

Artificial Intelligence is Coming, part II

June, 2017

By Dr. Derek Conte

The podcast I heard and shared last month covering the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, has covered more fascinating Ai news. This is my report on the new podcast, with comment, on the Internet of Things (IoT) conference, May 16-17 in Santa Clara, California. The words of the hosts and speakers will be in italics:

Banners hung everywhere with the phrase, “let’s connect EVERYTHING”. This means connecting to the internet not just through devices but connecting people themselves to the internet, biologically.

(We are undergoing a 4th industrial revolution and it is already upon us though most don’t know it)

The 4 tiers of industrial revolutions were described as:

1) Non- livestock generator power – mechanical engines, turbines, generators, motors via steam, electricity and gasoline. (Before this, animals, men, gravity, wind and water power provided the motive force to do work. This change occurred in the 1830’s)

2) Communication over distance – the telegraph wire, telephone, radio (wireless), TV. (This change occurred in the 1880’s, including vacuum tubes)

3) Electronic data storage and processing–computers and devices. (This began in the 1950’s with the transistor, IBM computers and has accelerated since the mid-1970’s with the microchip and PCs)

4) IoT (the Internet of Things) – billions of sensors will be installed in everyday items (the “things”), however seemingly insignificant, which collect the data of your life. (In reality the number will be more like trillions or quadrillions. Think of toothbrushes, coins, insects, jewelry, tools.....)

The 4th Industrial Revolution they point out will 1) not involve humans as the principals, 2) will lean heavily on robots, sensors, unimaginable internet speeds and, 3) change your perception of how society, borders and nations work.

What is the difference between a “smart device”, a “connected device” and the devices of “Internet of Things”? These new devices will be able to make decisions about their own operation and actually learn.

An oft-used term in almost every presentation was: the “Outcome Based Economy”. In agriculture, for example, a farmer would no longer buy his own tractor to work the land. He will lease computerized equipment from a manufacturer and pay them a royalty based on the yield-per-acre those machines delivered. This would be tracked by many sensors on the machine connected to “the cloud”. (This reminds one of how we now pay for our metered utilities) This tracking model will be extended to the actual seeds as well. Ultimately, the farmer will not “own” anything and the manufacturer will become a partner in the farm. The hosts then noted this was a new type of feudalism; and that eventually, the farmer could easily be replaced by the predicted explosion of robots (mentioned in last month’s article).

Here are some of my personal thoughts shared by the hosts: As machines get smarter and smarter and more efficient, able to reason, think and learn, the need for humans to operate, program, oversee the workings of the world will diminish. Robots will fill more and more historically human-only roles.

We're not talking floor sweeping robots here. More than one man has actually chosen a robot as his bride with rings, gowns, tuxes, wedding ceremonies, guests and all. When does this legally qualify robots as citizens with civil rights? What if the husband tires of his wife, outgrows her, or wants a newer model --- or a human instead? Is a divorce necessary? Will it be a crime if he chose to throw her away, abandon, abuse or destroy his robot? This will be a very deep reordering of our ancient human system of operation.

You may be wondering why this article appears in a traditionally health-oriented column. It is in this respect: the changes we are undergoing seem to have no historical equivalent in terms of their velocity, magnitude or requirement for social recalibration. Humans are biologically unique creatures with deeply-rooted cultural and genetically inherited programs, full of feelings, flaws, fears, loves, virtues, territoriality and violence. The changes we face will shake our sense of who and what we are fundamentally, and force us to question our rightful place in this world. As often discussed in this column, our health is bound tightly to our moods, beliefs and perceptions. Buckle up, world! This is a fascinating time to be alive.

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