

Artificial intelligence future wows Davos elite

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Stuart Russell, a professor of computer science at the University of California Berkeley, painted a futuristic vision for those who hate the chore of washing.

"We have already developed robots who can do the complete laundry cycle. It is able to pick up a big bin of laundry, sort the clothes according to the sort of wash it needs, put them in the washing machine, take them out, sort them again, fold them," he told a bewildered Davos panel.

"The one thing it hasn't figured out is where is the missing sock," he quipped.

Anthony Goldbloom, a young tech entrepreneur from the United States, said that algorithms were being developed that could correct pupils' homework.

"It is possible to train machines to grade essays more reliably than a teacher," he said, while acknowledging that the technology remains "a long way off from being deployed in schools."

Several advances in [artificial intelligence](#) are aimed at the ageing baby-boom generation, which will be the fastest-growing market in the coming years, the experts predicted.

Driverless cars are one of the key trends, allowing an increasing elderly population better mobility.

"There's no need to park your car, because your car will just go home and come back when you need it. That changes the situation for public transport, because you'll just get taken to the station and then your car will go back home," said Russell.

"You can even imagine your car going to the supermarket and doing your groceries," he added.

Rodney Brooks, chairman of US tech firm Rethink Robotics, said there would also be an explosion in robots that come into the home to help the

elderly.

"With the demographic inversion, there are just not enough people to help the elderly... robots can help you on and off the toilet, into the bath. So you can choose when to do that rather than when the carer comes," he said.

Killer robots

However, not all robots are friendly and helpful.

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch warned about the development of "fully autonomous weapons ... so-called [killer robots](#)."

Roth cautioned that taking away the human decision-making element in a confused and stressful battlefield scenario could lead to catastrophe.

"Is that child stumbling towards the front line lost or a suicide bomber? That's a very difficult judgement and we need humans to make that call, not a machine," he said.

Such machines will completely change the face of warfare, Russell said, and leave the average life-span of a human combattant on the battlefield "about 10 seconds".

Roth also warned the assembled elite about the loss of privacy that could come with increased use of intelligent robots—a key theme at this year's Davos forum.

Waving his smartphone to the crowd, he said: "All the data in my phone is available to the government because I shared it."

"I've lost my privacy rights. Now what happens when that goes into your home? If you have a robot in your home, you lose the privacy even in your own home," Roth said.

"We don't want to get rid of the technology, but we do have to be careful ... for some of these technologies, you're much better off keeping the genie in the bottle."

Others, however, were less concerned about their privacy.

"I trade my privacy for the convenience. Privacy is not something that worries me," said Goldbloom, the youngest member of the panel.

"People often behave better when they have the sense that their actions are being watched," he quipped.

The World Economic Forum in Davos brings together 2,500 of the world's top movers-and-shakers in the picturesque ski resort of Davos for a four-day meeting that ends on Saturday.

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