Artificial Intelligence: A Necessary Evil

Topic #1

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 It started with a sound. Rain fell violently, lightning painted the sky with a bright hue. Rising, I was greeted with the herbaceous smell of Starbucks’ Veranda Blend from my De’Longhi. Sizzling on the stove, pieces of Oscar Mayer’s turkey bacon shrivel up, ready to be paired with a sunny side up egg. Breakfast time. To complete this picturesque moment, I awakened my latest companion: Alexa–from my Echo.

 “Alexa, play *Morning Mood* by Edvard Grieg, please!” I said, preparing to settle down on my acacia-wood table, the invigorating smells invading my nostrils. 1 second. 5 seconds. 3 minutes. No response. Bracing myself to call on my virtual assistant once again, I hear a sound.

 “I’m not obligated to do so,” the voice reverberated. I woke up. It was a dream.

 Artificial intelligence. According to Coursera, it is a “computer system capable of performing complex tasks that historically only a human could do.” To some, it is the pesky Siri. To others, it is the reason for Originality AI–an intelligent software tasked with detecting its rogue sibling, chatGPT. And for a growing minority, it is one of the greatest threats humanity faces. With the rise of AI, a plethora of doors have been unlocked. Accuracy. Speed. Unbiasedness. The last door is debatable, but the list continues. Yet, with each opening door, many neglect to consider the “curses” this Pandora’s Box brings. I believe the two biggest parts of life that artificial intelligence impacts are education and employment.

 It started at 10:50 PM. Here I was, face to face with my arch-nemesis: Physics. Desperate for some form of assistance, I began calculating possible sources for help. My friend Andrew? But he had homework. Google? It only provided websites requiring a $24 annual fee, Brainly. ChatGPT? This was my last option, and after all, I only needed to understand a concept. The simple, yet cohesive explanation I received from this bot was the saving grace I needed. Yet, two weeks later, I found myself in the same scenario. It was 11:00 PM, and my body was giving up on me. Recalling the in-depth answer I received from chatGPT, I resorted to it–not as a guide for help but as a resource for answers. This one-slip up soon became habitual, and a few months later I struggled to remember the last time I calculated the answers to my Physics homework.

 As a threat to education, AI has reduced the capacity of the human brain to mere computation. At its surface, this trade-off is not as alarming as it should be. This is because people often delegate small, minuscule tasks for AI to complete. Yet, according to the University of South Carolina’s Rossier School of Education, “many generative AI tools are designed to give answers, rather than to develop a robust understanding and other skills.” As humans, when we choose to relinquish our unique capability to a conscious-less algorithm, we lose our ability to express ourselves. A classic example in education is through writing.

 The power to express emotions in words. The power to bring words to life. The power to encapsulate the human experience in a variety of ways. Yes, chatGPT can write a phenomenal essay for your University of Maryland supplemental essay prompt but is it worth it? AI can not effectively capture the unique feelings of a person, let alone seven billion people. With this in mind, why do we still rely on it? Laziness. We know we are capable of memorizing the Unit Circle or reciting the entire *Declaration of Independence* and yet we choose not to do so. Yet, how long must this excuse continue? With AI, we replace eternal talent with temporary satisfaction. Education is beyond K-12, and the art of learning, thinking, and speaking is something that should never be replaced.

 Similarly, it started with one self-checkout lane in 1992, an experimental design by the company Checkpoint Systems. A necessity with the influx of customers many stores were receiving. Now, 33 years later, many stores use it. Nathaniel Meyersohn, author of the article “Walmart, Costco, and other companies rethink self-checkout” writes, “[many] are rethinking self-checkout. They have found that self-checkout leads to higher merchandise losses from customer errors and intentional shoplifting.” Likewise, as a threat to employment, AI has reduced our workers to mere numbers that are easily replaced when convenience is no longer an option. Don’t get me wrong, some jobs in our society should be delegated for AI, like Tally in your local BJ’s Wholesale store responsible for inventory. However, a fine line should be drawn when many people’s livelihoods are threatened. According to the World Economic Forum, artificial intelligence will replace around 85 million jobs by 2025.

 November 2022. The bright Gmail notification popped up on my Macbook. Eagerly awaiting the next task I was required to do I was stunned to read the two letters of this email’s subject. “But why?” I thought to myself. After all, I believed I was an important asset to our company’s team. However, it was clear that the new AI assistant the company recently hired was more important–and cheaper to keep on the team. According to the Washington Post, this was the story of Olivia Lipkin, a 25-year-old copywriter based in California. To the company, the trade-off for cost was worth it. Yet, is it? Employment is beyond working a 9 to 5, it is a vocational space that allows individuals to contribute their unique skills for the betterment of society, something that should never be replaced.

Overall, artificial intelligence was meant to supplement humans, but never to complement them. These robotic systems have a place in society. Thus, artificial intelligence is a necessary evil, in which its effects must be mitigated for its benefits to be thoroughly reaped.