

As I See It by Joan Barnett

The robots are coming

Isaiah 35:3 NIV. Strengthen the feeble hands. Steady the knees that give way. Say to those with fearful hearts. Be strong, do not fear. Your god will come.

Every day we hear comments about artificial intelligence, some forms of which are very useful.

Digitised speech is used for items such as official letters and statements, bills or informational CD's for print impaired people.

Visualising a world with robots doing all the domestic chores, popping down to the shops for that forgotten item or wonder of wonders, a taxi taking us to any destination of our choice.

I heard James May, one of the previous top Gear presenters talking on the today podcast about autonomous vehicles. He said that the idea of a completely driverless car was unlikely in the near future because legislation would need to be scrutinised with so many organisations. Cars, planes and some cargo vessels do already have auto pilots.

What a shame, I had visions of David Blunkett and Peter White trialling racing driverless vehicles round Silverstone! I am not sure they would appreciate it though.

An episode of the Infinite Monkey Cage was about A.I. I must admit that much of the information is beyond my understanding. I do find it interesting listening to the experts. The PM programme was broadcast from the Deep Mind company. They are working very hard to make sure AI is useful.

The 2021 Reith Lectures were given by Professor Stewart Russell about AI. The four lectures were very interesting, covering all aspects of its use. At times it sounded somewhat frightening especially when in the wrong hands.

Whether we are aware of it or not AI comes into our lives most of the time. Interestingly the Amazon store in London where you could walk in and do your shopping without encountering a member of staff has closed, or so I heard on a news item. Apparently, people prefer engaging with human beings especially if you cannot find an item. No surprise there! Wandering up and down the aisles searching for an elusive item is not usually on anyone's agenda.

The verse from Isaiah always makes me smile. The NHS is already using various forms of AI. Did Isaiah have that in mind all those years ago? Well, he was a prophet!

Hearing aids, spectacles, heart pacemakers and replacement joints all come to mind. What a difference they have made to many people?

Robots are used in agriculture picking fruit and vegetables where possible. Some farm machinery can be programmed to move around the fields. I wonder if there will be a robot Border Collie rounding up sheep? One Man and His Dog would certainly look slightly different! Would it be parked in the shed instead of sleeping by the fire.

It is possible to have AI write anything we want but what would happen to imagination if our brains are not put to good use?

A Clint Eastwood alternative robot sighted assistant? A consideration possibly, not yet though, the present one works very well.

If these articles suddenly appear entitled, AI See It. You will know I have finally given way.