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EDITORIAL

IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE THE GOLEM OF THE 21ST CENTURY?

Iulian Warter, Ph.D.

Center for Socio-Economic Studies and Multiculturalism,
Iasi, Romania, E-mail: iulian@warter.ro

Yuval Noah Harari warns that “One of the dangers in the 21st century is that machine learning and artificial intelligence will make centralized systems much more efficient than distributed systems, and dictatorships might become more efficient than democracies.”

In one of his books (*Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*), Daniel Goleman mentions that “The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant,” Albert Einstein once said. “We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”

Since the earliest days of artificial intelligence research in the 1950s, the desire to create a human-like intelligence has been compared to the legend of the golem, a mythical creature from Jewish folklore, created by rabbis from mud and magic.

Golem, in Jewish folklore, is an image provided with life. The term is used in the Bible (Psalms 139:16) and in Talmudic literature to refer to an embryonic or incomplete substance.

The most famous story is about the golem created by the 16th-century rabbi Judah Löw ben Bezalel of Prague

In her book, *Golem: Modern Wars and Their Monsters*, Maya Barzilai observes that throughout ‘the long and complex history of the Golem, it has been linked with the different linguistic and material “technologies” of human artificial creation’. More recently, the Golem became more associated with technological anxiety. The Golem predates other anthropoid troublemakers and unruly machines inspired by the technophobia which accompanied the industrial revolution from its early stage: literary examples such as Mary Shelley’s 1818 *Frankenstein* and Karel Čapek’s 1921 *Rossum’s Universal Robots* include early modern cases of artificial humanoids that, like the Golem, get out of hand and revolt against their human masters. Fritz Lang’s *Moloch-machine* in *Metropolis* (1927) and the assembly line in Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936) – although not humanoid – can also be seen as Golem technologies which become uncontrollable. The appearance of artificial intelligence technology, influenced representations of much more sophisticated hostile machines, as in *Westworld* (Michael Crichton, 1973), *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984), or *The Matrix* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1999). These highly intelligent machines, like the Golem, quickly shifted from their inscribed role to serve humanity, becoming a threat to humanity’s very existence.

The Golem was meant to be an obedient kind of robot. In most stories, the Golem becomes independent of its owners. The Golem appeared often in literature (in Gustav Meyrink’s 1915 *Der Golem*), in comic books (Marvel and DC Comics), film, and television (starting with the 1915 silent film *Der Golem*). There are very many Golem replicas, even a Golem Pokémon.

Mankind acquires significant benefits from artificial intelligence, but pitfalls too. In 2015, artificial intelligence experts warned of the danger of creating something which cannot be controlled.

For centuries, the idea of an animate creature made by man and lacking a divine spark or a soul has been part of the Jewish imagination. Rabbis have argued over whether a golem can be considered a person, if it could be killed, and how it should be treated.

From these rabbinic debates, an ethical position on artificial intelligence emerged long before computers were invented. While it is considered admissible to create artificial entities to help us in our activities, we must remain responsible to control them, and not contrariwise.

Rabbi Eliezer Simcha Weiss, a member of the Chief Rabbinate Council of Israel, underlined that "In every story of the golem, the golem is finally destroyed or dismantled". He argues that. "In other words, the lesson the rabbis are teaching is that anything man makes has to be controlled by man."

The way we treat them determines the development of our own characters and sets the future course of our own exercise of moral agency."

In conclusion, it depends on the man whether artificial intelligence will be his help or his enemy. Artificial intelligence lacks emotions and ethics. What about the people who generate it?

Will today's artificial intelligence have the end to the 16th century Golem from Prague?