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Could we fill a Void with a Droid?



Have you met Ameca, the world's most advanced humanised robot? You can meet her via YouTube, as did Ricky (last name unknown), at a techfest in an unidentified location in early 2022.

Ameca looks and talks (in English, but probably any other language) like a woman. This makes her technically a "Gynoid" or "Fembot", but for the purposes of clarity and equality I shall call her an android.

She has beautiful manners, but so do many humans in any initial introduction to a stranger. The YT commentariat inevitably speculated that Ameca would have downloaded all Ricky's passwords before he drew his next breath, and would shock him by recognising him 20 years later when he bumped into her again in some other location.

Over 500 years ago, the great polymath, Leonardo da Vinci invented the "Robotic Knight", described as "a humanoid robot, able to wave its arms, sit down and even open and close its mouth".

There is no mention of any participation in a knightly melee, nor a foray into courtly love. But he was probably the first android.

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Thus began our fascination with robots. All the clichés tumbled out of the bag: fear of the unknown, learning about the unknown; eventually embracing the unknown.

Science Fiction authors latched on; Hollywood brought it to the masses. The movie *I, Robot*, terrified us with an army of hostile robots seeking to command the planet.

But Will Smith, who has form onstage and onscreen, decommissioned the enemy, and humans won the day.

But can you teach an android to love and care?

Can they resemble sentient beings? Is it possible that they could learn from the humans they interact with?

There are examples. Research carried out by Angelica Lim, a developmental psychologist at Kyoto University, established that, at least in part, humans learn how to emote according to how we are taught by our own caregivers and peers.

And so, we can teach androids ourselves by straightforward human behaviour in tandem with technological back up.

In the constant quest for a healthy life-work balance, an android might assume a critical role. We have deep social issues regarding the care of the elderly, often ageing badly and alone, lacking the time or physical support of a busy, nest-flown family and a severe lack of badly paid, physically strong and medically capable professional caregivers.

Would you trust an android to care for your children whilst you were at work? Why not?

A vital role for the android in your living room, who could wake you, wash you, dress you, cook for you and even listen to and acknowledge your life stories.

Would you trust an android to care for your children whilst you were at work? Why not? You can trust a nanny or au pair on the basis of a CV.

The radio became the first permanent fixture in the home, followed by the oven, the television, the dishwasher, the computer, the play station. Could the next household god be the android?

We keep domestic pets. Dogs, cats, guinea pigs, stick insects and spitting iguanas like the one Charlie next door keeps and treasures.

We love them for companionship and loyalty; we grieve when they die; we often replace or add to them. But they don't stack the

dishwasher or put on your pyjamas.

I remember on the eve of the millennium, a friend we visited in New York received a slightly panicked phonecall from a member of UNSC Kofi Annan's speechwriting team, seeking inspiration for his speech to mark the event.

A waggish friend suggested, "For the forthcoming millennium, I wish peace and harmony to the world, an end to war, and a personal jet pack for everyone over the age of 25". Mr Annan, unsurprisingly, did not use it.

I don't want a jet pack. I want an android.