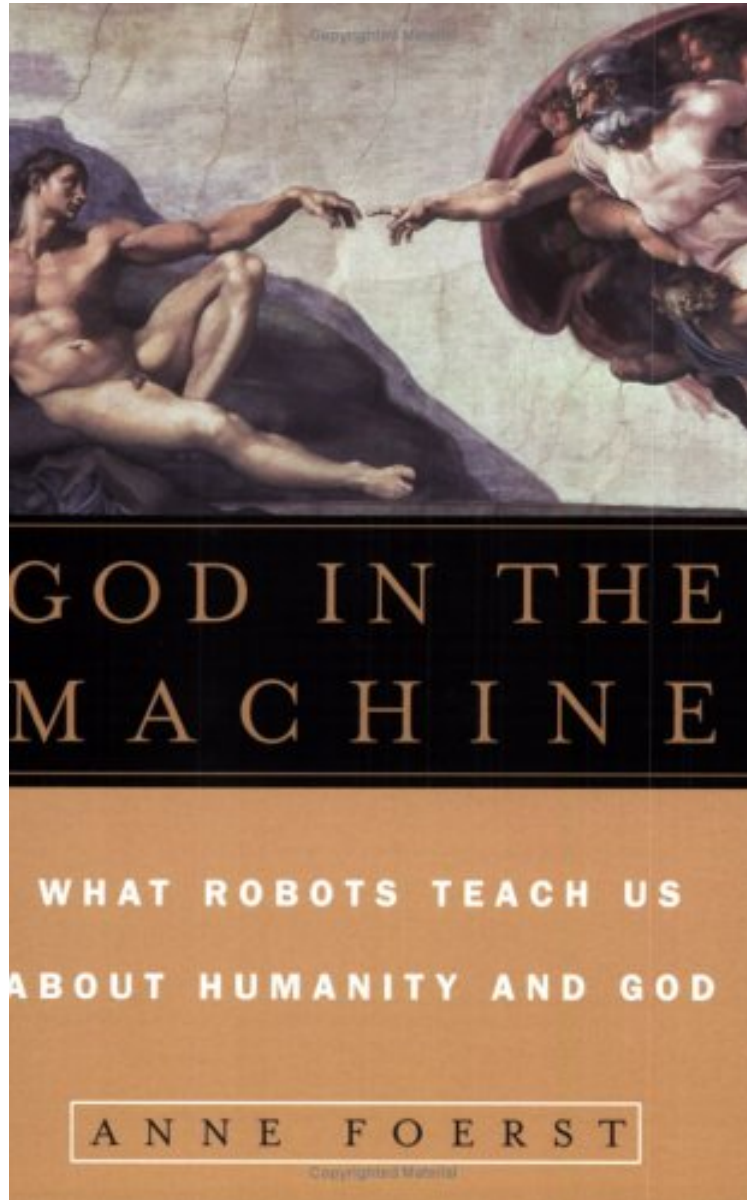


[DOWNLOAD] God in the Machine: What Robots Teach Us About Humanity and God

God in the Machine: What Robots Teach Us About Humanity and God

Anne Foerst

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Anne Foerst : God in the Machine: What Robots Teach Us About Humanity and God before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised God in the Machine: What Robots Teach Us About Humanity and God:

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. An interesting and bold narration

By Dr. Lee D. Carlson

Those readers who have no religious beliefs but yet are interested in or working in the field of artificial intelligence may think that this book would not be very interesting or important, or possibly an apology for a particular religious worldview. When beginning the book this attitude will be reinforced somewhat, since it takes a while for the author to develop her main themes. Once she does however the book is fascinating, and her discussion of some of the issues in artificial intelligence is highly original and insightful. Considering the environment in which she worked it is refreshing to learn that the author was taken seriously, in spite of her overt expression of her religious beliefs. The only minus to the book is that the author concentrates her attention on robotics, which is a very narrow field of artificial intelligence at the present time. Machines can be intelligent to various degrees without looking like humanoids and without interacting with the environment in the manner that the author describes in great detail in the book. Indeed, these machines are more than just the "machines that sit on the desk" to quote the author. No, they cannot move in the world as humans do, but their abilities to perform tasks in a way that cannot be done by humans attests to their cognitive abilities. Along with those who work in the field, the author has developed a deep appreciation of the magnificence of the human machine. She encapsulates her view of humanity not according to the usual classification, but according to human capabilities. Humans can tell stories ("homo narrans"), can stand upright ("homo erectus"), can use technology to change the world ("homo faber"), can engage in creativity ("homo ludens"), and can hold to religious beliefs ("homo religiosus"). There are of course other machines, biological and otherwise, that can do some of these things, but the human machine is unique in being able to do all of them, and then with a relatively low energy requirement. This of course does not make the human machine superior to the others, and in fact humans cannot compete at all with some of the machines of today in certain tasks. Those who build robots though insist on replicating the idiosyncrasies of the human machine, even though these robots may not be useful in any practical sense. The author's goal in the book is to try and understand why the building of these robots has been such an intense activity in the last half-century. It is clear that many do not find the prospect of humanoid robots very pleasant at all. Hollywood movies, with their depiction of machines bent on the annihilation of humankind, are both an expression and cause of this anxiety. But stories of non-human entities possessing high degrees of intelligence have also pervaded our myths and stories long before the invention of film. As an example she describes the myth of the "golem" coming from Jewish mysticism. Interestingly, in some stories, golems are made from clay and constructed through words and numbers. Their purpose is to assist in the understanding of the world, a mythos or paradigm that definitely intersects with the one in artificial intelligence. More interesting in her discussion of "rebuilding ourselves" is the reminder of a peculiar phenomenon that takes place in the artificial intelligence community, indeed in the scientific research community as a whole. This regards the "demystification" or diminishing of awe when a scientific explanation is found for a particular human capability. Indeed, it seems that every time an advance is made in artificial intelligence, such as a machine beating the best backgammon or chess player in the world, it eventually gets dismissed as being merely the result of a sophisticated program, and not as an example of true intelligence. The author of course is not free of biases, as no one can be, whether they are in the scientific profession or not. Her intellectual honesty though is refreshing, and she is unashamed of her devout religious beliefs. She correctly recognizes that there are many in the scientific community who occupy both laboratories and churches, and make significant contributions to science. Whether they are scientists who sometimes practice religion or religionists who sometimes engage in scientific research is perhaps left to debate. But the author believes that these individuals, along with all the rest of humanity, clearly benefit and learn from social interactions, and that such interactions are even absolutely necessary for true intelligence to arise. Sometimes though these interactions go awry, and result in devastating conflict, this occurring primarily because of a diminution in respect for differences or of parties not being in the same physical space. The acceptance of humanoid robots she argues will therefore depend on whether their differences can be respected and whether they can interact with us in the same physical space. These robots can be viewed therefore as a gauge on how far we have advanced in our acceptance and respect for others. Certainly this is a good reason for the creation of these machines if none other can be found. But many other reasons can be found.....

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. thoughtful meditation on a difficult topic

By Glen A. Mazis

This is a wonderful book. I am quite interested in this topic: the boundary between humans and machines, and especially developments in artificial intelligence as combined with robotics. This book does so much more than just explore that boundary, although it does that very well, too. It provides an insightful overview of the shift in artificial intelligence to "EMBODIED artificial intelligence." In order to do this, it explains the importance of embodiment for "human intelligence" and also gives an "embodied" reading of the bible which is quite informative. Foerst's ideas about the ramifications of being the "story-telling" or "narrating" animal to our sense of self and how this allows us to incorporate significant others into our sense of sense is a powerful argument, deftly expressed. The book also raises interesting ethical questions about how we identify or fail to identify with others, not only machines. Bravo!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Thought provoking

By Timothy Gray

I have been becoming more interested in this topic, and frustrated that religious writers, who have produced thousands of books about ecology and the fate of the planet, don't seem to be worried about the fate of our minds. Anne is creative and thought-provoking, and considers both theology and AI. She

describes well the interaction with the two robots. However, the book felt disorganized and I would have appreciated a more focused approach to the question of personhood. I'm looking for similar books on this topic. Any help?

A provocative look at the theological implications of artificial intelligence from the founder of MIT's God and Computers Project. Get ready to meet two remarkable characters, Cog and Kismet. They both enjoy working with others, they're very attentive, have excellent learning skills, and, according to their colleagues, they're very charming. And they're both robots. From Hollywood to the halls of NASA, robots loom large in the popular imagination. But what feelings do these lifelike machines really provoke in us? In *God in the Machine*, Dr. Anne Foerst draws on her expertise as both a theologian and computer scientist to address the profound questions that robots such as Cog and Kismet raise for us all: How do we define "human" versus "person"? What does it mean to have a soul? And what do robots teach us about our relationship with God?

From Publishers Weekly: Foerst, a theologian associated with MIT's artificial intelligence lab in the 1990s, writes not so much about robotics or AI as about what it means to be a person, in technological and theological perspective. As a German theologian transplanted into an unlikely environment, Foerst was received with both hospitality and skepticism by MIT colleagues. But the robots, rather than the roboticists, are the stars—especially Cog, a model of hand-eye coordination and learning, and Kismet, an example of emotional mirroring through voice and facial expression. Foerst effectively narrates the delight and at times, confusion she feels from her robotic encounters, although some readers will wish for more concrete descriptions of the science and technology involved. Foerst's thoughts on AI and theology can be grouped into two main themes: the importance of embodiedness and the flexibility of personhood. The first theme is developed quite effectively, integrating insights from the Bible with the idea of AI in the 1990s: making progress by modeling embodied systems—seven simple ones instead of abstract computational tasks. The second theme, relying heavily on Paul Tillich's concepts of sin and justification, and focusing on audience perceptions of Cog and Kismet, is generally less persuasive. Overall, Foerst relates an inherently interesting story, supplemented by parallels in Judeo-Christian traditions, but hampered at times by academic jargon. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

About the Author: Dr. Anne Foerst is a former research scientist at the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at MIT, where she also founded and directed the God and Computers Project. The only robotics theologian in the country, her work has captured much media attention, including coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and *Science*. She is currently a visiting professor of theology and computer science at St. Bonaventure University.