LDR 801-52 – Ethics in Global Society

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Professor

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**Assignment**

1. ***Assignment #3 – Essay***
2. 1. Write a 5-page essay that analyzes a topic in ethics relevant to your research interests, professional growth, and as an interdisciplinary faith-learning scholar. The essay must show scholarly work and cover the subject well.

“From the beginning of time until 2003 we generated 5 billion gigabytes of data (5 exabytes) – [that is] all the books and news and movies and information in history.  We now generate five exabytes of data every ten minutes” (Detweiler, 2013). This is the startling observation made by Craig Detweiler from his book *iGods* published in 2013. Ten more years have lapsed since this ponderous claim. The data, and the digital mediums built to carry the load, have only *increased*. The information overload is measurable.  It is also proving to be palpable as a deluge of studies signal that the overload is not just intellectual, but also emotional, and inescapably societal (Kegan, 1998). It is taking its toll. And this is just the human generated contributions. In the face of Artificial Intelligence infusing digitally curated media with incredible speed, new considerations are necessary to assist the integration of human-centered ethics in the rise of AI infused society.

In 1967, Marshall McLuhan quite literally penned the now famous maxim, “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1967). It is power packed with meaning, instructive, and direct. The medium is not neutral, unbiased, nor innocuous. McLuhan argues that the medium profoundly influences the content and value of the message itself. The medium colors the message. Because the medium is by nature value-laden, it carries ethical projection within its very constitution.

The *Gutenberg* world which generated the printing press for the written word literally transmitted its messages in black and white, supported linear modes of thinking, and enhanced the critical reflection of concrete meanings of words and the ideas those words put forth (Abel, 2011). The printing press promoted a world of internalization where ethical reflection could occur in the deep recesses of the individual mind. The society that resulted embedded itself in facts, reasonability, objectivity, and clearly defined relationships and social responsibilities.

Leonard Sweet (2012) and Arthur Hunt (2013), publishing within a year of one another, present the change in the multi-sensory, media ethical landscape. Hunt (2013), in his book *Surviving technopolis: Essays on finding balance in our new manmade environments* is sympathetic for the reclaiming of the day-gone-by, lamenting that “writing [i.e. the medium of the written word] has objectivity and permanency” and thus, “allows us to examine the past and compare it with the present in order to have some discernment in preparing for the future.” This tried and true 500-year critical thinking endeavor requires the concreteness of a defined word. It is only from this concreteness of the word that writing can describe the abstract. Visual images, for example, are simply “insufficient to convey things like holiness, mercy, self-existence…” (Hunt, 2013). Yet, Hunt must concede that, “the printing press gave rise to industrialism, which ironically gave rise to the new electronic culture, which shares characteristics with primitive oral cultures.” This new electronic culture operates as a culture of spectacle, not introspection; a key distinction in the message masquerading within the medium.

Leonard Sweet (2012) in *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* offers the positive side to what Hunt laments in his analysis.  Sweet sees the Gutenbegers as the "written word" crowd, and as such, more linear in thinking and projection.  The Googlers are more image rich, contextual, and capable of spherical thinking and analysis, i.e. more "global" in communication modalities. Gutenbergers use words as if from a fixed point, to explain hard facts and stats.  Googlers, on the other hand, utilize words emotively in ideas, the sharing of news, and telling stories.  They both rely on words as a primary medium, yet their approach is different. Sweet sees the power of the Googler approach in this new world of communication where everybody has the power to communicate globally in their pockets.  A digital tweet can go viral.  An internet post can impact hundreds of thousands...in an instant!  Sweet sees the revival implications amidst this new world order of communication.

While AI has the potential to be used for many socially beneficial purposes, there is concern about dangerous and problematic uses of the technology, which has prompted a global conversation on the normative principles to which AI ought adhere, under the banner of ‘AI ethics’ (Daly 2021). The rapid rise of AI within the digital and social media landscape brings forward a horde of fresh, distinctly ethical concerns. Pellegrino and Kelly note, “in the age of artificial intelligence, a fundamentally human domain, that of ethics, acquires more salience” (Pellegrino and Kelly 2019). In particular, “machines are per se unfit for striking payoffs – they have little judgement. Human beings must then step in and provide it: when we entrust decisions to intelligent machines, we need to clarify, for them, our philosophical, ethical, moral and legal preferences.” Pellegrino and Kelly appeal to the human element needed as increasingly more intelligent algorithmic automation is inserted into every scope and field of society, noting; “As decisions are automated, we must make sure that as human beings we are fully aware and in control of the assumptions and implications of such codes and data.”

A 2020 article in *AI, Society, and Governance: An Introduction,* Englke acknowledges, “many organizations have produced AI ethics and norms guidelines to place boundaries around the design of AI programs and their application to real-world phenomena” (Engelke 2020). Yet, “the fact that so many organizations have endeavored to define the ethical uses of AI is itself testament to a fear that has long animated thinking about AI, involving its incredible power and how it might be used for harmful and unethical purposes.” There is a problem inherent in the organizations responsible for the implementation of AI practices also attempting to define the limits of its use in the ethical arena. RSA researcher Jake Jooshandeh says: “Too often, technologists talk only to technologists, and citizens then struggle to have a meaningful voice in the debate” (RSA Journal 2019). Jooshandeh represents a research organization that provides toolkits to alleviate this disparity and bring humans back into the AI loop.

In the attempt to keep human preferences at the center of the AI experience, J. Tasioulas raises concerns in *Artificial Intelligence, Humanistic Ethics: “*The optimizing mindset prevalent among computer scientists and economists, among other powerful actors, has led to an approach focused on maximizing the fulfilment of human preferences, an approach that has acquired considerable influence in the ethics of AI. But this preference-based utilitarianism is open to serious objections…” (Tasioulas 2022). Her research team attempts to locate humanistic approaches to optimize human ethics within the AI world. These include a commitment to plurality of values which attempt to centralize both the individual and collective participation of well-being and morality.

In a similar appeal, F. Rossi argues for a “system of trust” to pervade the development of AI tools. He notes, “AI is a powerful technology that will have immense positive impacts on our lives. However, to fully gauge its potential benefits, we need to build a system of trust, both in the technology and in those who produce it. Issues of bias, explainability, data handling, transparency on data policies, and design choices should be addressed in a responsible and open way” (Rossi 2018). It must be acknowledged, as with Stanley-Lockman, Gilli, and Gilli’s 2020 article *Ethical purpose: Ethics and values*, that “these statistical machines have no understanding of good and bad, or fair and unjust. All an algorithm can do is achieve its human-defined reward function, not provide any context or information on whether the right question is being asked.” Although a machine is note a moral agent, the authors suggest that the machines should be considered a moral entity since decisions, albeit algorhythmic, are being made with installed goals in mind. They conclude, “this means that we humans are dutybound to adhere to our moral code of conduct when interacting with the systems, rather than shirking human responsibility to computers” (Stanley-Lockman, Gilli 2020).

Ethical considerations in the new media of AI are widespread. J. Tasiloulas contends, “these discussions often suffer from a tendency either to leave inexplicit their operative ethical assumptions or else to rely upon them uncritically even when they are made explicit” (Tasioulas 2022). Ultimately, who or what *gets* to decide the “goal” of the digital math driving the powerful undercurrent of the AI source code? If curated, collective human behavior are the only source for the algorhythmic AI frame, does that leave the transcendent realities of truth, beauty, and goodness unrepresented, lost, and fragmental in the digital formula? Is there room for a divine agent in the AI world, even if one grants that all efforts have been exhausted to maintain a human-centered outcome from AI assistance? Will an ethical society *survive the technopolis*, to borrow Hunt’s title, that its own technological advances has not only invented, but is uncritically ascending the power of agency to make the future world culture? Humanity has not traveled this way before. If McLuhan is correct, the medium of AI is not neutral, fair, nor just. It is as all mediums - slanted, preferential, and flawed. These questions must find frontier answers.

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