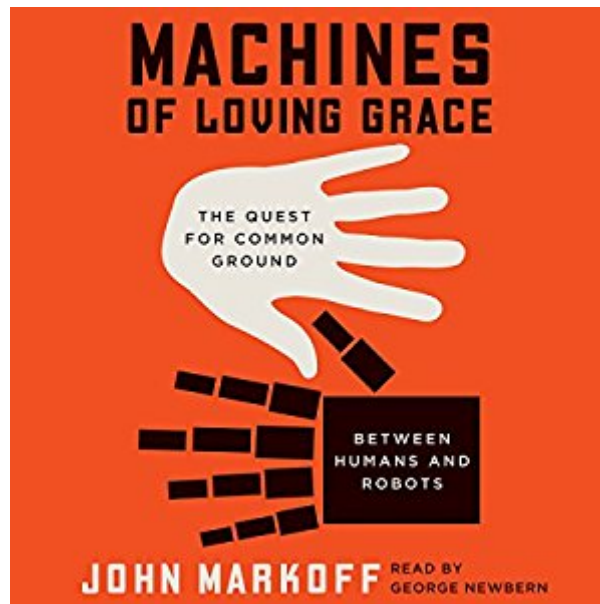# Machines Of Loving Grace: The Quest For Common Ground Between Humans And Robots

Synopsis

As robots are increasingly integrated into modern society - on the battlefield and the road, in business, education, and health - Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times science writer John Markoff searches for an answer to one of the most important questions of our age: Will these machines help us, or will they replace us? In the past decade alone, Google introduced us to driverless cars, Apple debuted a personal assistant that we keep in our pockets, and an Internet of Things connected the smaller tasks of everyday life to the farthest reaches of the Internet. There is little doubt that robots are now an integral part of society, and cheap sensors and powerful computers will ensure that in the coming years, these robots will soon act on their own. This new era offers the promise of immense computing power, but it also reframes a question first raised more than half a century ago, at the birth of the intelligent machine: Will we control these systems, or will they control us? In Machines of Loving Grace, New York Times reporter John Markoff, the first reporter to cover the World Wide Web, offers a sweeping history of the complicated and evolving relationship between humans and computers. Over the recent years, the pace of technological change has accelerated dramatically, reintroducing this difficult ethical quandary with newer and far weightier consequences. As Markoff chronicles the history of automation, from the birth of the artificial intelligence and intelligence augmentation communities in the 1950s to the modern-day brain trusts at Google and Apple in Silicon Valley and on to the expanding tech corridor between Boston and New York, he traces the different ways developers have addressed this fundamental problem and urges them to carefully consider the consequences of their work.

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Customer Reviews

In 1967, Richard Brautigan, the patron saint of hippiedom, published a poem in a collection under a title copied for this book. In the poemâ ™s final stanza, he envisioned a world run by robots that to so many readers then must have seemed entirely fanciful:I like to think(it has to be!)of a cybernetic ecologywhere we are free of our laborsand joined back to nature,returned to our mammalbrothers and sisters,and all watched overby machines of loving grace.Now, Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times technology and science reporter John Markoff examines Brautiganâ ™s vision in the light of nearly fifty years of technological development. His conclusion? Ambiguous. However, one thing emerges clearly: â œjust as personal computing and the Internet have transformed the world during the past four decades, artificial intelligence and robotics will have an even larger impact during the next several.â •Markoff is unclear what that impact will be. He describes the enduring debate about the consequences of automation, which came to the fore in popular media in the 1950s. The question, of course, is whether robots will displace humans â ” and ultimately even eliminate us! â ” or simply expand our capabilities. Some of todayâ ™s most audacious thinkers, including Stephen Hawking, Bill Joy, and Elon Musk, have issued dire warnings about the dangers inherent in the possibility of runaway automation, while others such as Ray Kurzweil welcome the prospect with open arms, even claiming the potential for human immortality in advancing machine intelligence.

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