

Youth Culture Lesson
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iWorship

Is technology becoming *too* cool?

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What Happened:

In the 1950s, people used to go to movies in which robots would take over the world. They'd come down in flying saucers and walk stiffly down the gangplank. Every once in a while, they would demand we worship them. Stuff of science fiction, right?

Some experts believe that as technology becomes ever more sophisticated, the greater danger there is in thinking these machines have surpassed—or will surpass—their creators.

Some professors have noted how technological advances—particularly from Apple—often come wrapped in spiritual jargon. When it was first released, the iPhone was called the Jesus phone by some tech bloggers, and Steve Jobs was regarded as a high-tech prophet.

“[Apple] could offer a religious-like experience,” said Heidi Campbell of Texas A&M who wrote a paper called “How the iPhone Became Divine.” “It basically could perform the same role in people’s lives that being part of a religious community could at one time.”

Meanwhile, engineers in Japan are working to make robots more integral in our society (one named I-Fairy recently married a couple), and scientists here are trying to hone “artificial intelligence”—the complicated algorithms that allow computers to interact with us better—from being more daunting videogame opponents to helping us choose new movies from Netflix.

Engineers in several countries are working on robots that will mimic and in some cases actually “develop” emotions as they interact with us. “This behavior is modeled on what a young child does,” Lola Cañamero, lead researcher on a British project, told *Computerworld*.

Experts such as Jaron Lanier from Microsoft Research says we’re walking down a dangerous road. The more we humanize our machines, the more we dehumanize us—and the more tempting it is to place computers a level or two above us.

Here's what's really creepy: According to Lanier, a Silicon Valley-based organization called Singularity University believes the Internet suddenly may become conscious—that it'll start thinking on its own, and it'll be infinitely smarter than humankind. "It'll become alive in the blink of an eye and take over the world before humans even realize what's happening," Lanier said. What will the Internet do with us should such a thing happen? We haven't the foggiest idea.

Lanier doesn't believe such consciousness is possible, but the fact that some do suggests our technology is turning into a religion of its own...and that we're losing something of our own humanity in the process.

Talk About It:

How far do you believe "artificial intelligence" can go? Do you think computers one day may have the ability to think for themselves? To feel?

If robots or computers did develop consciousness, what would it mean for you? Would it change how you think about them? About yourself? About your soul?

Do you think technology could become a form of idolatry? Is there a temptation to think it's *too* cool or become *too* reliant on it? Do you know people who maybe use technology too much? Do you?

What the Bible Says:

"The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them" (Ps. 135:15-18).

"Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation..." (Hab. 2:18).

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen" (Rom. 1:25).