

[Student's Name]

What role should machines play in our lives?

Today's technology is far more advanced than what it was just a few decades ago. In today's society, we rely heavily on electronics for almost every aspect of life. We communicate and research via computers, we locate destinations with global positioning systems, we play games on smart phones, and the list could go on. I cannot remember the days before such technology became widespread, but I certainly cannot imagine life without some of these devices. But how big of a role should machines play in our lives? Should they replace humans in some occupations, such as therapy, as suggested in the article "Robots That Care" by Jerome Groopman based on the research and work of a professionally diverse team lead by Maja Mataric, a professor of computer science at the University of Southern California? I'm not convinced that this should be the role played by machines in our lives. I believe that the place for machines in our society is filling voids left empty by humans, performing when humans are unable to. Looking at the current state of our economy, we should be seizing every opportunity to provide a human with a job, not handing it over to a robot. Furthermore, as of yet, machines cannot fully be relied upon because of their frequent malfunctions. The article discusses the implementation of robots in the field of technological therapy. In this instance, I deem it appropriate for robots to supplement the work of humans, but not replace it.

The unemployment rate in the United States as of April 2010 was 9.5%, but was high as 14%, as it was in Michigan in April 2010 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov). With the economy as unstable as it is, I feel as though the available or newly created jobs should be taken by humans. A robot completing a job that an unemployed human is capable of doing seems wrong to me. Why are we cutting our opportunities short? Some argue that employing robots diminishes the interaction between doctor and patient. I agree with this notion. Not only would

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the utilization of robots take job opportunities away from humans, but patients would lose out on the personal treatment that only a human could so lovingly provide. The economy being what it is, not only should jobs be going to humans, but money should be spent on mending what is destroyed as opposed to inventing and perfecting new technologies. Technological advances are typically beneficial, but when people and the economy are suffering, and important programs and institutions, such as schools and police departments, are receiving budget cuts, the money should be spent on stabilizing the economy and not letting these vital organizations be so hard hit. Due to the current state of the economy, I think the development and use of machines should be halted to focus on what I deem more important matters.

Any person who has interacted with any sort of machine can vouch for the frustrating malfunctions that occur. Even with the advancements that have been made in technology, glitches and errors still cannot be avoided. What would happen to a patient should their technological therapist cease to properly function? For this reason, it is my belief that these robots should only complement the work of their human counterparts. Some patients may interact better with the robot than they would with a human, but a human should still be in the vicinity should an emergency arise. Replacing human therapists with robots would also detract from the human interaction. Mary, a stroke victim, and a patient in Matarić's study, proclaimed, "I much prefer the robot to my husband," after completing a task with the aid and assistance of the robot ("Robots That Care"). But not every patient in the study was as keen on the robot as Mary was. Matarić added a component to the robots so that they could respond differently for the difference personalities of people – introverted versus extroverted. While this is undoubtedly a wise addition, I am not sold on the idea that a robot can comprehend a human's emotions and respond appropriately; even humans find it difficult to deduce one another's feelings and respond

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in an appropriate manner. Matarić, speaking based on observations, stated that, “One woman actually refers to [the robot] as a grandchild,” (“Robots That Care”). It is amazing that a person formed a bond so strong with a piece of hardware, but so long as it aids her in her recovery and facilitates her life, I see no problem with it. A human, I believe, should be present to monitor the robot, ensuring that it works correctly, and to give the patient contact with a human and the nurturing that only a human can provide.

As our society progresses technologically, which will indubitably transpire as we move further into the future, machines should play a role in our lives. Machines can prove themselves very useful to humans, as in increasing the production of goods, facilitating communication, and assisting in research. The money we do have should be filtered to imperative institutions such as education and public safety, not towards research and development, as groundbreaking as it may be. Additionally, machines cannot be completely relied upon due to their occasional failures. The role of machines should not be to take on the role of a human, but to ease and improve our lives.