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*03/05/2021*

**Are robots taking over or are we allowing them to take over?**

Over the years we have continued to upgrade our choices in computer, digital and autonomous technologies, most of which now focus on the replication of human patterns and traits. Some may say that there will be a time where one robot will be equivalent to one human. Many people assume that issues such as mass unemployment will explode as these methods we wish to have for ease of life are cheaper alternatives. Individuals like Elon Musk say that the only way we can move forward is we have accompanying technology that can assist or “upgrade” the way we live, so that technology makes us better. Then the other end of the spectrum consists of the sci-fi fantasy realm, where humanity is either dominated by robots or are at one with them. In this essay I will be presenting multiple examples of Isaac Asimov’s work, assessing how each novel presents robots in different ways and how it may relate to the current times.

Isaac Asimov was an American writer who was known for his works in science fiction and popular science, accredited for writing/editing over 500 books Asimov is one of the leading authors in science fiction. One of his works that stands out is “The Caves of Steel” written in 1954, a book that is set three thousand years into the future. The plot of the novel revolves around the changes on Earth, where humans now live in underground cities while robots, their servants work in farms and mines above them. There are some humans who are referred to as “Spacers” as they live in outer space and have lifespans of around 350 years (Asimov, 1953). One of the main characters called Roj Sarton is killed in a Spacer colony, which is where our protagonist Elijah Baley comes in to investigate. In the book Asimov paints robots in two different ways, one as the labourers and two as the assistants. Olivaw, Baley’s android partner is programmed to be a robot detective with a strong element of justice to ensure the role of an investigator is fulfilled. The robots in this story appear to be happy and well-behaved, but in reality are just servants of humanity, programmed with the Three Laws of Robotics. There are two prevalent attitudes towards robots in the novel 1) Eathenmen who distrust robots and fear they will take their jobs 2) Spacers who advocate human/robot cooperation. Then we have the Medievalists also known as “Luddite” who are extremely anti-robot and call for a return of primitive life. In this case Baley is a typical Earthmen who starts off with a strong distrust in his robot partner (Asimov, 1953).

Like many of Asimov’s robot novels, Caves of Steel attempts to banish the stereotype of “evil robots”. In the book Baley starts off with an extreme distrust in Olivaw, but this highlights his important role in the plot of the story which is to change Baley’s perception of robots (Asimov, 1953). Olivaw is successful in such as towards the end of the novel Baley trusts his android partner more than anyone else. This is a great example to show that the dystopian notion of robots taking over can be flawed and too repetitive to stimulate our current thoughts on the matter. However, Asimov presents the robot without the creator, as an entity that has no higher duty or obligation to a firm or organization which is why it is easier to take such an approach. This means that the robot cannot be capitalized on and is in some sort of “free-roam”. What Asimov does in this book is present a possible utopia of cooperation, but I feel that he contradicts himself in expressing that it can all be good. Another robot was an accomplice to murder as it did not know the motives for the human’s actions. Could this have been prevented if the robot had control over its own actions? In my opinion, Asimov focuses way too much on the bright aspects of such cooperation and he doesn’t shed enough light on cooperation through exploitation and manipulation. What is the point of having the Three Laws if robots can be so easily manipulated to become accessories to murder? The whole system contradicts itself. In regards to our main question on if we are allowing robots to take over, Asimov says that we need robots to progress and become better, almost as if we need them to have some sort of control over our lives. This is excellently shown between Olivaw and Sarton’s relationship - robots are not threats to human jobs or beings, they are entities that will eventually replace humans but are creations that will lead humans to lead a better way of life. Almost as if this is inevitable.

Little Lost Robot focuses on two main characters, Susan Calvin and Peter Bogert who fly to an asteroid-based research facility to assist in tracking down a robot known as NS-2-10, or Nestor 10 (Asimov, 1977). Interestingly, this robot has hidden himself among a shipment of 62 otherwise identical NS-2 models, but it is different from the normal robots, the second law is non-existent, which makes it imperative that he be identified and recovered (Asimov, 1977). Personally, there was a constant feeling within the text that robots, as sentient beings, might resent their treatment by humans. The electrocution on humans to see if the robots would react made me quite uncomfortable because if the robots were manufactured to aid humans why are they testing them again? This is quite different from the certainty that Asimov establishes in Caves of Steel. The NS-2s are manufactured without the Second Law which means that the robots have the ability to harm humans through "inaction", for the entire part of the story the government hides such to avoid rejection of the public. Does this mean that the creators of Robots are the ones who control them and in turn allow them to control the greater societies? I believe so. Through the logical paradoxes, Asimov presents the dilemma that robots and scientists may face, he perfectly illustrates the complexity of human ethical choices in our world of developing technology*.* It is almost as if we should be more worried about humans controlling the robots than the robots controlling the humans. The personality trait and need to have control is not something that is naturally developed but rather learned or motivated by something else. In the story the other Nestors don't yet know anything about physics without the Second Law because they're produced without that knowledge. This makes me curious to know if they can be educated, not by humans but by other more advanced robots. What if the humans or organization that supposedly is responsible for such lose their control as robots start to educate themselves? Towards the end the Nestor-10 was caught because of his own superiority complex in proving and trying to educate humans a “get lost” attitude.. Isn't this something similar that humans have? We can see that without one basic law robots try to mimic the superiority complex that humans have in educational spaces and workforces. Wannabe human? Overall, I really think this story highlights the dangers of innovation and who in the end has the most control over it.

The Malthusian theory suggests that while technological advances could increase a society's supply of resources, such as food, and thereby improve the standard of living, the resource abundance would enable population growth and improvement, which would eventually bring the per capita supply of resources back to its original level (Malthus, 1978). This is similar to what Asimov assumes, that robots being involved in our lives is what will allow us to progress into a better society. Hypothetically this is valid as those that lack the skills of an AI/Robot dominated world will most likely be at a disadvantage to compete for resources, which at this point in time many are scarce. What about the areas of the world that will not have access to such technology? Currently we are seeing regions of the world where people do not even have basic access to the internet, how do we expect the human standard of living to increase with AI if not everyone will be a part of it? This presents an ethical issue to development organizations in the field, if a human-AI is existent who will have access to it? In my opinion, the most ethical way possible is to allow all societies to indulge in such creations rather than having only the creator’s society enjoy their accomplishments. I worry that this might not be achieved in a capitalist society. If we still have current issues where our global population still lacks basic internet access, how are we going to work with robots and AI on a global scale?

Do we need to diversify and decentralize?

Yes we do. This whole idea of control comes from the idea that one group or one side are the ones who have the authority over something or someone. If we presently look at the developments within AI and Robotics, we could say that the industry is dominated in the US and East Asia. Where does this leave everyone else? In my opinion, this presents an ultimatum to the rest of the world; create your own robots or we will create them for you. It’s like an arms race of robotic development. Everyone wants to have the best robots that do the best things, to outcompete those that are seen as rivals or competitors. We are already seeing this within many industries such as household appliances and transportation. Tesla isn’t the only manufacturer that produces autonomous vehicles but it currently has the monopoly over the market because everyone perceives it as the best. Therefore, Tesla regulates most of the innovation and production regarding the industry due to its large market share (DeBord, 2018). What if this happens with actual robots? I think we need to stop thinking about if robots will take over but rather who will control our robots and if they will be manipulated to take control over us by a larger entity.

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