

PHI315: Questions for “Ex Machina”

Last time, we discussed “Her” and while the discussion was good, I feel that perhaps I could do a better job of focusing it. Again, I have not done a movie class before, and, as such, this is trial and error. Today, I am going to provide some areas, some topics, and some ideas, for us to discuss and focus our conversation on. I am not committed to only addressing these, since I value student driven discussion more. So, consider this a hybrid of both me adding stuff to talk about and you being able to contribute to things.

Main Ideas:

I think that “Ex Machina” exhibits some crucial ideas in relation to AI and AL, especially in contrast to “Her”. These are some of these:

1. Life– notice that with the AI in “Her”, the notion of life was abstract. Samantha certainly became a non-material life form, which gives credence to the idea that life is but a pattern, yet she never had a proper body. We assume that bodies are requisite for life, and I think that in “Ex Machina”, Ava seems far more like life to us since she has a body. **What does this reveal about our notion of life and how ought we change the conception of it in light of the possibilities exhibited?**
2. Embodiment– of course, the crucial difference between “Her” and “Ex Machina” is that Ava is embodied whereas Samantha is not. The embodiment, though evident in both films, seems to also be irrelevant to the way in which Theodore and Caleb feel toward them, since both fall in love. **But that Eva was embodied, does that signify something? Does it make you think that AI systems will need bodies?**
3. **In regard to embodiment, and the contrast between “Her” and “Ex Machina”, do either of these AI systems feel more human like? Does embodiment play a role in that? What does this say about the way in which we perceive intelligence and life?**
4. Does the smirk Ava give at the end suggest something about Ava, namely that in having smiled for no one, she smiles for herself? Does this reveal a kind of emotional performance that reminisces our own since we often do react for ourselves alone which means the reaction is almost authentic? Or is our own reaction also rooted in evolution and hence is an algorithm?
5. What do we make of the ethics in the film? Was Nathan a bad guy? Was Caleb a victim? Is Ava justified in the means she chose for her escape? Would you act different or the same? Does this suggest that AI systems and model, if complex enough, deserve autonomy and moral consideration?
6. Making the movie concrete, do you think that if an AI / AL system exhibits the complexity of behavior like Ava that it ought to be entitled to whatever we think humans are entitled to? Should we start being nice to chatGPT?