



The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Part-3 Employees or Robots?

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In the first two parts of this series, I had examined the structural issues around data analysis, profiling and digital cloning. These are situations in which we are either unknowing or unwilling participants by following the herd or complying with laws or perhaps, just subject to hacking and illegal activities from the dark web.



In this part let us examine an area which is going to become a very prevalent topic in the next year or so. So let me begin with a comic book I used to read which was very popular in the 1960s and provided a peek into the future- **“Magnus the Robot Fighter”**. In my childhood, I couldn’t fully comprehend the comics but Magnus this futuristic Superhero fought armies of Robots somewhere in the far future. He was a muscular character and wore a Red or Pink costume and pristine white boots and killed these mechanical beasts, in some kind of human form, by a blow to their necks. I didn’t understand then, why he fought them but they kept coming and he kept destroying them. I could understand though, that he was trying to save humankind. So essentially, the Robots were the bad guys. Even though it was far in the future

and far removed from the reality that then existed, none of this felt unbelievable. Now fifty plus years on, no armies of Robots have appeared and perhaps the war that Magnus undertook doesn't look like it is about to happen. But make no mistake, it's going on and is in its evolution.

If it interests you, the term **Robot** literally means "**Forced Labor**". They were meant to help us in performing repetitive and risky tasks. Then about four to five years ago, I was approached by a number of Consultants and Technical Professionals about **Bots** that they had developed. The name brought back memories of the Magnus era Robots. But **Bots (Robotic Process Automation)** were mere pieces of software that could carry out multiple repetitive processes or tasks that people do such as clerical work or accounting related work. Bots make these tasks easier and do them quicker and more accurately than people. So you could have a Bot eg. do an accounting reconciliation and email it to a customer or creditor. **Easy, Efficient, Cost Effective, Quick** were the adjectives used by the developers with regard to Bots. I understood the messages but also that these Bots would spell the end of low end jobs in the corporations in the future. The only comfort seemed to be that they were still trapped in my computer and I could control them.

A year or two later these Bots, the first crustaceans of Artificial Intelligence, were giving way to multiple developments on many fronts- **Driverless cars , Delivery Drones, Robotic Androids**. Suddenly the Magnus Robots are back. They no longer sit within our computers and will move around in our environment. We currently ask questions of **Siri and Alexa**. We are just getting used to a human way of communicating with the Alexas. Soon however, Alexa may be walking with us in the park as a companion. With the **Internet of Things (IoT)** fast developing, machines will be connected and talking to each other powered by our initial thoughts through data captured through our digital profiles. They will get better Ambulatory Articulation and get Smarter as the Algorithms power them to better learning.



All of this is now real and happening all around us. This brings me to the **Ethical Matters** surrounding these developments:

- When Henry Ford and others built their mass production lines for the first Automobiles we had no idea of the impact it might have on our environment and climate. **What excuse do we have now?** We know that employment and livelihoods will suffer with our building Bots, robots powered with AI yet we go on with their speedy development. **Should we not pause and develop a proper course for the future?**
- The industrial revolution came at the turn of the nineteenth century and machines started doing the mundane repetitive tasks of labour. That's already happened to us once now its happening again a century later. **We produced at a scale never seen before and started a culture of consumerism that is wasting away our planet? Should we not learn from our history and evaluate whether this time AI powered Robots will make us humans waste away?**

Magnus now makes sense ... but the simple ways in which he destroyed Robots will not work.. no Karate chop to the Robots mechanical neck will work. These new robots have completely different forms.

One thing's for sure .. if Magnus lived today, he would have to change his pristine white boots to some other colour and material for the tasks that lie ahead .

This series continues....