Humans or Watson?
Posted by epearlman - 2011/02/15 10:20

I couldn't help but watch the TV show "Jeopardy" last night as two of the quiz show's most successful contestants pitted themselves again IBM's computer system dubbed "Watson." The show runs over three nights this week (Feb. 14 - 16) and I admit it's intriguing to see if humans or a computer will do best. The first night, Watson ended up tied with one of the contestants.

If you want to try your luck against Watson, the New York Times has an interactive quiz that lets you play. I tried one round and, I'm pleased to say, I beat Watson 40 to 26 points. You can try it too.

The more important question is, has computer intelligence reached a point where machines can replace humans for tasks that require reasoning?

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Re:Humans or Watson?
Posted by searley - 2011/02/15 10:51

I think that most AI experts will agree that computer intelligence are far from replacing humans for tasks that require reasoning. In fact most agree that progress in this field has been slow. Although I must admit that Watson was very impressive and it reminds us that IBM is at the forefront of computer development at the highest levels.

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Re:Humans or Watson?
Posted by epearlman - 2011/02/17 09:16

An update on IBM's Watson--it did win the 3-day Jeopardy challenge against two humans. However, IBM did not develop Watson just to beat humans during game shows. According to the New York Times, the company plans to announce today that it will collaborate with Columbia University and the University of Maryland to create a physicianâ€™s assistant service that will allow doctors to query a cybernetic assistant. The company also plans to work with Nuance Communications Inc. to add voice recognition to the physicianâ€™s assistant, possibly making the service available in as little as 18 months.

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Re:Humans or Watson?
Posted by srw134 - 2011/02/17 23:50

I agree that I don't believe that we are set to being replaced just yet, however there does seem to be place for it in places where strictly analytical thinking are required. For example, while a modern AI may not be able to be a doctor it can give an opinion based on statistics and available patient information. This is why it may work well acting as a PA (Disclaimer: I am not looking to offend human PA's out there who have the experience to look outside the analytical box).

-sean

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Re:Humans or Watson?
Posted by pgalen - 2011/02/18 11:28

AI can be a wonderful tool, especially if it helps with productivity. Lawyers use e-discovery to sift through reams of relevant law cases and physicians and radiologists use computer aided models to aid in the diagnoses of medical conditions. Lets learn how to properly leverage it.

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Re:Humans or Watson?
Posted by ciony - 2011/02/18 14:54

Given access to appropriate knowledge bases, I think Watson represents great potential in areas like legal research, medicine, etc. where knowledge is exhaustively codified; it's probably the best example yet of the expert systems that were predicted in the '90s. Still, it made enough basic gaffes that there is room to improve. Overall, a PR master stroke for IBM.

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Re:Humans or Watson?

Posted by srw134 - 2011/02/18 21:37

I concur on all points, especially in areas where there is really a wealth of available data available it should be able to simplify some duties (i.e. legal documents and medical research). How about good weather prediction? ;-)

-sean

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Re:Humans or Watson?

Posted by epearlman - 2011/02/24 12:56

I just came across an interesting little research tidbit about getting human brains to be more innovative. A study done at the University of Sydney found that research subjects who received electrical stimulation of the anterior temporal lobes of the brain were 3 times more likely to come up with fresh insight to solve a difficult, unfamiliar problem.

Perhaps humans, in the next contest between people and computers will need a little electrical jolt before the competition begins.

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Re:Humans or Watson?

Posted by mhenricks - 2011/02/24 13:03

The most interesting thing on AI I've read lately is a piece from The Atlantic about the competition to come up with a program that can fool humans into thinking it's human. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/03/mind-vs-machine/8386/

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Re:Humans or Watson?

Posted by epearlman - 2011/02/24 13:43

Thanks for the recommendation. I'll take a look at that article.

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Re:Humans or Watson?

Posted by srw134 - 2011/02/24 22:53

Nothing else I like more in the morning then my regular electric shock.

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-sean

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Re:Humans or Watson?
Posted by mhenricks - 2011/02/25 15:24

It'll never replace a quart or so of hot black coffee, but I was a little shocked when I tried an online version of Cleverbot, one of the human-imitating chatbot programs referenced in The Atlantic piece. It was horribly lame. I can't imagine how anybody could be fooled. Computers should stick to chess and Jeopardy.

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Re:Humans or Watson?
Posted by srw134 - 2011/02/25 23:29

While they may not quite be up for human interaction, it is amazing what has been accomplished int he last 30 years or so. Makes you really wonder what is possible in the next 30.

-sean

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Re:Humans or Watson?
Posted by epearlman - 2011/03/01 10:39

I just wrote a longer piece for CIOZone about robots and social technologies called "The Temptations of Technology." It was inspired by Sherry Turkle's book "Alone Together." Check it out.

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Re:Humans or Watson?
Posted by mhenricks - 2011/03/02 17:05

Nice article, Ellen. Here's the link, in case anybody else wants to read it: http://www.ciozone.com/index.php?option=com_myblog&show=The-Temptations-of-Technology.html&Itemid=713. Meanwhile, here's another matter: My teenagers aren't very interested in getting their driver's licenses, and I think it's because they stay connected with friends electronically. If this is a large-scale trend, it will almost certainly save lives by taking teen drivers off the streets. While we ponder the quality of our lives, let's also consider the value of being alive in the first place.

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Re:Humans or Watson?
Posted by srw134 - 2011/03/02 22:27

Well I know my sister was the same way (16 years my junior). I don't quite understand it, as it still signifies freedom to me. I suppose there are advantages and disadvantages of not having a license.

-sean

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