

Will Google Robot Ultimately Defy the Word of God?

Google's humanoid robot, Atlas, is wowing techies everywhere with its new moves—able to flex its virtual muscles in sync better than even some humans can.

That might not seem like a groundbreaking advance to most, but the technology, programming, algorithms and software necessary to make a robot move just like a human definitely have scientific, technological and ethical implications.

Last year, IHMC Robotics, one of the groups using Atlas at the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA) Grand Challenge, came in second by proving the robot could accomplish many of the same tasks as first responders in emergencies and disasters. Many think IHMC could place first this year with its new advancements for Atlas, which include performing the very difficult “Crane Kick” featured in the movie *The Karate Kid*.

Dr. Richard Land, President of Southern Evangelical Seminary, says the recent advancements in robotics raise several ethical concerns, such as the use of robots in the military. For example, projects submitted for the DARPA contest could eventually be used by the U.S. Armed Forces.

“That God has given man intelligence to create and advance these technological wonders is certainly a blessing. But we must be mindful of the power that technology can exert over our everyday lives. Here at Southern Evangelical Seminary, we're researching the ethics of robotics, asking questions about whether robots can do the important jobs of humans, whether they are equipped for human touch and human care, and if relying on robots to do our work is ethical,” he said.

“For example, humans regularly make moral determinations in

carrying out tasks. With whose 'morality' will robots be programmed? These are questions that deserve answers, and our faculty and students are delving into these considerations from the basis of God's eternal and unchanging truth."

Last winter, SES unveiled its own NAO humanoid robot, .—"Digitally Advanced Virtual Intelligence Device"—which features face, object and speech recognition, text-to-speech capabilities in seven languages and whole body motion. . is being used by faculty and students on the SES campus to explore the ethical questions surrounding the use of technology in our everyday lives.

Dr. Kevin Staley, associate professor of Theology, who is leading the research, is an expert in the application of a biblical worldview to moral issues involving advanced technologies. Specifically, his specialty lies in investigating the ethical issues that surround robotics, artificial intelligence and human enhancement technologies.

"Today, technology plays such a crucial role in our everyday lives that we can't help but consider how it will affect how we make decisions, how we handle ethical dilemmas and how we interact with others on a daily basis," said Staley, who wrote his thesis on the topic of "Imago Dei in Machina? A Theological Reflection on the Ethics of Man and Machine in Communion."

"We are finding that there are technological influences on daily interactions that they never considered before. For example, is it ethical to allow our electronic devices, from our phones to our tablets, to make decisions for us, interact for us and do work for us? Likewise, is it ethical for robots to perform the tasks once assigned to human beings, and if so, how far should we allow those robots to go?"