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חדשות האגודה – ינואר 2017 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy 2017

מועדון הקריאה בחודש ינואר בת"א יעסוק באסופת הסיפורים "היה יהיה" השמינית במספר (אגודה ישראלית למדע בדיוני ולפנטסיה, 2016), ויתקיים ביום חמישי 19/01/2017, ב-19:30, ב-"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2. מנחה: **דפנה קירש**

מועדון הקריאה בחודש ינואר בירושלים יעסוק בספר "בני החורין הקטנים" מאת טרי פראצ'ט (קדמת עדן, 2008), ויתקיים ב-26/01/2017, ב-19:30, בבית הקפה "נגילה", משיח ברוכץ 5, ירושלים. מנחה: **גלי אחיטוב**

כל האירועים של האגודה מופיעים בלוח האירועים (שפע אירועים מעניינים, הרצאות, סדנאות, מפגשים ועוד)

לקבלת עדכונים שוטפים על מפגשי מועדון הקריאה ברחבי הארץ ניתן להצטרף לרשימת התפוצה או לדף האגודה בפייסבוק.

Society information is available (in Hebrew) at the Society's site: <http://www.sf-f.org.il>

HAPPY NEW YEAR – 2017 !!!***This month's roundup:***

- The "WestWorld" TV series and issues of morality
- Excerpts from a related article dealing with Animal and Robot rights
- A quick look at the Lexus Hoverboard ("flying" skateboard)

And, of course, the Sheer Science section by Dr. Doron Calo: *Wouldn't you like the power of the Sun in a jar on your desk?*

– Your editor, Leybl Botwinik

Real Reader Remarks:

Just received a beautiful Chanukah^(*) card, including new US Postal Services Star Trek commemorative stamps and a NYT article clip about Leonard Nimoy "Half-Vulcan. Half-Human. All Role Model" (see: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/02/movies/spock-half-vulcan-half-human-all-outsider-role-model.html>),

from a loyal reader:

... So anyway, I saw in CyberCozen that you received some Canadian Star Trek stamps. I can hardly let Canada outdo the US (although I'm tempted to emigrate there, given recent events here).

Devra K.



(* For the record, there are multiple spellings for this Jewish holiday. The American English one is – like in the card: "Chanukah". The correct Yiddish transliteration is: "Khanike". There are variations with double "n", with and without the final "h", etc.)

WESTWORLD and Morality Issues

- By Leybl Botwinik

WOW – I must say that again: WOW!

The recent *Westworld* TV series is really worth watching, and will probably be the study of many articles and research papers for years to come.

Of course, there are multiple aspects that can be explored and analyzed vis-a-vis the series. For example: A) How the series works technically (e.g. camera work, plot intricacies, acting); B) Technology (Robots, security and tracking system, etc.); C) Social and Moral issues (sex, violence, race and genre issues, excesses, history and frontier life, etc.).

What I'd like to explore here, is the issue of morality and ethics, vis-à-vis the humans and the robots in the story.

Westworld High-tech Theme Park

First, let's understand what the *Westworld* TV series and high-tech theme park is all about.

The 2016 program is based on a 1973 movie of the same name, starring Yul Brynner as a robot gunslinger terrorizing visitors in an adult theme park, the size of a typical amusement park. The place was set up to provide visitors with a feel for a real Western town with life-like robots acting out various roles, only that in the movie, one robot goes rogue and counter to its original programming starts shooting humans. The original story is by SF writer and director Michael Crichton (1942–2008) – also known for “Andromeda Strain” and “Jurassic Park” (which also has the ‘theme park’ idea).

In this take, the *Westworld* theme park is a valley thousands of acres wide, with several towns filled with ‘locals’ who are robots (the animal life as well: horses, snakes). Visitors can join in on themed action in town such as bar fights or bank robberies, or over the nature trails tracking down the bank robbers in a posse, joining the Union army fighting the confederates, etc. Visitors can join such outings as either spectators, or can actually intervene in the fighting, shooting, etc.

The visitors are given special technologically adapted weapons that are capable of shooting and ‘killing’ the robots – literally blowing them apart with ‘real’ bullets and watching them ‘bleed’ and die. The robots can fire on a human but humans cannot be wounded from robot bullets that can and do ‘kill’ robots (except for a sharp pain – imagine Paint Ball). I'm not quite sure how that technology would work – supposedly some kind of ‘smart’ bullet. It's also unclear if a robot wielding a knife or tomahawk or shooting an arrow can harm a human – but it's suggested that humans can't be harmed (at least not seriously). In a fight, they can be kicked and punched – but not fatally harmed.

The visitor's experience is very realistic and interact with the robots who respond exactly how a frontier person would. This is so realistic, that visitors can even have full sexual interaction with the robots – and apparently not know the difference between having intercourse with a real human or a machine.

The robots begin each day by being reset from scratch, with the same scenarios playing again and again, with minor adaptations, depending if they have any interaction with humans – or if they are killed. If killed or shot up, they are then taken off-line by technicians that restore them to a working mode and return them to their ‘role’ – usually overnight. Defective ones are replaced by different ones, and any robots that interact with them (e.g. barman and barmaid/prostitutes) would have their programming re-adapted, as required.

This is interesting, in that each robot is unique and if defective it's just junked and a replacement is programmed to take its place. This is NOT a duplicate of the defective one – but an entirely new robot, with different (though similar) characteristics as the original. There is no ‘cloning’ here (i.e. several versions/models of ‘Henry’ the barman). On the other hand, each robot can be reprogrammed to play

a different role. Each robot's programming includes fine-tuning of specific characteristics, such as aggression level, intellect, spirituality, etc. In other words, although the 'memory' may be wiped – it is still, essentially, the same robot. It just ends up 'acting out' the same, or a new role, again and again – until it finally just wears out and is junked.

Visitors

We can assume that the human visitors are very rich (i.e. entrance fee is very high). The upkeep and maintenance and replacement parts of the robots must be very expensive. The support team of technicians, keeping track of hundreds of robots and preparing new or replacements, testing them at all levels (physical and 'intellectual', etc.) must be very expensive as well. The technology of AI, speech and visual recognition, 'acting' etc. is very sophisticated. Throughout the series, the viewer is shown a glimpse of the various stages of creating the robot shell, the programming and training of the robots, and the tests that are made on them.

Interestingly enough, the theme park also has children visitors (family outings) and conversely, child robots to keep things realistic. When they arrive at the start of their vacation/visit, all visitors are offered suitable theme-oriented clothing and tools/weaponry.

Moral Implications

Visiting a historical recreation site and participating in a 'real Wild West' experience sounds like fun and is 'healthy' from the intellectual point of view. However, the exploitation of the robots should be of great concern.

One new visitor, for example, asks his friend how to recognize/determine which 'person' on the street is human and which is a robot, since everyone is dressed the same and everyone seems to act natural and fit in. His friend says to just shoot him/her, and you'll know. In other words, visitors can indiscriminately shoot, kill, rape, etc. any robot they want to.

While 'rape' is not exactly promoted (since anyone wanting sexual intercourse can get it free at the local saloon), the series does, however, present at least one rape scene between a human and a robot. The robot 'knows' that she is getting raped and 'acts'

accordingly, because she was so programmed. She has the wherewithal to fight back (stronger, faster, smarter than humans) – only she is prohibited from resisting except in a token way (e.g. verbally).

In the movie "Interstellar" one of the robots is about to go out on a 'suicide' mission – but is "OK" with it, since it knows that this is one of the reasons it exists – to take the brunt of danger away from humans. In a way, though, it is aware of its own upcoming demise and that makes it OK for the rest of the team – just as if it were a soldier or policeman whose duty is to protect civilians, who will volunteer to do something risky – because that's what they are trained for. – It's their duty.

The exploitation of the robots to fulfill immoral fantasies seems to be a premise (or at least one of the foundations) of the *Westworld* high-tech theme park. Each robot is programmed with a set of AI-like emotions, habits, feelings, humour, etc. in addition to the skill set required of its 'role' (e.g. cut-throat outlaw, gunslinger, sheriff, prostitute). In addition, the robots interact and act out themed group scenarios to the thrill of the visitors (such as a bank-robbery or a battle between Union and Confederate soldiers, or an Indian war-party attack).

However, the unrestrained freedom to harm, do damage, etc. with respect to both property and robot population, seems unjustified and shocking. Is it really, though? After all, is there that great a difference in 'killing' a mechanical robot versus a 2D / 3D video-game character? If we consider the damage done when shooting up the saloon, breaking bottles and tables – all that is just material damage. But if you shoot up 'innocent' robots – or even a potentially harmful one even though you know that it's 'only' a machine, can we as rational humans accept such behaviour?

If we accept that robots have no souls, then we are only damaging machines. However, to decide that, from a moral point of view, we need to first qualify what a 'soul' is, and what is the role of the 'body'.

Taking a cue from Judaism, the body is primarily a vessel containing the person or personality – also known as the soul. That having been said, we still need to provide for

the body, nourish it, take care of it and not do excessive things with/to it. This is primarily in order to contain the soul in its best shape, because the body and soul are nevertheless connected. Is it then possible, for a human soul to reside inside such a shell – a robot body?

Many years ago, there was a kind of sit-com TV series called “My Mother the Car” (1965-66) about the relationship between a man and his mother. The mother’s soul had been reincarnated as a 1928 Porter automobile. Just like there are people who talk to their animals, or plants, there are those who talk to their cars – or their computers [as I sometimes do ☺]. At about the same time (1967), Harlan Ellison had a short story of his “Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes” published in an anthology entitled “Nebula Award Stories Number Three”. It talks about a Las Vegas slot machine that contains the soul of the woman Maggie. More recently, the movie “Transcendence” has the mind and ‘soul’ of a scientist transferred into a computer.

The above referenced souls in machines, however, pertained to souls of humans that were somehow transported into machines. Who is to say, in *Westworld*, that some human soul didn’t get transferred into a robot that was just shot up? Who is to say, that some nascent soul didn’t just awaken on its own in a robot that has most qualities of humans: mobility, intelligence, memory, speech, etc. What – in fact – makes us human? It’s not the body (the vessel) it’s something more. Who is to say, that a man-made object can’t develop a soul?

The Other Side of the Coin

We often use expressions such as “S/he has no soul” or is “inhuman” – so, does that mean that there are humans among us without souls? Not really, it’s just an expression for someone with a tainted or failed soul.

Man-made ‘objects’ should be treated with respect as well, whether a utensil or tool, or even a book, chair, wall or floor. Even inanimate, non-living objects should not be randomly vandalized, broken, etc. Ergo – robots should be given their proper place in working with and for humans – but not to the point where they are abused. *Westworld* shows up some of the worst in Mankind. It also shows us what robots are capable of – and who knows, they may one day develop their own souls too.

For further reading, here is a related article, well worth your time to look over:

http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/28/if-animals-have-rights-should-robots?mbid=synd_digg&utm_source=howtogeek&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter

I’ve provided some key excerpts for your reading pleasure, here:

If we look back a generation to Apartheid in South Africa, or a bit further back to Nazi Germany and their race laws (and their extermination of millions of innocents who didn’t meet their standards), ... or even further back to the slave trade (and even today it’s still going on) – we could say that soulless people were in charge of selling, buying, exploiting, and disposing of humans like they were no more than chattel.

The Germans, for example, created extreme racially discriminatory laws to differentiate between the “Aryan” *Übermensch* (superior man) and anyone else. In this way, they could ‘justify’ the extermination of Jews and others (such as gypsies and homosexuals) who they named *Untermensch* (inferior man). It then became acceptable (and even recommended) to use, abuse, exploit, torture, experiment on and kill millions of human beings, because they were classified as inhuman or beneath-human (and not worthy of sharing the same planet as them).

Jewish religion and tradition teaches us to treat everything and everyone with respect:

- The frail and infirm, the very young and the very old, intellectually or physically handicapped, the weaker such as orphans and widows, different races, and different religions.
- Plants and animals should not be exploited or misused. We should respect Nature and the natural order of things: vis-à-vis animal rights, there are Jewish Shekhita laws that ensure creatures that we eat will not suffer when their life is taken by a ritual butcher.

NEW YORKER - A CRITIC AT LARGE NOVEMBER 28, 2016 ISSUE

IF ANIMALS HAVE RIGHTS, SHOULD ROBOTS?

We can think of ourselves as an animal's peer—or its protector. What will robots decide about us?

By Nathan Heller

In relation to animals, we can conceive of ourselves as peers or protectors. Robots may soon face the same choice about us.

Harambe, a gorilla, was described as “smart,” “curious,” “courageous,” “magnificent.” But it wasn’t until last spring that Harambe became famous, too.

...

[LB: Heller opens with recounting the recent incident of a child falling into Harambe the gorilla's area at the zoo, and subsequently being killed because he endangered the child's life...]

“One does not meet oneself until one catches the reflection from an eye other than human,” the anthropologist and naturalist Loren Eiseley wrote. In confronting similarity and difference, we are forced to set the limits of our species’ moral reach.

Today, however, reckonings of that sort may come with a twist. In an automated world, the gaze that meets our own might not be organic at all. There’s a growing chance that it will belong to a robot: a new and ever more pervasive kind of independent mind. Traditionally, the serial abuse of Siri or violence toward driverless cars hasn’t stirred up Harambe-like alarm. But, if like-mindedness or mastery is our moral standard, why should artificial life with advanced brains and human guardianships be exempt? Until we can pinpoint animals’ claims on us, we won’t be clear about what we owe robots—or what they owe us.

...

[LB: Heller continues with analogies and insights dealing with FISH, animal rights activists versus anti-abortionists, etc.]

The day *may* come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny. . . . The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?

....

[LB: Heller then recounts the story of the Canadian hitchhiking robot experiment and how it was found torn apart – Not everyone like robots, it seems]

At one point, a roboticist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory built an unlovable, centipede-like robot designed to clear land mines by crawling forward until all its legs were blown off. During a test run, in Arizona, an Army colonel ordered the exercise stopped, because, according to the *Washington Post*, he found the violence to the robot “inhumane.”

By Singer’s standard, this is nonsense. Robots are not living, and we know for sure that they don’t suffer. Why do even hardened colonels, then, feel shades of ethical responsibility toward such systems? A researcher named Kate Darling, with affiliations at M.I.T., Harvard, and Yale, has recently been trying to understand what is at stake in robo bonds of this kind.

In a paper, she names three factors: physicality (the object exists in our space, not onscreen), perceived autonomous movement (the object travels as if with a mind of its own), and social behavior (the robot is programmed to mimic human-type cues).

In an experiment that Darling and her colleagues ran, participants were given Pleos—small baby Camarasaurus robots—and were instructed to interact with them. Then they were told to tie up the Pleos and beat them to death.

Some refused. Some shielded the Pleos from the blows of others. One woman removed her robot's battery to "spare it the pain." In the end, the participants were persuaded to "sacrifice" one whimpering Pleo, sparing the others from their fate.

[LB: Reminds one of the way German SS soldiers were matched up with German Shepard dogs during training, and near the end of their 'boot-camp' ordered to strangle to death the dog they have been interacting with for many weeks – How inhumanly cruel can you get?]

Darling, trying to account for this behavior, suggests that our aversion to abusing lifelike machines comes from "societal values." While the rational part of our mind knows that a Pleo is nothing but circuits, gears, and software—a machine that can be switched off, like a coffeemaker—our sympathetic impulses are fooled, and, because they're fooled, to beat the robot is to train them toward misconduct. (This is the principle of HBO's popular new show "Westworld," on which the abuse of advanced robots is emblematic of human perfidy.)

"There is concern that mistreating an object that reacts in a lifelike way could impact the general feeling of empathy we experience when interacting with other entities," Darling writes. The problem with torturing a robot, in other words, has nothing to do with what a robot is, and everything to do with what we fear most in ourselves.

...

Full article here: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/28/if-animals-have-rights-should-robots>

Just for fun:

Here's How the Lexus Hoverboard Actually Works

Buckle up: "History is gonna change" by [Craig Trudell Yuki Hagiwara](#) August 4, 2015

Introducing the World's First Working Hoverboard

Imagine, if you will, being handed what looks like a skateboard that almost magically hovers an inch or three above the ground. See yourself running, your hand beneath the board as it floats, suspended in midair. Carefully step on it to test out its buoyancy. And then take a running leap onto it—just as you would with your beloved skateboard—only to have it slide out underneath you, leaving you flat on your rear. Welcome to the world of the Lexus hoverboard.

For full article see:

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-24/lexus-builds-a-functional-hoverboard-prototype>

and make sure to see the neat video here:

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2015-08-05/introducing-the-world-s-first-working-hoverboard>



Sheer* Science: Star in a Jar!

(* In memory of Aharon Sheer (ז"ל) – Founding Editor)

– Prepared by: Doron Calo**, PhD (**our CC Sheer Science editor ☺)

Imagine a future with **inexhaustible energy sources**, providing clean energy to all of humanity. This is sci-fi at its best... and also exactly what **fusion energy** is promising to give us. According to new research, this goal is getting ever closer to being realized. The idea is quite simple really – just consider **the sun**. Its massive energy is derived from fusion of lightweight atoms such as **hydrogen** into heavier elements such as **helium**.

Scientists have been working for many years to recreate this stellar process down on Earth (basically, putting a **star in a jar...**) for some very good reasons. For starters, it's **clean** – unlike fission reactions that splits **heavy atoms** to release energy and in the process also generates deadly radioactive **radiation**, nuclear fusion does not. A second reason to go for fusion lies in the fuel: you're only going to need **hydrogen**, which can be easily extracted from **water**. Planet earth currently holds enough hydrogen to fuel fusion reactions for **tens of thousands of years!** And what's more, the by-product of hydrogen is **helium**, a harmless, inert gas.

And we're talking about a **huge amount of energy** that can be safely used by the **entire planet** for a long time. To achieve this, a doughnut-shaped construction called a **tokamak** is used to fuse a mix of **deuterium** and **tritium** (which are isotopes of hydrogen) into **helium**. The fuel has to be heated to insane temperatures (**tens of millions Celsius**) to create **plasma**. They even got a cool name for the gizmo: **stellerator** (that's a combination of stellar and generator, if you didn't get it).

The biggest stellerator in the world, the **Wendelstein 7-X**, was built in Germany and turned on for the first time early in 2016. Recent results show that the experimental reactor **is working**: It successfully generated about **30 cubic meters** of super-hot plasma, using a sophisticated system of **magnetic fields** to safely contain it. An international team of researchers is hard at work to make this crazy sci-fi scenario into a reality, with the goal of having a fully functioning prototype of a power plant ready around the year **2030**.

If this will actually come to pass in our lifetimes, a truly amazing new era will begin for all mankind.

Links:

'Star in a Jar' Fusion Reactor Works and Promises Infinite Energy

<http://www.seeker.com/star-in-a-jar-fusion-reactor-works-and-promises-infinite-energy-2134228965.html>

We'd love to hear your thoughts on any of the above subjects and we may publish some of them!

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