

AI in Westworld: a press review

'Westworld' science adviser shares his vision of robots and the future of AI

PALO ALTO, Calif. [...] From questions about robot consciousness to the ethics of artificial intelligence, the show has taken some of the most compelling questions about technology and neuroscience [...].

To learn more about the real-life science behind the fictional realm of Westworld, [...] Mach recently sat down with Westworld's science adviser, Stanford University neuroscientist David Eagleman. [...]

Mach: How close are we to a future as depicted in the show?

"I think it is really, really distant for a couple of reasons. One is that AI can do very impressive things right now, like play chess better than a human can. But what AI is not any good at is the sort of broad intelligence that, for example, [...] a three-year-old has. [...] We are not really close to having AI that seems like a human, like in Westworld. [...] We don't know all the issues going on in the brain. It is a mystery that has to be plumbed probably for many more decades or centuries before we understand the principles of brain operation. What we have happening in AI are these very useful networks like what are called deep learning networks that can do clever sorts of things, but it is nothing like how the brain is currently operating. [...] A lot of the questions at the centre of "Westworld" - about free will, about can a machine become conscious, and so on - these are really the most pressing questions of our time. And these are all questions that have been at the heart of neuroscience for a long time."

Mach: One big issue raised in the series whether preserving consciousness could be a form of immortality. Is that really possible?

"If it turns out to be possible to download somebody's brain and reconstruct it on a different substrate, then in theory you could put it inside of a robot. One of the questions is about the ethics of doing that. I think we don't know enough yet to say too much about that. We are such a long way off from that actually being a possibility, but when that time arrives we will have to deal with this question: What does it mean for this person to not die? [...] But at some point we are going to have to deal with this question."

"Denise Chow, Shivani Khattar and Brock Stoneham, Mach for NBC News, June 2018



HBO's *Westworld* depicts a future where humans interact with ultra-realistic humanoid robots in a theme park-type setting.