

11 October 2022

### **Reading Response 3**

As new technology develops, there is a conversation about its relationship with people; how it has influenced their lives up until now, how it could continue to do so in the future, and whether that influence is good or bad. A 1999 article written by Nardi and O'Day described the conversation and its authors' opinions on it at the time. They state that these questions and concerns about future technology have been around for a long time, as people are uncertain about how it could affect their lives. The authors propose that some people are optimistic about future technology's potential benefits and others are certain its effects will be negative, and that while both of these groups might seem like opposites they both share a similar way of thinking about technology, which the authors call the "Rhetoric of Inevitability". Both of these groups often portray the 'advancement of technology' as if it had a single defined path, where the only options are to either advance or not advance. The authors seem to consider this a fallacy, one that downplays people's role in designing technology and deciding how it is implemented. Their claimed position is that technology has both potential for helping people but is at risk of being misused, and because of this people should be more aware of the technology around them and their own potential in shaping how that technology is used.

A recurring theme is that of the distinction between people humans and machines becoming less distinct. Up until recently this was mostly in the realm of fiction, in media such as films. Films such as Blade Runner; A.I.; and I, Robot depict human-like machines which are sometimes indistinguishable from humans. Many of these texts ask questions of their

personhood, of how human-like they can or cannot be, and of humans' concerns with these changes. Recently, there have been real-life instances of machines becoming more humanlike, such as robots being designed to not just look like humans but also to perform humanlike tasks. An artificial intelligence made by IBM was designed not to look humanlike, but to be able to compete against humans in a game of Jeopardy without knowing specifically which questions and answers there would be; an interesting result of this is that while the AI won the game in the end, it struggled with some questions the human contestants did not. One robot designed to seem like a human and perform social interactions, Sophia, was granted Saudi Arabian citizenship in an effort to promote technological development. A video about Sophia has an interesting comment by a YouTube user, which despite not being a formal publication is relevant to Nardi & O'Day's concerns; the commenter was born in and lived their entire life in Saudi Arabia but was not granted a Saudi citizenship, and they express disappointment about Sophia being given citizenship at the same time that people who have lived their entire lives there may not be entitled to it. This reflects the concern that sometimes the advancement of technology might be prioritized over the wellbeing of all people.

The news coverage of driverless cars could be considered exemplary of the "Rhetoric of Inevitability". Other than one clip from 2015 showing a car running into a person, most of these clips are uncritical of self-driving cars. They are described as "the future of driving", as something that will help people who struggle with driving to move around cities. What was particularly surprising to me was the portrayal of car-dependent infrastructure, itself used by Nardi & O'Day as an example of technology's negative impacts on people, as something that could not be changed. The benefits and drawbacks of self-driven cars are compared in these

videos only to human-driven cars, but they don't seem to consider that there are problems shared by both that might be solved by taking a different path of technological innovation.

Source for YouTube comment on Sophia video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8Ox6H64yu8&lc=UgylehMiQhn9Wg8pBm54AaABAg>