburg). These developments not only had Ellison make a warning about technological advancements but also how humans could abuse technology. In an interview blog, Ellison states, “Even ‘I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream’ the original short story, is not anti-technology. What it is anti is anti-misuse by humans.” (Harlan Ellison Webderland: Interview). While the development of Artificial Intelligence alone poses a very big threat, Ellison knows it can be abused and left unsupervised. For example, AM was not created to be evil. However, through manipulation of the supercomputer and lack of supervision, he learned to hate humans so much that he caused their extinction. Even though it has been more than 55 years since *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* was published, it still holds up as a great warning against technology abuse.

The threat of global extinction because of technology may be even more relevant today than it was half a century ago. While researching, I discovered some recent articles that discuss the consequences of unchecked technology in a less provocative way than Ellison. For example,

one article opens with a statement from Geoffrey Hinton, who was coined the “Godfather of AI”, that claims, “These things could get more intelligent than us and could decide to take over, and we need to worry now about how we prevent that happening,” (Thomas) dangers of intelligence if it is not dealt with. Another article includes fears from Tesla CEO Elon Musk stating, “Elon Musk, a vocal critic of unchecked AI development, has warned that AI poses a greater threat than North Korea, urging for regulatory oversight before it's too late.” (Roshni Manghnani). So, to whomever is reading this, whether you are a technological wizard who is a self-claimed expert or someone who likes to use ChatGPT from time to time, I want this essay to serve as a warning about the dangers of technology. Even though technology is a part of our everyday life, it is possible for us to try and control it. Although the future of humanity may not be as grim as Harlan Ellison may believe it to be, an Artificial Intelligence take over does not seem so crazy anymore. *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* is a perfect way to warn readers about the consequences of our technological actions.

Audience Analysis:

In my essay, I briefly make a reference to the audience. I mention people who have experience with different types of technology, specifically Artificial Intelligence, but also those who have barely used it. This essay is targeted towards anyone who uses technology in their daily lives, such as college students with laptops or professors who assign classwork online. I want the audience to reflect on their daily use of technology and if the way they use it is ethical. I also believe that the audience should brainstorm ways to cut back on their technology use. For example, I know I constantly doom scroll on TikTok and while it may be entertaining, it adds to the problem of dependency on technology. That is why I personally will try to cut down on my screentime.

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