

Gods and Robots: Myths, Machines, and Ancient Dreams of Technology. Adrienne Mayor. Princeton University Press. 2018

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The concept of creating artificial life is not new; humanity's fascination with self-moving devices, automata, and the idea of beings being "made, not born" can be traced back to ancient Greek mythology.

Adrienne Mayor's *Gods and Robots: Myths, Machines, and Ancient Dreams of Technology* is a thought-provoking work that offers a profound and philosophical exploration of the intricate interplay between mythology, technology, and the human imagination in ancient civilizations. Through meticulous research and insightful analysis, Mayor unveils the profound implications of ancient beliefs in artificial beings, challenging our modern understanding of the human relationship with machines and the perennial quest for creating intelligent life.

Mayor's central argument delves into the philosophical underpinnings of ancient myths, asserting that they encompassed more than mere imaginative tales but served as reflections of human desires, aspirations, and anxieties regarding technological progress. She masterfully examines a vast array of ancient sources, ranging from epic poems and tragedies to philosophical treatises, to unravel the intricate tapestry of connections between technology and mythology.

One of the most captivating aspects of Mayor's work is her ability to resurrect lesser-known mythological narratives and present them as sources of profound philosophical inquiry. By introducing us to remarkable stories such as the bronze giant Talos, tirelessly guarding the island of Crete, and the golden robots of Hephaestus, dutifully assisting him in his workshop, she reveals the ancient Greeks' fascination with the concept of artificial life. These accounts underscore the Greeks' astute observations of the potential applications of technology and invite us to reflect on timeless questions surrounding human agency, the nature of consciousness, and the boundaries of creation.

Moreover, Mayor delves into the Roman adaptation of Greek myths and their distinct interpretations of artificial beings, further enriching the philosophical discourse. Finally, she delves into the Roman fascination with automatons, such as the mechanical birds of Archytas and the clockwork servants of Emperor Nero, demonstrating the enduring human fascination with replicating life-like entities. Through these narratives, Mayor invites us to explore the ancient longing for power and control over the natural world and the profound ethical implications that arise from manipulating life and blurring the lines between creator and creation.

By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, seamlessly blending classical studies, history, philosophy, and science fiction, Mayor encourages readers to contemplate the implications of ancient myths within the broader context of contemporary technological advancements. In addition, she skillfully engages with the modern discourse on robotics and artificial intelligence, prompting us to question the ethical ramifications of our current pursuits and our responsibilities as creators. In this way, "Gods and Robots" becomes a bridge between past and present, urging us to critically examine our aspirations and moral compasses as we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of technology.

Mayor's prose is eloquent and accessible, making "Gods and Robots" an intellectually stimulating and emotionally resonant philosophical journey. She seamlessly weaves ancient texts with modern philosophical and ethical dilemmas, prompting readers to reflect on enduring themes such as the hubris of human ambition, the fear of technological usurpation, and the delicate balance between progress and ethical considerations. Moreover, including illustrations and diagrams enhances the reading experience, visualizing ancient concepts and technological wonders and serving as visual cues for profound philosophical contemplation.

While the book occasionally delves into tangential discussions and related concepts that may distract from the central thesis, this minor critique does not overshadow Mayor's work's overall impact and value. "Gods and Robots" is invaluable to classical studies, offering a deeply philosophical exploration of ancient civilizations' engagement with artificial beings. Through Mayor's meticulous research, interdisciplinary approach, and eloquent



prose, readers are invited to embark on a profound intellectual odyssey, challenging preconceived notions about the boundaries of human existence, the nature of creation, and the ethical implications of our technological aspirations. Offering a captivating and philosophically rich exploration of the intersection between mythology, technology, and human imagination in ancient civilizations, Mayor's meticulous research and interdisciplinary approach shed new light on the profound implications of ancient beliefs in artificial beings, inviting readers to reflect on timeless philosophical questions surrounding human agency, consciousness, and the ethics of creation.

Through the lens of ancient myths, Mayor demonstrates that the quest for artificial life is not a modern phenomenon but rather a profoundly ingrained human aspiration that transcends time. By delving into lesser-known narratives and their philosophical underpinnings, she uncovers the multifaceted nature of ancient societies' fascination with technology and its potential to mirror and shape the human experience.

Furthermore, Mayor's engagement with modern discourse on robotics and artificial intelligence serves as a bridge between past and present, urging readers to critically examine the ethical and moral dimensions of our technological advancements. In an age where the boundaries between creator and creation are increasingly blurred, this book prompts us to confront our actions' complex responsibilities and consequences as we navigate the frontiers of technological progress.

In "Gods and Robots," Adrienne Mayor has provided an invaluable contribution to classical studies and a profound philosophical inquiry into the human quest for artificial life. By intertwining ancient myths with contemporary reflections, she invites readers to embark on a transformative intellectual journey, challenging our preconceptions and encouraging us to consider the enduring philosophical implications of our technological dreams. Drawing parallels between ancient myths and modern concerns about artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, showing how our ancestors' stories can shed light on the ethical and philosophical questions we face today.

Gods and Robots remind us that our modern fascination with technology and artificial life is not unique. By examining ancient myths and their connections to contemporary science and technology, Mayor encourages us to consider the lessons learned from these stories as we create a new world with AI and robotics.