PREDICTIONS AND ETHICS

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Artificial Intelligence is a common topic in both science fiction and projections about the future of technology and society. The existence of an artificial intelligence that rivals human intelligence raises difficult ethical issues, and the potential power of the technology inspires both hopes and fears.

In fiction, Artificial Intelligence has appeared fulfilling many roles, including a servant, a law enforcer, a comrade, a conqueror/overlord, a dictator, a benevolent provider/de facto ruler, an assassin, a sentient race an extension to human abilities and the savior of the human race.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein considers a key issue in the ethics of artificial intelligence: if a machine can be created that has intelligence, could it also feel? If it can feel, does it have the same rights as a human? The idea also appears in modern science fiction, including the films I Robot, Blade Runner and A.I.: Artificial Intelligence, in which humanoid machines have the ability to feel human emotions. This issue, now known as "robot rights", is currently being considered by, for example, California's Institute for the Future, although many critics believe that the discussion is premature.

Joseph Weizenbaum wrote that AI applications can not, by definition, successfully simulate genuine human empathy and that the use of AI technology in fields such as customer service or psychotherapy was deeply misguided. Weizenbaum was also bothered that AI researchers (and some philosophers) were willing to view the human mind as nothing more than a computer program (a position now known as computationalism). To Weizenbaum these points suggest that AI research devalues human life.

Many futurists believe that artificial intelligence will ultimately transcend the limits of progress. Ray Kurzweil has used Moore's law (which describes the relentless exponential improvement in digital technology) to calculate that desktop computers will have the same processing power as human brains by the year 2029. He also predicts that by 2045 artificial intelligence will reach a point where it is able to improve itself at a rate that far exceeds anything conceivable in the past, a scenario that science fiction writer Vernor Vinge named the "singularity".

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