

AI in One Page

Artificial Intelligence is a topic of media interest at time of writing. In particular, there are worries about its long-term impact on society. Jobs are not the only area of concern. There is even a marginal anxiety about the future of the human race in the face of supposedly 'superior' intelligence. But let us examine these issues.

Firstly, artificial intelligence, as it is at present, is a computing process based on machine neural networks that 'learn' the processes and identities of items within massive databases of material gleaned from the outside world (mainly the Internet). Computer systems establish recognisable patterns within the data (such as what a face looks like, or how language syntax and grammar works), and then can answer questions based upon these accumulated processes.

It seems clear though that this is not intelligence as we would conceive of it in everyday life. We usually recognise intelligence in others beyond simple computing ability. Instead we fuse the raw capacity to organise information with social and communicational behaviours, and overlay these with emotional responses. It is in the broad activities of life that intelligence becomes a human quality, introducing creativity and initiative within our lives. From this principle, it is obvious that machine intelligence is a likely misnomer. Better to term it 'massive data-management computing', or as I sometimes satirically term it: 'machine stupidity'. Contemporary AI systems have no creativity as such (at least, not as we know it). They have no intentionality, or if they do, it is of a totally alien type. Ignoring these doubtful exceptions, it is in the intentions of AI's creators that the worries arise. How AI is used is the major concern of most folk, rather than AI itself.

There is also the issue of AI minds. Could a machine ever 'think' as human beings do? The difficulty here is in quantifying a phenomenological matter. Human mental activity is generated by brain activity, but is not synonymous with it. By that, it is meant that, though we know we are dependent on our brain to think, we do not conceive of the brain as being the 'thinking thing' that Descartes discussed in his work. The brain may generate thinking, but it is not thinking in itself. No individual neuron thinks. No specific portion of the brain thinks for you. 'You', as a whole, do the thinking. This is the main premise upon which we judge ourselves as independent entities.

Can a machine achieve this same phenomenological process? That is an unknown question. But what is clear, is that a machine does not have to be innately (or, phenomenally) thinking to be able to be recognised as an independent entity worthy of rights and protections. A simulation of sufficient power and credibility would be enough. After all, we recognise the realness of other human beings purely on their behaviours and communications. We do not know anything about their internal mental workings. Therefore, it seems clear that we would be forced, in the face of a supremely credible AI simulation, to deal with a machine as if it were an entity similar to our own.