

Technoethical Analysis of WALL-E

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Author Note

Part One: Technoethical analysis - Description/Intro

Part Two: Technoethical analysis - Normative/Mechanical questions

Part Three: Identify One Ethical Dilemma related to critical questions identified

Part Four: Explain Why Ethical Dilemma is a Moral Dilemma for character.

Part Five: Reflect on Moral of The Story

“I don't want to survive, I wanna live!” - Captain B. McCrea

INTRO

It is the year 2775, planet Earth is a barren, desolate wasteland devoid of life. The oceans and rivers have dried up. The towering trees, and leafy green plants that once covered the world are now non-existent. A perpetual dusty fog covers what used to be a bright blue sky. A massive amount of garbage encases the city, with piles higher than the towering skyscrapers. There appears to be just a single creature left on Earth; WALL-E.

PART ONE

The city is riddled with advertisements, billboards, and massive stores, all with the name Buy n Large on them. There is paper currency covering the ground that has the BnL logo on it instead of a president's face. According to Pixar, BnL, was a massive worldwide conglomerate that controlled 36 major fields of work, or every aspect of life on Earth. Buy n Large had around two million wholly owned subsidiaries, governmental bodies, and health care centers (*Buy n Large*, 2008). The CEO, Shelby Forthright became the leader of the world, due to BnL's monopoly on life. By giving the entire population on Earth "the right to spend", humanity went into a state of mass consumerism which covered the entire planet in un-recycled refuse (*Buy n Large*, 2008). BnL decided to send everyone off into space, while the garbage on Earth was cleaned up. The trip to space was marketed as a five year voyage where humans are tended to completely by robots "At BnL space is the final frontier." (Stanton, 2008). By the year 2110, BnL CEO declared that the cleanup efforts were futile, and that all humans should remain in space for the foreseeable future.

Over 600 years later, the Earth is still a desolate, toxic, wasteland. WALL-E the robot is a cheerful little solar-powered robot who appears to have achieved sentience. He loves to listen to

music from movies and mimic the actors and actresses dancing. He is intrigued by the bond of relationships shown within the movie *Hello, Dolly!*. WALL-E's job is to compact trash into cubes in order to reduce the amount of trash covering the surface of Earth. "One man's trash is another man's treasure," fits WALL-E's persona well since he collects random nick-nacks from the garbage throughout the day. WALL-E's best friend is his pet cockroach who has survived the environmental disaster, and ironically sleeps in a twinkie. WALL-E is one of many WALL-E's (Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class) whose purpose was to clean up Earth while the humans were away. Unfortunately, all the other WALL-E bots succumbed to technical errors or other mishaps, leaving WALL-E the lone one of his kind.

One day, a spaceship touches down and releases another robot. This robot's name is Eve (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator). Eve was put back onto the desolate Earth to complete her "directive" - finding a form of life. WALL-E almost immediately falls in love with Eve, but alas she only cares about completing her mission. She continues mindlessly scanning things in hope of finding any sign of life. Eventually WALL-E shows Eve the plant he found and she is transported back to the crown jewel of the fleet, "The Axiom".

The Axiom ship has been in space for 700 years, and the year is 2775. The people aboard are all grossly overweight due to their completely sedentary lifestyles. All humans aboard are sitting in moving chairs, with holographic tv screens on in front of them 24/7. All chairs and robots are confined to movement on pre-defined lines except WALL-E who moves freely around the ship. Everyone is so consumed by technology that they are oblivious to their surroundings. The ship is crowded with holographic advertisement boards, all for BnL. The humans on the Axiom only know life to be sitting in a chair, occupied with a tv screen all day, with food and

assistance available at a single word or clap. An autopilot feature named Auto is in command of the ship. The morning announcements are the only thing Captain B. McCrea gets to do. Once he is made aware that an Eve probe has come back positive, Captain McCrea starts to snap out of his stupor. He begins learning about Operation Recolonize by attempting to read the manual on it. First, he attempts to contact the book, “Manuel relay instructions,” then he eventually gets the hang of reading. Fascinated by the words in the manual, Captain McCrea starts asking his computer interface to define “Earth,” and “sea”. Eve finally arrives at the cabin bay, but is missing the plant upon McCrea’s inspection. The warden and autopilot(Auto) bots are programmed to never return to Earth, so they attempt to dispose of the plant. Auto tries to keep the captain and humans aboard the ship, but the captain proclaims, “I don’t want to survive, I wanna live!”(Stanton, 2008). Captain McCrea overtakes Auto and puts him into manual mode. All humans aboard the ship realize they can overtake robots, and life is more fun without being in front of a screen 24/7. The camera pans out and green plants are starting to spring up everywhere. “Down to the Earth” by Peter Gabriel starts to play.

The main character I will be focusing on is WALL-E, as well as Eve and Captain McCrea. I will be talking about the existence of Buy n Large and how mass consumerism throttled and destroyed the entire planet as we know it. Also, I will analyze the over-normalization of technology within our daily lives and how it changes us for the better or worse. The film WALL-E was published by Pixar in summer of 2008. I spent about two hours watching it and taking notes on various scenes and themes.

PART TWO

Normative Questions

Normative statements are statements that are non-concrete and not wholly fact-based. Peoples political rants and advice on Facebook are normative statements because they are opinions that are highly debatable (Phillips, 2021). Normative statements and questions are about the “big picture,” of things, and are usually debatable (Onesti, 2021). Normative statements and questions are based on personal experience, feelings, and opinions. Should the people in WALL-E have a say in how they want to live their lives, or should it be up to robots?

Mechanical Questions

Mechanical questions and statements are fact-based observations, which leave little room for debate. An example of a descriptive statement would be, “The Earth is a round, sphere-like shape”. How long has the Axiom been in space? What is needed in order for the humans aboard the Axiom to go back to Earth?

Three Critical Questions

My first critical question is, “Should governments around the world put legislation into effect that would disable the possibility of a single company monopolizing all industries on Earth? ”. My second critical question is, “Should there be more effort put into educating the general public within countries such as the United States on the consequences of pollution, and climate change to protect the future of humanity?”. My third critical question is, “Should there be limitations put on certain technologies that automate tasks within daily life, in order to avoid complete automation and mindless integration of technology within human life?”.

PART THREE

Ethical Dilemma (1)

The stakeholders in this situation are the humans and robots. One mechanical question I came up with was; How do the humans aboard the axiom get back to Earth? Another mechanical question I thought up was; How does Captain McCrea overpower Auto in order to regain manual control of the ship? One normative question that came to mind was; should the humans on the ship vote (majority rules) on going back to Earth, or should it be up to just the Captain? Another normative question would be; Will the humans fare well back on Earth? I also thought up the following normative statement; Plants growing on Earth indicate that the environment is recovering from the overwhelming pollution. Some possible values pertaining to the situation are; Communication, Open-mindedness, and Hope. There are two possible outcomes of the following proposal. The first outcome is brought about by deciding to fly the Axiom ship back to Earth, hoping that it is habitable enough, and beginning Operation Recolonization. The alternative decision is to keep the Axiom ship on its course of eternally meandering about space, and not return to Earth. I created the following ethical dilemma based on my previous work; Should Captain McCrea fly the Axiom back to Earth, without consulting the passengers, even though Earth may still be uninhabitable, and a majority of the passengers might not want to go back?

PART FOUR

Moral Dilemma

A moral dilemma is described in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as, “where an agent regards itself as having moral reasons to do each of two actions, but doing both actions is not possible”(McConnell, 2018). Within my ethical dilemma Captain McCrea has a moral reason to keep the Axiom in space, as well as a moral reason to take the ship back to Earth. The captain cannot both keep the ship on its course in space and return to recolonize Earth.

Ethical Dilemma -> Moral Dilemma

According to the ethical dilemmas lecture, in order for something to be an ethical dilemma it must possess the following three things, “normative/mechanical statements/questions, values, and action/decision”(Onesti, 2021). Within my ethical dilemma is a normative question; Should Captain McCrea fly the Axiom back to Earth-. The values of communication, hope, and open-mindedness are present in the dilemma. These three values are critical within the Captains decision on whether or not to go home. It is important to have hope that Earth is habitable. Also, communication could be crucial in determining if the majority wants to go back home. Open-mindedness is present within the idea of believing Earth is habitable and will provide a future for everyone on board. The action being decided on is presented as either maintaining the current course in space, or returning to Earth in hope of building a better future.

PART FIVE

The movie WALL-E is truly a masterpiece by Pixar. As per usual the film entices younger children, but also touches on the deeper issues of technology dependency, and mass

pollution. I think as of now, we are on course for this movie to become reality in the future.

Currently, Amazon is on course to become the Buy n Large company portrayed in the film unless something is done to kill off global monopolies. Our landfills are starting to look more like mountains, and an excess of garbage can be found in streets, cities, along roads, and in bodies of water. In this current day and age, we have something called The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which is a floating mass of garbage in the ocean that is twice the size of Texas (*The Great Pacific Garbage Patch*, 2020).

Moral of The Story

Captain McCrea decides to not consult the masses, and hyper-jump back to Earth in hopes of a brighter future. In making this decision, he saved WALL-E's life, and gave the passengers a chance at living, and discovering things on their own again, without the pacifier of technology that controlled them aboard the Axiom. The moral of the story here is to care for the environment, be wary of automation, and to be vigilant against corporate giants. There are a multitude of thought-provoking themes presented within the movie, and I highly recommend watching it if you haven't seen it already.

CONCLUSION

It is easy to let technology become the forefront of our lives whether it be, using our phones all day, watching too much tv, depending on the internet for everything, integrating smart home technology into our homes, etc. Furthermore, it is not hard to forget about the problems that excessive waste production is creating for our planet; environmental toxicity from garbage, extinction of species, and degradation of the atmosphere protecting us. The movie WALL-E goes to show just how bad things will get, unless we start globally unified action today.

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