

## **How Anthropomorphism Distorts the Concept of Artificial Intelligence**

Whenever autocorrect messes up your text or Siri calls someone mistakenly, people become frustrated, as if their smartphones and computers are expected to be “smarter.” Unconsciously, we place unreasonable expectations on our technology because of anthropomorphization, the attribution of humanlike qualities and descriptors to nonhuman objects. Our reliance on interacting with other people trains our brains to comfortably identify human characteristics. As there exists a “growing literature suggesting that we respond better to such seemingly living creatures”(Belk), companies are incentivized to design products that emulate human emotional authenticity, leading end users to develop an unrealistic understanding of the human-like qualities their technology is capable of assuming. AI’s capability to deliver human responses does not imply its capability of inferred decision making, non-probabilistic risk taking, or other skills requiring human intelligence. Despite this, public fears of advanced technology have persisted, if not increased, since the advancement of AI. Anthropomorphization is painting a false image of AI as an enemy and competitor of humans, which creates a barrier of knowledge between those who understand AI and the general population, hindering society’s utilization of new technology.

Stories of AI turning evil from TV shows such as *Battlestar Galactica* are unfounded. By definition, the dominant model of artificial intelligence (Machine Learning) is goal-oriented. ML programs act upon correlations from large datasets between possible actions and a predefined set of goals. Unless the set goals are wrong, all actions of an AI system only serve to help its purpose. The real dangers of machines are their lack of a moral compass and their willingness to attempt malicious goals without hostile intent nor emotion. In the JFQ, Eschelman and Derrick describe simple malicious programs like email viruses: “Hostile intent, human

emotion, and political agendas were not required by the adversarial technologies themselves in order to impact users. Simple goals, as assigned by humans, were sufficient to considerably influence economies and defense departments across the globe.” While there is some truth behind the dangers of new tech, current rumors are a far claim from the actual reasons robots could be dangerous.

The same goes for advanced AI robots. For example, a self-driving car delivering a time bomb does not need to be persuaded to accept its destination, nor does it care if it gets blown up after it arrives. Yet many popular film series are centered around humanoid robots that possess consciousness and free will, misleading the general public to anthropomorphize their mental ability. To someone outside the barrier of knowledge, whose only exposure to AI is through mass media, it would seem perfectly conceivable that technology is developing towards self-conscious robots at risk of turning evil.

Powered by anthropomorphism, predictions of the future also include that mechanization will replace many human jobs; this conclusion is just as misguided. During the mass spreading of ATMs, many bank tellers, who manually filed money, were scared for their jobs. However, instead of being replaced, tellers’ tasks were redefined to become more sales-oriented, moving to bank branches within supermarkets. The fears of losing jobs to machines originate from the idea that technology is able to replace humans, when in reality new technology simply reshapes human tasks. With its subpar social communication, AI requires humans to utilize its data calculation abilities. As tech blogger Ines Montani points out, “the problem with a lot of conversational applications is that they're not actually trying to solve the underlying problem — they're simply reengineering a makeshift solution born out of necessity. It's not enough to apply a new technology to an existing process. It needs to be used as a tool, a

building block in an entirely new system”. Instead of making robot doctors, we should create AI programs that identify illnesses and have doctors communicate with patients. The phenomenon of anthropomorphization is reinforcing that Artificial Intelligence is human-like, and therefore in competition with humans. In reality, advancements in technology have only shifted the definitions of future jobs while improving quality and efficiency.

In order to re-orient society’s expectations of robots as fundamentally different, the truths and misconceptions of AI need to be discussed and spread. This way, humanity will be prepared to design, accept, and benefit from the technologies of tomorrow.

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