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The Robotic Revolution

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The Robotic Revolution

For many years, humans have spent time always trying to figure out what sort of machine would not only make their work easier but also would perform different kinds of job more effectively and efficiently than people. Because of this, various inventions have been made over the years, such as the invention of the light bulb by Thomas Edison, the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell, and the wheel just to name a few.

All these inventions have played vital roles over the years in making humans' life easier and more comfortable. However, with all these machines in place, human still wanted a simpler, comfortable, and also in a way a more sophisticated lifestyle. On account to this, humans came a long way mind boggling what form of invention would perform the very same duties they perform themselves and the result was the invention of robots.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a robot is defined as a machine that is capable of carrying out or performing complex series of actions automatically programmable by a computer. Such objects offer a range of services according to Carla Diana in an article tagged 'Our Talking, Walking Objects' on January 26th 2013. According to Carla the world is headed to a more sophisticated era where talking objects will be the order of the day with regards to the day-to-day affairs of human life.

Moreover, she asserts that robots have found their way into our homes in such ways through hand-held tools, wearable gadgets and counter-top appliances and as house-hold products become smarter, their interactions with us in terms of conversation increase whether verbally or not. Looking at how a domestic pet like the dog responds to his master when sad,

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happy or hungry, Carla states that we will be able to read emotions from our products which in turn give the illusion that the products are 'alive'.

However, the invention of robots has provoked numerous controversies that cannot go unnoticed. One of the most dominant questions that arise is whether robots should be entrusted for the care of the elderly or even young children. In my opinion, in as much as robots are a brilliant form of invention, humans especially those in positions of responsibility should not delegate such duties to robots for a number of reasons. This paper focuses on a number of issues to justify, support my stand, and subsequently provide a counter-argument of the same.

According to Shirkey (2008), robots designed to deliver service are really good at dirty, dangerous, and dull work, such as performing domestic work at home and cleaning of windows and sewers. They play an important role in assisting doctors and surgeons, harvesting fruit, pump gasoline, and at certain times even entertain people. However, the use of such robots is deemed to not only pose anticipator risks but also ethical issues as well; the two most probable areas that pose ethical risk being that of care of children and the elderly.

Globally speaking, the use of such robots to perform such tasks as the mentioned above is a new concept. This is of course with reference to third world countries or developing countries. It is thus important to note that the supply and subsequent use of such machines, robots, is mainly a preserve of the developed countries. However, it also important not to ignore the ethical views of such countries on the same most of which are opposed to the idea of robots taking over human responsibilities, such as child and elderly care with regard to their belief systems and customs.

In context, one would ask; do humans really need these robots to cover the vacuum left socially speaking? Well, in my opinion, it goes without saying that human attention and care can by no means be compared to and replaced with robots and toys. However, in as much as actual human attention supersedes that of robots, it is also rather evident that in most economically developed world countries, most parents simply do not have time to spend with their young ones because of the busy nature of their schedules. It is for this reason that they leave their children hours on end with these rather interesting sophisticated gadgets that serve to cure these children's curiosity until they meet again. The manufacturers of these robots are indeed aware of this fact and it is for this reason that adequate measures have been and continue to be taken to ensure the safety of these machines.

Having acknowledged the safe nature of these robots, it is rather difficult to counter-claim the negative effects of the same, as safety is paramount. Furthermore, it is of note to acknowledge the fact that there has not been any study to prove that long-term exposure of infants to robots has any long-term effects on the child's psychology. However, studies performed on the early developmental stages of the monkey have shown that a severe social dysfunction occurs when the infant animals develop attachments and bonds to inanimate surrogates. Such a finding gives the probable notion that human infants too may be victims of the same thus presenting a questionable need for parents to expose their children to robots to always keep them busy while they are away for the most part of the day.

According to an article done by Robbie Brown on 7th June 2013, robots however, do go a long way into helping children. He highlights a story of a child suffering from chronic heart disorder who by the help of a camera and an internet-enabled robot is able to follow class-room proceedings from her home. In the article Dr. Mataric asserts that children are well able to

understand and adapt more quickly to issues of technology as opposed to adults and thus other school-going children are able to take the robots as their fellow classmates. Robbie, according to the research further connotes the healthy benefits that such robots have with regards to ensuring the children have a social life. A case in point noted is a student by the name Conor, 14, who suffers from a rare lung condition. Conor does not go to school but is able to connect and stay in touch with his friends as he awaits a transplant. However, having stated such merits with regards to robots helping children who are bed-ridden or home-bound due to health matters, it is important to note that the biggest disadvantage about the use of such robots is them collapsing anytime there is no internet connection. Whenever this happens, the child at home is not able to connect with the rest of the class.

On the other hand, with regard to the elderly community, it is worth noting that there is an increasing number of the elderly in the society as compared to the younger generation. Bearing this in mind, the younger generation are in effect are pegged with the responsibility of taking care of the elderly. However, because of the variant ratio between the two sets of generations, there have been insufficient hands to cater for each of the elderly needs. It is for this reason that the 'noble' idea as one would put it, to come up with elderly-care robots was formed. However, according to Shirkey (2008), these elderly people need actual human attention and contact, which is mostly provided by the caregivers. In light of this, another type of robot known as Paro the seal has been manufactured to cater for the desires of personal touch and contact. So, in as much as they suppress the guilt of the relatives and the society as a whole into actually solving this problem, the truth of the matter is that these are just but toys, which do not alleviate the problem of elder isolation.

Sherry Turkle in her book 'Alone Together: The Robotic Movement' on the other hand disagrees with the notion that the elderly are in need of human contact. In fact she asserts that people seem comforted by the idea that if we fail and alienate each other robots will be there to provide stimulations of love. She goes on to give examples that if the children are neglected and the population is aging, there will be robots to take care of them. According to her book, an elderly woman laments of how her robot dog is better than a real dog. She says that the robot dog cannot betray you, die suddenly or even abandon you leaving you very sad and lonely. Because of this, companionate robots are aggressively marketed to the elderly.

In conclusion, it is therefore evident that the question as to the necessity of robots with regard to human domestic day-to-day affairs poses double-edged extensive arguments on the same. This is of course with regard to the merits that robots have in the field of providing children with entertainment in their leisure period and easing the day-to-day routines of the elderly in the society. It will thus be rather pretentious to not acknowledge the fact robots have become a simple salvation to the social problems that the 21st Century brings with it. This is especially with regards to the elderly in the society as they provide them with a more safe and predictable form of companionship (Turkle, 2011). That notwithstanding, there are demerits of the same as children are left void of proper parental care while the elderly are left void of human contact all because there are machines that can do that. Morally speaking, humans should and must be valued over robots. Bearing that in mind, it is also worth noting that we are mortal beings and this by itself should make us value ourselves more than any destroyable gadget regardless of its usefulness to the human race. Life comes in many faces but once it ends it cannot be replaced.

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