

Robots

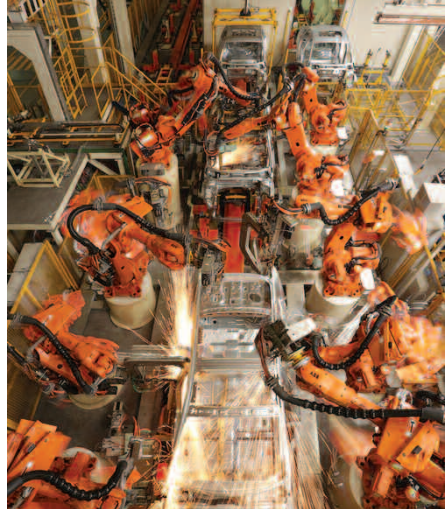
After the loud bang, Arthur opened his eyes, relieved that he was still alive. The crash had happened suddenly and unexpectedly. In a state of shock he climbed out of his car, which looked like a write-off, and staggered across to the other car. He was ready to give the driver a piece of his mind.

However, Arthur was concerned when he could not see the driver, fearing that he could be severely injured. Then the truth dawned on him: there was no driver. Arthur had heard that driverless cars were being tested in several countries, but it was his first encounter with one. Questions had always been asked about their safety. For example, who would be responsible if they were involved in a serious or even fatal road traffic accident?



Robots and Responsibility

Debates about robotics and devices with artificial intelligence have raged for years, as the issues are complex. It is undeniable that, for a number of purposes, such systems are safer, more productive, more efficient and more precise than human beings. Good examples of this are the han-



dling and disposal of dangerous nuclear waste, where radiation levels are far too high for humans; the meticulous interpretation of X-Rays and scans; and precise keyhole surgery.

The engineers who design these systems include experts in hazard analysis, and they try to cover every eventuality. In some cases this involves systems being programmed to improve or 'learn' - to modify their behaviour based on their 'experience'.

Important questions need to be addressed about where blame falls when such automated systems fail, either through sabotage or mistake. Some people argue that the systems should be transparent; in other words that their line of reasoning should be clear. Others say that a named human being should always take responsibility for a system's decision. Another approach would be for a black box data recorder (as in an aeroplane) to

enable experts to analyse accidents, identify the likely causes and then remedy them.

Our Freedom of Choice

We are not robots. The Bible says that God, our supreme designer, allows us to make our own choices in life, whether good or bad. Using our intelligence and power of reasoning we have more choices than are available to a robot. Some decisions are just a matter of personal preference with no serious consequences. But we can also, either deliberately or by mistake, make decisions that are harmful. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God's specific commandment in the Garden of Eden, the results were disastrous for the human race.



In any situation, our actual choices may be influenced by our genetic make-up and by our personal circumstances. Nonetheless we are not pre-programmed or controlled by an external console. Nor are we left to our own devices. God has given us divine guidance in the Bible, telling us what is right and what is wrong.

Consequently, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that we are responsible for our own actions:

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself (Ezekiel 18:20).

While sometimes we can claim that we did not really mean to do something, we cannot claim to have been 'sabotaged' by any external force:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed (James 1:13-14).

In some circumstances, we are not even innocent of the failings of other people, because we should be a good influence.

If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand... Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul (Ezekiel 33:6, 9).

How to Choose?

We have some control over the company we keep and the environ-



ments in which we operate. We must choose the right sort of friends, as ungodly influences will encourage us to have bad habits:

Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Unlike robots, there can be no doubt about who is responsible for what we do. However, like robots, we cannot always give an honest explanation of our reasons or motives.

If we are truthful with ourselves we know that we are not always able to explain why we have done or not done certain things. So we can fool ourselves, and we can fool other people, especially after the event – we can be very devious!

But we do not need a black box recorder because we can never fool God. He always understands our motives and thoughts. So, He does not need our explanations – we are totally transparent to Him. In fact, we cannot even argue with Him, or justify ourselves to Him, as the man Job found out – see how in Job 38:1-4 and 40:2. Furthermore, we can never, ever blame Him (or His design of us) for our own failings: we are wholly responsible for ourselves.

God has told us the cause of our bad ways, and also how to be saved from destruction by accepting His offer of eternal life. The good news is that

despite our failings, He is willing to forgive us and welcome us into His kingdom.

Learn From God

Arthur is still not sure whether he, the driverless car, or some other factor was responsible for the accident: lawyers are still arguing.

However, when deciding who is accounted worthy of eternal life, God will have no dilemmas of judgement – He knows everything. It is therefore vital that we use our God-given reasoning abilities to learn what He wants of us and to do the best we can to obey Him, avoiding influences that could lead us astray.

We are not robots. We make our own choices and we alone are responsible for our actions and hence for our eternal destiny.

Anna Hart

