

Prejudice Against Robots Should Be Discarded

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If robots could beat human beings over open-ended questions, then that should be shocking.

Some professionals in the go community, who once vowed solemnly that human would win in the competition, will find it difficult to see such a result. Yet for me, I am not surprised. Although I did not make any forecast on the result simply because too many factors are involved, still I believe that artificial intelligence will be the ultimate winner, if not this time. I agree with what most people say online, that go is a game with fixed rules – a closed question, and sooner or later machine will undoubtedly defeat human on such closed questions of any field. For example, when a human and a robot are playing football together, if the game rules were changed during the game, the human would be able to keep playing; yet for the robot, it is difficult for it to respond in a short time because the robot is just programmed for fixed-rule activities. Therefore, what strikes me is not that Alphago defeated human being in the go-playing, but that one day robots can compete with human on open questions such as writing, painting and designing.

Study of artificial intelligence requires preparation from the perspective of Ethics.

Stephen Hawking claims on several occasions that as artificial intelligence develops further, it is not impossible that one day robot could be strong enough to result in the demise of human. I am doubted about that. However, what is certain is that studying artificial from the perspective of Ethics should be added to the total research map. In Hawking's description, artificial intelligence would ultimately tread over human, which not only refers to that artificial intelligence would take over the jobs from human beings, but that robots would completely exceed human in terms of both physical and mental power. Such an imagination is still a blur in the distance. More persuasive evidence should be gathered to prove robot's abilities. Otherwise it is too early to draw the conclusion.

I always believe that all products need the guidance from Ethics if they were to be used in an ethically right way, and since robot obviously is one kind of products, it is without exception. The current information technology has already presented threat to the safety of personal privacy.

If robots could beat human beings over open-ended questions, then that should be shocking. As study about artificial intelligence explores deeper, it is essential to look at the issue from the perspective of Ethics and human beings should remove the prejudice against robots.

Big data, for instance, which is as influential as artificial intelligence, would inflict some negative impact on human's personal privacy, if not used correctly. It is urgent, therefore, to realize a balance between the promotion of big data technology and the protection of citizen's right of privacy. By the same token, it is significant to study how to minimize the damage that a robot could cause on human being. The discussion on setting industrial safety standards through robot encoding is a progress in this regard. Such considerations shall be carried out far before the artificial intelligence is powerful enough to cause that damage.

When philosophers contemplate industrial ethical problems, the damage which could be caused upon human beings by potential industrial accidents will be taken into discussion. Moreover, it is also significant to tackle the source of danger once it happened and track back the causes to those who should be held accountable. For example, when a car broke down, it should be made clear whether the problem lies in the engine, driver or the scheduling. One tricky issue about robots is that once technology reaches certain level and enables robot to think and make decision independently, and such self decision-making ability presents certain threat to the safety of human being, how should we assess and determine the responsibilities of the robots? This is a significant question. It seems absurd to bring the robots under justice within the current legal system, but this is exactly the kind of question that philosophers deal with. Perhaps this is why it is popular to bring philosophers into the discussion about the ethical principles of robotics in Western world (e.g. Google).

Prejudice against robots should be removed.

People always worry that what if someday robot may cause the extinction of human race. Such anxiety is just similar to what we think about extra-terrestrial beings. What good it will do as they come from so far away just to say hello to us? Will they try to kill us? Possibly this is their real motivation. Such prejudice also exists on the issue of robots. But let's just suppose that someday the intelligence of robots would exceed human's, why do they need to kill us? Human beings possess a high level of intelligence, so much so that we can cultivate our responsibilities for nature: that we should protect the environment around us, that we should not kill other creatures which share the planet with us and that we understand the values of environmental protection. Why wouldn't robot have a peaceful coexistence with human beings? Why wouldn't robots share the beautiful planet with all creatures? What if they believe in religion belief just as all the sincere human religious practitioners do that all should be treated with kindness? It is time for us to drop this long-existent prejudice against robots.

Translator/Wen Jieling