



Stanford eCorner

The Relationship of Man and Machine

Stephen Cohen, *Palantir*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3093/The-Relationship-of-Man-and-Machine>

"There are lots that computers cannot do," says Stephen Cohen, co-founder of Palantir Technologies. According to Cohen, when computer scientists appreciate the importance of this idea, it opens up a series of fascinating questions and challenges around the future relationship between man and machine.



Transcript

Roughly around that time too the conceptual vision for the product stabilized and those are the moments where you start to gain clarity on kind of what the heart and soul is of what you're doing. And for Palantir what the fundamental aspiration the platform is, it's basically to enable humans to perform the analytical reasoning that for whatever reason machines can't seem to replicate. There's a certain form - and we could say the kind of simplistic version of this is to enable the ideal human computer symbiosis, but I think that doesn't quite do justice to some of the more subtle aspects of this, the idea here, which is firstly accepting as computer scientists and engineers and just people who are in the technology business, that there's actually a lot of computers can't do. It could be for practical, empirical reasons, it could be for theoretical reasons; I find the theoretical possibilities quite interesting themselves. But accepting that there's these realms of reasoning that computers are particularly bad out without human health, like for instance figuring out what the right framing is for a problem, you can't even really describe a problem to a computer without a framing on it that pre-exists. So you certainly can't hope for computer just to kind of tell you 'hey, here's the right framing.' Computers are very bad at finding patterns and data unless there's an incredibly dictionary-long instance of a very well constrained, well understood problem, then it can begin the finding certain patterns. And for the vast majority of human analytical problems it's just not it. It's sparse, it's isolated, things are connected in ways we can - we have a stronger intuition for rather than a rational reason. And so because of all these facts, really the right kind of future economic relationship for man and machine is one that deeply respects the capabilities of what only man can do, or just at least for now what only man can do. And also of course you want this to be the computer scientists who are recognizing this so the machines can do the absolute best of what they can do the algorithmic reasoning; write the computational machinery that they - the computational processes that they can execute trillions of times faster than we can.