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The Rise of the Robots

Robots that behave, adapt, live, learn, and even love just as humans do used to exist only in the minds of science-fiction writers. These days, however, robots are becoming more and more lifelike and seem to be able to take on increasingly complex tasks. Is creating robots that resemble us in behavior and appearance a step forward, or is our technological ambition clouding our judgment?

Our interactions with machines are usually cold and devoid of emotion, but that's already changing. Recently unveiled in South Korea is the robot named Kibo. This robot can display ten supposedly realistic human emotions. Kibo's features include a voice-recognition microphone and a face-recognition camera, and it can interact with people around it.

Kibo represents an emerging trend that is seeing robots invade facets of our lives once thought impossible for them to function purposefully within. Matilda is a robotic health-care professional designed to assist the elderly. Matilda reads human emotions and responds to them. If Matilda thinks a patient is feeling down, she will email relatives to tell them it would be a good time to pay the patient a visit. There are even some extraordinary robots that go a step further than Matilda as far back as 2010, a team of scientists unveiled prototype robots that could form emotional attachments to people as they interacted with them, just like a young child to a parent.

Not everyone is enthusiastic about having robots that act just like we do, though. Huw Price of Cambridge University wonders how we will prevent super-intelligent robots from autonomously deciding one day that they don't need humans around anymore. These worries surface in such films as *I, Robot*, where intelligent robots become murderers.

We probably don't need to sound the alarm just yet, however. In time, we will likely have to make an evaluation about how much free will, intelligence, and ease of movement we really want robots to have. It will be an exciting and possibly frightening time, depending on how you want to look at it.

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