

The Pinocchios of Silicon Valley

Ian I Mitroff*

Center for Catastrophic Risk Management, University of California Berkeley, USA

***Corresponding Author:** Ian I Mitroff, Center for Catastrophic Risk Management, University of California Berkeley, USA.

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The story of Pinocchio is a perfect fable for our times. Indeed, it's an incredible description of the dilemmas associated with today's technology.

First of all, Geppetto, Pinocchio's creator, brings to life an "artificial boy" that he's created out of wood and that with every good intention hopes will somehow turn into a "real boy." In an eerily similar vein, present-day proponents of robots proclaim fervently that it's only long-standing human prejudices that refuse to grant robots the same qualities-emotions, feelings, etc.-that we reserve for humans. In other words, if robots can in fact assume-mimic--all of the qualities once exclusively reserved for humans, then not only should they be accorded all of the rights given to humans, but since they are much more efficient, there are no valid reasons why they shouldn't replace humans altogether.

Second, Geppetto is quickly overwhelmed by his creation whom he unable to control. Because Pinocchio lacks a conscience, he's constantly getting into trouble. In fact, his wooden nose grows uncontrollably every time he lies, which is quite frequently. Furthermore, because of his bad behavior, his "self" is highly unstable. Thus, due to his constantly getting into trouble, he frequently turns into other animals such as donkeys. In other words, his grip of what makes humans human is very fragile.

The similarity with today's inventors of technology is striking indeed. They are frequently accused of having no conscience as well-i.e., no foresight and even less concern--with regard to all of the unintended, unforeseen negative consequences of their marvellous creations. Like Geppetto, they tend to see only the positive attributes, which they overly rhapsodize. Thus, they are unaware of all the crises that are likely to result from their prized creations. For instance, in proposing that chips be implanted in us, Elon Musk shows little inclination, let alone ability, to ponder the downsides of our becoming cyborgs, i.e. Pinocchios on the largest scale imaginable.

What incredible short sightedness. We have no idea of the crises we are unleashing.

No wonder why before any new great technology is unleashed, I am calling for the most intense social audits of its impacts, both positive and negative. If only Geppetto had done this before he created Pinocchio.

This article is based on a book in preparation, *Techlash: The Existential Threat of Technology, The Thinking Person's Guide to Thinking the Unthinkable*.

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