

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND HUMAN ATTRIBUTES: A MORAL APPRAISAL

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The crave for the invention of artificial intelligence whose working system is modeled to imitate the human person by scientists and technologists, coupled with success recorded so far in the project, gave rise to a debate in which the following philosophical questions are posed: can there be artificial minds? Can or should machines be regarded as intelligent? Can or should machines be regarded as human companions or human rivals? Is it wise to analyze the human person in a mechanistic way without falling into moral problems? What is/are the ontological difference(s) between the human person and other artifacts? What could be the possible effect(s) of artificial intelligence on our conception and understanding of human life and personhood?

The moral question(s) concerning artificial intelligence represent(s) our central concern in this essay. Although the debate has both social and religious implications, arguments from this perspective are often received with bias. Hence moral implications of such exercise remain appealing to modern minds. If rationality, for instance, which used to be the distinctive defining characteristic of the human person is subject to doubt because some artifacts or servomechanisms could perform what could be regarded as intelligent activities, then a recourse needs to be made to simple attributes or features of the human person that are lacking in servomechanisms. This is why the debate becomes a challenge to both philosophers and scientists alike.

In order to explicate the issue on hands, this paper adopts a comparative approach. Evaluation and conclusion will follow. However, I shall opt for a heuristic rather than dogmatic position.

The Science of Artificial Intelligence

The field of science concerned with artificial intelligence is called cybernetics. It was used as a term in 1948 by Norbert Wiener. As a discipline, F.G. Georges (1982) says it studies control and communication in animals, human beings and machines. Hence, the attempt is to examine the composition of the human brain and its operations so as to build or construct machines that can imitate the working system of the human brain. This is why E. Emerson and C. Forbes defined artificial intelligence as the enterprise "of writing computer programs that can do things that we would consider intelligent if done by human beings, the enterprise of constructing a mind."¹ The question is: can the mind be constructed artificially and still be called mind in the real sense of the term?

In the same vein, J. Weizenbaum says artificial intelligence becomes

an effort to erect a machine on the model of man which will have its childhood, learn language as a child does, gain its knowledge of things around him by perceiving the world through its organs and ultimately to contemplate the whole domain of human thought.²

It implies that the effort is directed towards creating artificial brain or mind which will enable us to see the relationship between the human being and machines in terms of their functions and efficiency. It also would mean the examination or the analysis of the human brain processes using computational language or coded programme installed in the computer. By this, the human brain is likened with computer brain, as the human heart is said to represent the pump in the machine. This possibly explains the position of Roger Schank when he says "artificial intelligence

¹ Allen Emerson et. al., *The Invention of the Computer Culture* (Illinois Intervarsity Press) p.13.

² J. Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1976), pp. 202-203.

is just a new term for the study of the mind and the way to the mind through language."³ We should agree with Schank because, if the human brain is equivalent to computer brain, then the human being can be explained mechanically and science would be able to give a complete account of the human being. But we know that this is impossible. As K. Sayre argued: "it follows from the very nature of scientific inquiry that scientists are segregated into diverse competencies, none of which is capable of synthesizing a comprehensive conception of man..."⁴

Secondly, the question of the origin and the sacredness of human life becomes useless. To describe the human being as rational is to fall into the error of relativism. This is why the debate becomes a controversial one. As Jonathan Cohen expressed it, the effort has been to compare the familiar mental activities and experiences of men such as thinking up a joke a imagining an invention, with the actual or possible performance of servomechanisms, computers and other programmed artifacts.⁵

This is the consequence of the challenge posed by A. Turing, a challenge which initiates the necessity of showing the essential difference between man and machine. This is crucial, since it is difficult to agree that the human mind is a set of determined programmes. It threatens human freedom. It raises the questions: How can we build intelligence mechanically? How do we explain the concepts of consciousness, originality, intentionality, perception, imagination, feeling, emotion, love, empathy, the capacity for morality and judgment which are features human beings display in life? For these questions to be clear, we must begin first by analyzing the concept of man by inquiring into what the human person is.

³ Allen Emerson et. al. Op cit p. 62.

⁴ Kenneth M. Sayre, *Cybernetic and the Philosophy of Mind* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p.7.

⁵ Jonathan Cohen, "Can there be Artificial Mind" in *Philosophy Journal* vol. XVI 1954-1956 p.36.

What is the human person?

The human person is a being endowed with reason. As a dynamic and moral being, his existence has a purpose, he could be held responsible for all his actions. As a composite being, he has both physical and spiritual entities co-joined, that is body and soul. Hence, it has been argued that the origin of human life is not by mere chance. The biblical image shows man as the steward of creation, responsible for the transformation of the world through his intelligence as clearly displayed in science and technology today. From the above, man is distinct from other creatures and servomechanisms, since his unique characteristics include rationality (brain) consciousness, self transcendence, a being of culture, language and value. As a moral being, he can express his emotions and can make prompt judgment.

The Brain

The brain is considered as the seat of knowledge. It consists of about 10 billion complicated beautifully arranged cells immersed in chemical fluid containing hormones and neuropeptides that control human behaviour. The brain has the capacity of self replacement that makes its working system and composition a marvel to scientists till date. Through it, the human person is able to reason and acquire knowledge, able to make decisions or express himself in different situations. With this, can we say that the computer has a brain capable of thinking and conscious of its thinking processes, or, can artificial minds exist?

Thinking is an activity of a rational being associated with mental processes consciously done by man and expressed through language or other behavioural manifestations. This includes the capacity to reflect, listen, deliberate, choosing, feeling, loving, etc. If this is the case, then the explanation offered by Donald Mackay with reference to mind as nothing but a bunch of computerized programme admittedly remains questionable, objectionable, doubtful and above all, difficult to justify.

The human brain therefore is different from that of the computer and designed differently. Computer is a product of human intelligence, hence computer cannot produce man. We must ask: Can a creature be superior to his creator or inventor? Metaphysically, each existent only acts in accordance with its own mode of being. Computers being product of human intelligence can only work on coded programmes following the grammatical rules (other wise called syntax) of their designer. Even though, it is argued that computer can work on the principle of randomization, it is necessary to point out that even the randomization is dependent on the algorithm upon which it is built (algorithm is a system of programme designed and loaded into a computing unit such that the unit following the programme is able to arrive at a solution to a given problem). Such actions are predictable and determinable. On the basis of this, we can argue that intelligence means logic, pattern recognition and the ability to change actions, behaviour and thoughts in response to changes in the physical, intellectual or social environment by setting new goals. But can artificial intelligence set goal for self like human persons?

Personhood

Can artificial intelligence be regarded as the human person? The human person is a composite being. For Boethius a person is an individual substance of rational nature. And Jacques Maritain says whenever we say that a man is a person, we mean he is more than a mere parcel of matter, more than an individual element in nature... there is in him a richer and nobler existence.

The above is revealed through a metaphysical study of the human person that deals with the questions of who is man and who is the supreme cause of his being, such that the nature, origin and the ultimate end of man are critically examined. This study is facilitated through the acquired data from the transcendental and phenomenological analysis of the human actions. It reveals that human actions have both spiritual and physical dimensions and remain meaningful, purposeful and consciously done. If this is the case, then human actions remain superior to the functions performed by a computer or servomechanisms and cannot be placed at the

same level. Two reasons can be given for this: firstly, man is an opened being and secondly, man is an unfulfilled project. Marx Scheler describes this openness as "the unique freedom of man to inquire and to move beyond every given regulation of his existence."⁶ Through his openness the human person is able to acquire new experiences in its varied forms and has the capacity to respond to reality perceived at every given time. This is shown in the quality of work of his work. Through work, the human person demonstrates the capacity to transform his environment to suit his purpose or intention and thereby improve himself, especially with reference to development. In this regard, Dietmar Lenfers (1989) argues that.

the food gatherer invents agriculture, the hunter learns to tame animals and tends his flock and herds. More specialized skills lead to a division of labour, a trade and urbanization.... The invention of powerful engines initiates the process of industrialization, electricity and electronic devices give access to hitherto unimaginable technical achievement.⁷

Secondly, as an unfulfilled project, the human person seeks union with the divine, and this enables him to transcend the physical realm to the spiritual sphere. By transcendence, we mean the capacity to go beyond the material spheres in thought, will and action. Machines of whatever mode do not have these qualities. The claim is true because machines neither possess life in the philosophical nor in the ontological application of the term. Because the idea of life connotes the sense of purpose, the human person as an existential being exists for a purpose and is conscious of the purpose. This explains why he engages in meaningful puzzles. For anything to be alive, it would mean it has the capacity to grow and reproduce.

⁶ Max Scheler, *Man's Place in Nature*. Transl. Hans Meyerhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 35.

⁷ Dietmar Lenfers, *The Marvel of Human Being*, (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1989), p. 53.

But, apart from rationality, there are other human attributes lacking in machines. Some of these we shall now examine.

Emotional Capacity

The human person is not only rational but also emotional and capable of expressing this feeling or sentiment in varied ways, at different times or situations. Through feeling, personal experience of the world and the things around him, and through his encounters in the society, he is able to grow as a social being. The human emotional capacity and feeling could clearly be manifested in various behavioural moods. He could be happy or sad, laugh or weep, love or hate, feel depressed or be ashamed of his family background or appreciate it etc.

A clear emotional expression is mostly expressed when a close relative dies, the mood is quite different from when a cousin is celebrating his/her birthday or graduation. These are features of conscious human activities. Machines do not possess the capacity to establish intimacy, nor the ability to recognize others or feel loved or be depressed. Machines do not weep even when a vital component part of their operational system is damaged. But the human person has the capacity to know what is right from what is wrong such that he is responsible for his conscious activities. This is why his actions could earn him reward or punishment. He has moral obligations to perform, and he discovers these through the use of reason as entrenched in natural law. For this reason, he should not be manipulated as tools. Justice as a social norm guides his actions towards another and obliges him to do that which promotes the social good. This why man demands justice and could appeal to justice.

From the above it is out of order if not impossible to defend the claim that machines or artifacts are moral beings. For it is not possible to award blames or reward to machines. Machines do not feel the sense of guilt. Incapable of moral actions, they cannot be said to be just or unjust in their mechanical operations, nor can they be responsible for others in the way human beings are.

Judgment Capacity

It is not contradictory to say that artifacts or artificial intelligence of whatever kind, even if they are considered while performing complex mechanical functions, lack human sense and the capacity to make judgment. They cannot respond adequately and promptly to varied and complex life situations. The human person, however, can find solutions to daily problems affecting his life, job, and environment and can adapt quickly. For example, if there is fire accident suddenly in a house in which there are a computer and a human being playing chess together, the human being can easily look for a means of putting out the fire or seek the assistance of others or escape. The machine would do nothing.

Furthermore, making moral decisions and judgments are natural and conscious activities of the human person. He knows what is good for him or for others and knows what could harm him or others. This is why taking moral decision is a unique capacity man is endowed with. One may however argue that deviants, such as rapists, thieves, drug addicts etc ought to know the effects of their actions on others if all men had the capacity for morality. But the fact that such people are described as deviants implies that their behavioural disposition is already impaired, hence not psychologically balanced.

From the above, we can see that the notion of artificial intelligence has negative implications on human life and on the society. First the publicity accorded artificial intelligence has created general interest in many without looking at the effects it has on them. This attitude is already affecting the way we view man, life and reality. Many can no longer see the difference between man and machines. Such attitude raises moral questions. It negates human dignity as a moral being. J. Weizenbaum clearly expresses it thus:

We have embraced the machine metaphor as a description of ourselves and our institutions much too readily, that in this embrace we are in acute danger of yielding what is essentially

human—our dignity, our love, our trust, to ideas and artifacts that do not deserve it and that may destroy us.⁸

This is the danger of ascribing to machines the essential qualities of human beings. It creates in many the idea that the human person can be created and destroyed at will if considered unproductive in the society. Such attitude reinforces views favourable to abortion and euthanasia. It can create massive unemployment when machines are made to replace human beings, and it renders education useless. A culture of hostility and violence can easily emerge. Excessive attachment to computer, as shown by research, can produce psychological problems such as depression, loneliness, impatience, wrong conception of life, lack of love and affection, loss of empathy, inability to cope with real life problems, and, in marriage, lack of sexual responsiveness through withdrawal since such person becomes selfish in his/her life. Techno-centred persons, including children, become artificial in mind. They are best described as actors. Allen Amerson describes these problems as techno-stress.

The writer's position is that artificial mind cannot be created, neither can we not should we ascribe rationality to any form of mechanical device(s) since they lack life, mind, consciousness, self transcendence, will, capacity for emotion, capacity for morality and judgment nor do they possess personality. It is a known fact that science and technology have helped us greatly in production and in other facets of human needs. Yet, products of science cannot be equated with the human person. Rather these instruments testify to human creative skill, and hence, are products of human intelligence. We cannot for example have a society occupied by machines with institutionalized form of government and social life, associated with culture, language and values.

The use of artificial intelligence in academic debate can only be used in the analogical or metaphysical levels. In such a case, it becomes a language game, a game that is to be interpreted and understood within the limited context of function and productivity. Any invention that will debase the dignity and freedom of man needs to be criticized and rejected.

⁸ J. Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason* (San Francisco, W.H. Freeman, 1976), pp. 202-203.

This is why this debate should not be left for scientists alone. Philosophers should help bring out its implications for our society in particular, and for humanity in general. It is then that the debate will be meaningful.

ON THE LIMITATIONS OF EXISTENTIALISM

Emmanuel Ogundele

For some decades now, the philosophical trend called existentialism has become prominent as well as influential. Existentialism, as a philosophical movement came into reckoning in Europe soon after the end of the Second World War. Historians of philosophy differ concerning the antecedents of this trend of thought. While some would regard Blaise Pascal as the father of existentialism understandably due to his preference for the God of Scripture over the God of the philosophers, others consider Kierkegaard as the founder of existentialism as a result of his approach of not wanting to situate God nor people's relationship with him within a systematic philosophy. Others who have been labeled as existentialists are Friedrich Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Franz Kafka to mention just a few.

What then is existentialism? Most books on existentialism prefer to describe rather than define existentialism. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volumes 3&4 in avoiding to define existentialism says "...That two writers claim to be existentialists does not entail their agreement on any one cardinal point. Consequently, to define existentialism by means of a set of philosophical formulas could be very misleading."¹ This said position is further buttressed by the fact that Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre are considered as existentialists even though Kierkegaard was theist while the other two are avowed atheists. Consequently, while there are differences between the various philosophical positions considered as existentialist, there are some familiar themes occupying the attention of the existentialist movement. Existentialism as a philosophical trend could also be considered as a reaction to certain orientations in philosophy both within the ancient and

¹ Paul Edwards, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1967), p.147.