The human or the robot?

text de Claudia Catana

I've decided to write about this topic after hearing my 3-year-old son saying that he wants to be a robot, not a child. I've tried to understand his choice. But as expected, his answer didn't trigger any revelation, the child doesn't know why, he simply wants this. The universe at his age is full of wonderful possibilities and I don't want to crash it for him. Who knows?
But he managed to increase my interest for the subject and for the questions that have been hunting humanity for quite some time, some of them for decades:

Will robots leave people without jobs for the next 50 years? Will Covid-19 context accelerate the use of robots in taking on human tasks? What are the human characteristics that a robot cannot replicate? Which is better: artificial intelligence or human intelligence? The relationship with robots: good or bad for humans? Will robots bring the end of humanity as we know it today?

The questions are not new, science and technology personalities such as Stephen Hawking, Murray Shanahan, Hans Rosling, Bill Gates and Elon Musk have tried to answer them over time. The global consultant McKinsey predicted in 2017 report that 33% of workers in the US would be replaced by automation and robots by 2030, which is within 10 years. But the truth is that we don't know what the future holds.

It is hard to believe that in the near future we will be able to create robots with a higher intelligence than humans do, given that the human brain is still unknown to researchers, who so far have managed to penetrate only a tiny percentage of brain's mysteries and potential. Researcher Cristof Koch said that we do not even understand how a worm's brain works, meaning 302 neurons and 7000 neural connections, compared to the 86 billion (10^9) neurons linked by 100 trillion (10^{12}) synapses in the human brain. On the other hand, a robot's brain is „machine learning" algorithms, data bits that cross electrical circuits with astonishing speed and that can solve a problem as long as the answer is in data sets that can be accessed.

Judging by data processing, human intelligence is indeed inferior to artificial intelligence: the time it takes the human brain to identify and classify an image, a robot's brain processes millions of images. The advantages of robots are obvious: speed of execution, accuracy, lack of biases, constant productivity.

If we talk about critical thinking, the human brain takes the lead. Unlike the robot, the human is able to translate information into new contexts and learn from mistakes. The human brain has extraordinary neuroplasticity and can learn at any age. Humans make decisions based on experience, while even the most advanced robots, after 60 years of research and development, can hardly compete with the mobility of a 6-year-old child.

In addition, as Viktor Frankl was saying in his book "Man's search for meaning": *„The one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one's freedom is the ability to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance".* It's about free will, it's up to us how we choose to act and react, which a robot cannot do.

Therefore, artificial intelligence is very suitable for repetitive tasks, very clearly defined and which can be represented by data. Instead, human intelligence cannot be replaced for tasks that require handling abstract ideas from several domains, adapting to new situations and environments based on gained experience.

We live in an era similar to post-industrial revolution, when services replaced manufacturing, in which humanity feels the need for progress, but at the same time fears it. Robots were created by humans to help humans, to ease their work. After all, why should human waste his evanescent existence performing activities that can be solved much better and faster by a robot? Since there are now technologies that allow the automation of certain tasks, human will be able to use his intelligence and develop skills in creative, social, artistic, sports, literature, poetry areas that are closer to the intrinsic values of the human being.

At the same time, access to robots must not replace interpersonal relations, we must not spend more time in their company than in humans. Human is a surprising being, able to reinvent himself, to learn from his own mistakes, with critical thinking, with dreams and purpose, with beautiful manifestations (love, joy, empathy, compassion, forgiveness, gentleness, kindness, generosity, creativity) and less beautiful (anger, fear, sadness, hatred, anger, victimization, blame, egocentrism, hypocrisy). But we want to see and experience this whole range of emotions, especially the beautiful ones, living without feelings would make our existence so empty. So, let's celebrate the HUMAN with all his qualities and flaws and be grateful for this privilege.

What do you think? Please do share your thoughts with us. If we want to find out more about this, please watch the videos below.

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AI - friend or foe? How machines could make us more human | Guto Harri | TEDxCardiffUniversity
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Can we build human-like AI? Should we? | Harri Valpola | TEDxHelsinkiUniversity