Reflections on Ethical Artificial Intelligence

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Introduction

> "Ethics is a process of reflection. It requires us to be thoughtful when weighing up a decision. But rather acting on instinct alone, ethics asks us to reasonably consider our options based on what we know, what we assume and what we believe."
> (The Ethics Centre, 2021, https://ethics.org.au/)

It is not immediately clear that the current media coverage of the proposed widespread adoption and diffusion of AI includes much practical reflection on the ethical implications of AI, although many organisations are calling for guidance on these issues including the UN, EU and professional organisations.

Forward to the Past

In fact, much of the current debate on the implications of AI reflect similar comments from the 1980s such as

> "The aim of AI research is to develop thinking machines that outstrip all human intellectual capabilities; leaving mankind, in the words of Donald Michie, Britain's leading AI researcher, 'living in the interstices of uncomprehended, incredibly intelligent electronic organisms, like fleas on the backs of dogs'."
> (Shallis, 1986)

What may surprise is that what Shallis termed as the "… intellectual imperialism of the artificial intelligentsia…" this subservient role for humanity was perceived as both desirable and essential given the challenges faced by humanity.

> "Michie has said that such developments cannot be classified as 'anything but good'. Such an enterprise is justified both on the grounds of evolutionary progress and in terms of sheer practical necessity."
> (Shallis, 1986)

Hype and Reality

> "Technology is much too serious a thing to be left to technologists"
> (Adapted from Talleyrand)

To inform a more ethical perspective to AI it is worth acknowledging the idea of "future hype" introduced by Seidensticker (2006) to examine what he termed as the "myths of technology change" that in essence state that the common perceptions of technology developments are mistaken. This is perhaps surprising given his own technology background with IBM and Microsoft.

One challenge to addressing the widespread hype of AI is that there is still considerable debate around the concept of rationality and explored termed by (Bronner and Di Orio ed., 2018) as the 'mystery of rationality' and whose questions that help to focus contributions to the book include.

- What is it to be rational?
- Is rationality merely instrumental or does it also involve the endorsement of values, i.e. the choice of goals?
- Should we consider rationality to be a normative principle or a descriptive one?
- Is rationality a conscious skill or a partly tacit one?

One logical challenge is how AI can be successfully designed and implemented if there are considerable debates around what is meant by rationality that most would argue is an aspect of intelligence.

To conclude, the so called Sevareid Law that "the chief cause of problems is solutions" can be applied to AI and that as Grant and Moses (2017) argue in their book titled Technology and Trajectory of Myth

> "... both the optimists and the pessimists are missing the point. Both the utopian and dystopian views are examples of mythological thinking and this makes them highly problematic."

One major task is for the development of ethical guidance for individual and organisation levels that is a major challenge for academics across many disciplines.

References:

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