

Living with Robots – Part II

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As a scientist, I welcome technological advancement. As a human being with (hopefully) a modicum of critical thinking, I do not possess an unconditional trust in the creators behind the high tech or the consumers who submit unquestionably to their products. The former participates in fierce competition on the global market; the latter is becoming a pliant user of products that more often than not disseminate disinformation.

A statement made by a psychiatrist in the year 1956 explains my reservations in accepting high tech products without questioning their utility and relevance to human life.

“It is the very subservience to technology that constitutes an attack on thinking. The child that is confronted from early youth with all modern devices and gadgets of technology is unwittingly conditioned to millions of associations, sounds, pictures, movements, in which he takes no part. He has no need to think about them. They are too directly connected with his senses.

The child doesn't learn to question his world anymore; the screen offers him answers-ready-made. Even his books offer him no human encounter; the screen people tell him their story in their way.”

Joost A. M. Meerloo. “The Rape of the Mind” 1956.



The year is 2023. Brian Roemmele, an Artificial Intelligence expert has declared that ChatGPT 3.5 and ChatGPT 4.0 may revolutionize the field of treating mental health patients. Apparently, human beings are more comfortable speaking to machines than to their fellow men and women.

“What is happening, quite by accident, is new AI ChatGPT-like platforms are enhancing and assisting medical professionals. My research in using AI for mental health started in the 1980s when I first tried Eliza, built by Joseph Weizenbaum in 1966. It was clear to me and those whom I tested it on (ever the scientist) that we could reveal a deeper and more sensitive aspect of our feeling to a “machine” that does not judge. Of course, Eliza was extremely limited and anyone would lose focus after a period of time as it only could reflect your statement as a question in a Rogerian way. Yet the promise was grand in my mind. Over the decades, I have built some expert systems and early AI systems that would help guide a person with a low crisis period to be more positive and more motivated.”

I became intrigued by Brian Roemmele’s publications and statements and decided to investigate his approach to Artificial Intelligence. Roemmele describes ChatGPT as “Large Language Models (LLM)” built on human language. According to Roemmele, humans are fundamentally emotional creatures, and their language expresses emotions. Nevertheless, AI has no concept of global knowledge; AI is basically a mathematical tensor. [Tensors are mathematical objects that can be used to describe physical properties, just like scalars and vectors. In fact, tensors are merely a generalization of scalars and vectors; a scalar is a zero rank tensor, and a vector is a first rank tensor.]

However, OpenAI, the corporation that generated ChatGPT, never divulged the parameters used to generate the algorithm for Artificial Intelligence. In an interview with Professor Jordan Peterson, Brian Roemmele described algorithm parameters as enablers of creating relationships between words that are statistically likely to clump together.

During my investigation of his work, I surmised that ChatGPT cannot assist doctors in their endeavor to help mentally distressed patients, without considering the most important parameter that might be missing in today’s societies: the almost total social isolation, the lack of communication between human beings, the breakdown of families and communities, the parameters that teach us the language of humanity.

Finally, I would like to comment on the human fragility vis-à-vis the power of high tech. On the 11th of May 2023, there was a direct hit on a building in Rehovot, Israel; one person was killed. A military spokesperson claimed that this tragedy was the result of a technical malfunction in the Iron Dome missile defense system. While an interceptor was fired at the rocket, the missile failed to hit its target. Nevertheless, considering that by Thursday night a total of 866 rockets had been fired towards Israel, the inventors of the highly sophisticated Iron Dome can be proud of their achievement. The most important contribution of this technology to humanity is its ability to save the lives of numerous civilians.

In conclusion, the current trend in the almost uncontrollable growth of high tech seems to be an inevitable process. From a personal perspective, however, I cannot help regarding this progress with a degree of reservation. I am thinking of future generations who will be oblivious to the traditions and culture of their predecessors.

