

## Sample Essay -- Intelligent Machines

A common theme of science fiction has been the conflict between man and machine. In the recent film, "I, Robot", the protagonist, Will Smith, ends up doing battle against intelligent robots who have dropped their facade of "obedient compliance" and rebelled against their human masters. Today, science fiction is becoming science fact, although not to the extreme presented in the movie. Instead, we have docile machines programmed for efficiencies. Rather than running amok, today's machines are either fixed in place like ATM machines or operating as software interfaces to telephones or the Internet.

But are these machines, programmed for fast, smart and efficient operations causing us to lose human perspective on events? From a personal point of view, I find myself more attached to my iPhone than to the people around me. I'd rather text than talk. Moreover, Internet apps like SnapChat and Instagram don't really let people communicate deeply. These machine driven apps are short-lived. The so-called conversation is gone before it's had a chance to develop.

Things were simpler for us back when the human touch was more commonplace. Even clerks in retail stores seem to have been negatively impacted by the rise of machine technology. Some take our money and type our information into their consoles without even looking up, much less engaging us in conversation. Our mundane daily encounters with retail clerks at department store like Sears or Walmart no longer require basic courtesy and respect. And who hasn't suffered the extreme frustration of being trapped in a phone maze, where a fake computer voice directs you through an endless chain of options until you finally close in on your destination, only to be greeted with a busy signal!

On the other hand, intelligent machines have streamlined business operations, automating various stock market transactions on Wall Street, making the ticker tape a relic of the past. From an efficiency perspective, machines are good at high-speed extremely precise jobs. The space program, in particular, has benefitted from the rise of intelligent machines. We can now outfit space stations and send probes to Jupiter and Mars. Nasa recently, with pinpoint accuracy, landed a remote spacecraft on a comet streaming through the universe at 84,000 miles per hour.

The jury, however, is still out in terms of the ultimate effect, positive or negative, intelligent machines will have on humans. For every bank teller displaced by an ATM, there's a potential opening in the bank's expanding data center. For every video store clerk displaced by Netflix, however, the outlook is not so optimistic. Unhappily, there's a downside to the progress and efficiency brought about by intelligent machines. A certain amount of economic dislocation and loss of human interaction is inevitable. Nonetheless, intelligent machines are challenging our long-standing ideas about what humans are or can be. From a cultural point of view, this opens up a new chapter in human evolution as man and machine work together toward a future of unimagined possibilities.