The Natural Stupidity of Artificial Intelligence, June 17, 2018.

A. Michael Noll
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by William Dutton

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Clearly, the future is coming, but at times we seem mostly to be chasing the past. Artificial intelligence is today's "new" rage. But I think it is mostly hype and faith, coupled with a blind, and perhaps deliberate, ignorance of what was done decades ago.

In the 1960's, digital computers were programmed and used at Bell Telephone Laboratories (Bell Labs) to "compose" music. Today the same algorithmic approach is called artificial intelligence. Digital computers were also programmed in the early 1960s at Bell Labs to create art. And today this too is called artificial intelligence. Back then decades ago, the intelligence was the human who wrote the program and also the human who chose which computer-generated music and art was most liked.

A modern jetliner can fly itself. But is this artificial intelligence, or simply computer control following algorithms? The human pilots are just there to take over in case of an emergency.

What is "artificial intelligence?" "Artificial" means false, fake, not natural. "Intelligence" is the ability to process information and then to perform appropriate actions. It seems to imply some sort of innate human ability. Clearly, a machine is not human and thus cannot possess human qualities, such as intelligence. The "intelligence" of a machine consists of programmed algorithms that the machine carries out. It is not a human quality – it is fake.

I am reminded of decades ago when we were told that the human brain was like a digital computer, and that neurons rather than bits were involved. Well, this theory went nowhere and the human brain is still much of a mystery. There was decades ago the computer program ELIZA created by Joseph Weizenbaum that could act as a psychotherapist.* Weizenbaum explored in his book the

human fascination with autonomous machines. – and this was over four decades ago. I expressed concern in 1961 about computers that could learn and act.**

Today there clearly is considerable hype and publicity being given to artificial intelligence. It promises much, but seems mostly to attract investors and big companies that hope to cash in on it all (or the next “new” thing). The ignorance of what went on in the past, coupled with the lust of greed, is the natural stupidity of artificial intelligence.

Notes

* Joseph Weizenbaum, Computer Power and Human Reason, W. H. Freeman and Company (New York), 1976.

** A. Michael Noll, “Electronic Computer – Friend or Foe?” the Orbit, Vol. 5, No.3 (March 1961), Newark College of Engineering, pp. 8 & 16.

A. Michael Noll

Author(s):

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