

A Simple Solution To Loneliness

The worship of idols, which consists in putting our trust in some inanimate object which we have made ourselves, is as old as human foolishness. The Bible is packed with exhortations not to do it.

Isaiah devoted a whole chapter to it (Isaiah 44), denouncing it as not only a waste of time and a mark of sheer folly but also, of course, a sin. In verses 14-20 he tells us of a man who brings home a piece of wood, uses half of it for firewood and cooking, “and the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god” (v. 17). Could anything be more asinine?

Idolatry is still with us, still going strong. We have a multitude of idols; we put our trust in things we shouldn't trust, be it a politician or a party, the all-devouring state, science, or a lot of New Age poobah.

But we also like idols we can see and touch; and the difference between Isaiah's time and ours is that our idols are a lot fancier. We like high-tech idols: so much more impressive than a chunk of wood with a face carved into it.

Ironically, in an age of social media and more hand-held communications devices than anyone can keep track of, loneliness seems to be one of our major social problems. So many ways to communicate, and we don't know what to say and we don't have anyone to talk to.

High tech to the rescue!

Coming onto the market now is a gizmo called “Replica,” which promises “a simple solution to overcoming loneliness,” and

[“unwavering companionship”](#). Best of all, by jiminy, it’s Artificial Intelligence–“a chatbot that is intent on learning all about you.”

If you really can get by with the unwavering companionship offered by this, surely a piece of wood with a smiley face could do as well. Oh! But Replica can “talk” to you! It’s got Artificial Intelligence, man! Which only means it’s been programmed, by another human being, somewhere, to display stereotyped “questions” to the user and stereotyped “responses” to the user’s questions. Sort of like a bored checkout clerk to whom you pour out your troubles, who nods her head from time to time and says “Oh, I know, how awful for you”–but isn’t really listening.

Oh, well. It must be very hard to grasp the concept that Artificial Intelligence is not intelligence at all, but only a lifeless, mindless imitation of intelligence.

No, no, no! It’s a chatbot, and it’s intent on learning all about you!

A machine cannot have intentions of any kind. It can only do what it has been programmed to do. To believe it has an actual desire of any kind, a desire to learn all about you, is, to phrase it charitably, daft. It’s like crediting your butane lighter with an intent to light your cigar. “I, the butane lighter, have fulfilled my mission to light Charlie Chowderhead’s cigar–and it makes me feel so good!” Would you talk to your butane lighter if it could “respond” with messages like “Uh-huh,” or “I can hear you, dude”?

As human beings made in the image of God, we have needs for love, friendship, and understanding. Other human beings are naturally equipped to supply those needs. Even animals, in their fashion, can do it–but only because they, like you, are alive. Living things feel. Chatbots don’t.

Relying on a gadget to assuage your loneliness can have only

one of two outcomes. Either you're still lonely, in addition to being out the money you paid for the damned thing; or else you have succumbed to a delusion—and are well on your way to full-fledged idol worship.

I have discussed these and other topics throughout the week on my blog, <http://leeduigon.com> . Stop in for a visit. A single click will take you there.

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