

Digital Ethics by Futurist Gerd Leonhard

February 12 - Issue #4 - [View online](#)

Futurist Gerd Leonhard's latest findings on the intersection of humanity and technology, focusing on Digital Ethics i.e. the ethics of exponential technological change and related Technology/Humanity topics

This newsletter is a highly curated weekly collection of topics and opinions that will hopefully add some momentum to the [Digital Ethics](#) conversation.

I am always interested in your opinion so please feel free to [ping me anytime](#) with comments or feedback.

Live long and prosper!

[Gerd](#)

Zurich / Switzerland

This newsletter is co-created by Futures Agency Curator [Peter Van](#)

Check out my recent [book 'Technology vs Humanity'](#) for more context, now available in 10+ languages

Introduction

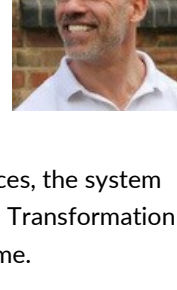
Welcome to the fourth issue of my Digital Ethics Newsletter. This week, I am sharing some interesting book reviews as well as some excellent long reads on Digital Ethics. And so that not everything is doom and gloom, I included some positivist views to the conversation.

I hope you like it. Please feel free to share your feedback and input on social media (see links below). Thanks for reading!

Highlights

Evgeny Morozov dissects "Surveillance Capitalism"

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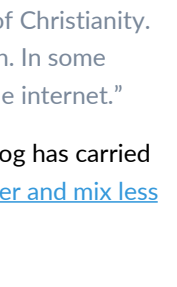


Excellent review by [Evgeny Morozov](#) of Zuboff's latest book ["The Age of Surveillance Capitalism"](#). In 10 chapters, he shares his deep insights on how we are "being programmed by capitalism"

"Managerial capitalism" hunted and automated the body; "surveillance capitalism" hunts and automates the mind... One company did make billions from the countercultural rhetoric of individual empowerment and self-determination, exhorting all of us to "think different"—preferably while paying for its expensive products"

Rushkoff: Team Human vs. Team AI

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[Rushkoff](#) has a new book - ["Team Human"](#) - and confronts the promises of artificial intelligence with the need to understand and reframe the values implicit in technology. Douglas's work and mine intersect in so many ways it's sometimes uncanny.

"Human beings are not the problem. We are the solution... To a hammer, everything is a nail. To AI, everything is a computational challenge."

He also addresses the ["Solutionism"](#) culture of Silicon Valley (every problem that can be solved by an app). In that way, Rushkoff meets [Morozov](#) halfway:

"To many of the developers and investors of Silicon Valley, however, humans are not to be emulated or celebrated, but transcended or — at the very least — reengineered. These technologists are so dominated by the values of the digital revolution that they see anything or anyone with different priorities as an impediment. This is a distinctly antihuman position, and it's driving the development philosophy of the most highly capitalized companies on the planet."

Justice/Court/Law

Australian Robo-debt scheme is a matter of government ethics

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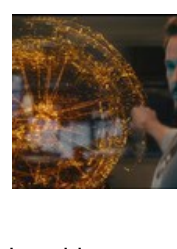
The Australian Government's highly controversial robo-debt scheme utilizes an algorithm to average out a person's yearly income. If this calculated income does not match other data sources, the system automatically issues a debt notice to the recipient. Former Digital Transformation Office chief executive [Paul Shetler](#) says the algorithm isn't to blame.

"The robot-debt issue is a problem of government ethics, not algorithms or technology... People that are interacting with DHS are at their most vulnerable, they should be getting the best services, not the worst"

The Facebook case study on digital ethics, continued

Facebook's 15th anniversary: more critique than party

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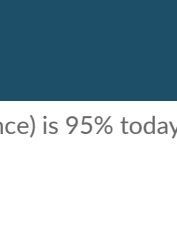
Facebook celebrated its 15th anniversary: the occasion for many journalists to sharpen their critique on the company that only has one metric: user growth.

"Facebook has collected more users than there are followers of Christianity. More than 2.3 billion people use the service every single month. In some parts of the world, Facebook has become synonymous with the internet."

Germany crashed the birthday party: the German privacy watchdog has carried out a probe into the social network by [ordering Facebook to gather and mix less data](#).

Angela Merkel Quits Facebook: after the cheers, ethical questions are raised

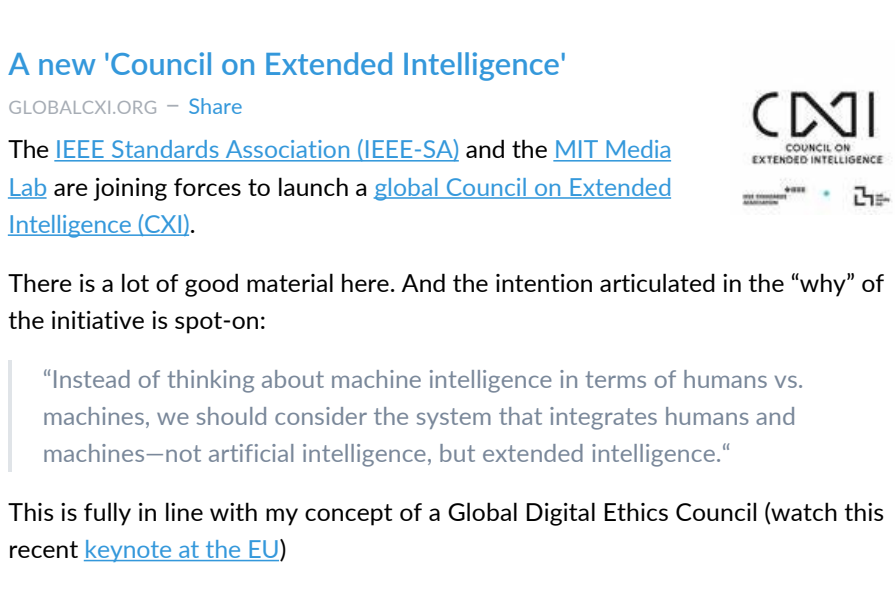
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Angela Merkel leaves Facebook: well, it's more complicated than that. This is about the [fan page of Germany's chancellor](#), not her personal account, which still exists.

Merkel ignored her party's leadership, and decided to simply end her chancellor's fan page. Merkel's step raises fundamental questions:

"Can a prominent politician single-handedly choose to leave Facebook? Doesn't her digital legacy need to be archived along with her files, letters and memos? And doesn't posterity have the right to know how Angela Merkel communicates in a sphere which she herself has described as "Neuland," a new frontier?"



Is Facebook gunning for our relationships?

Challenges

China wants to become #1 in AI at all cost

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In this fascinating long read, [Gregory C. Allen](#) shows how China will do whatever it takes to become the world's undisputed leader in AI: in R&D, in military, in education, in talent acquisition, etc. Its strategies become a geo-political issue and could potentially lead to war.

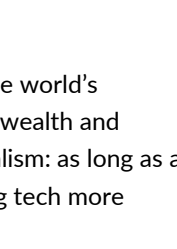
"China's leadership — including Xi Jinping — believes that China should pursue global leadership in AI technology and reduce its vulnerable dependence on imports of international technology... Jack Ma, the chairman of Alibaba, said explicitly in a speech at the 2019 Davos World Economic Forum that he was concerned that global competition over AI could lead to war."

"China's stance on exponential tech such as AI and human genome editing is becoming a huge challenge as far as defining global [#digitalethics](#) is concerned" [@gleonhard](#)

Technologies

The Future of AI Ethics will require action NOW (says Matthew Biggins)

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[Matthew Biggins](#) does a great job breaking down the generic term "AI" into its different flavours. He also provides some good definitions and a useful framework for discussion. This way, he adds structure to the debate on what artificial intelligence means for agency and ethics. He believes the time to act is now.

"That means the crucial time period is right now, ... If we can engrain ethics now, it may carry over into more advanced AIs. There are no guarantees, but it's the best chance we've got."

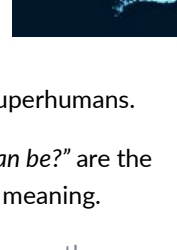


The 3 steps of AI, graph by Gerd Leonhard: IA (intelligent assistance) is 95% today

Industries

Joi Ito analyses algorithms in the insurance industry: the danger of more inequality and discrimination

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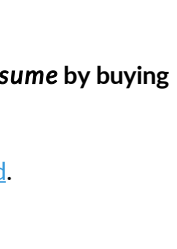
[Joi Ito](#) (Director MIT Media Lab) argues that the use of AI by insurance companies (and others like them) leads to more inequalities and discriminations.

"The original insurers used back then—that their job was purely technical and that it didn't involve moral judgments—is very reminiscent of the arguments made by some social network platforms today... Like the insurers, large tech firms and the computer science community also tend to frame "fairness" in a depoliticized, highly technical way involving only mathematics and code, which reinforces a circular logic."

Organizations

A new 'Council on Extended Intelligence'

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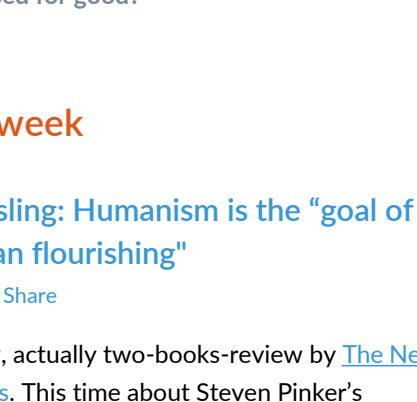


The [IEEE Standards Association \(IEEE-SA\)](#) and the [MIT Media Lab](#) are joining forces to launch a [global Council on Extended Intelligence \(CXI\)](#).

There is a lot of good material here. And the intention articulated in the "why" of the initiative is spot-on:

"Instead of thinking about machine intelligence in terms of humans vs. machines, we should consider the system that integrates humans and machines—not artificial intelligence, but extended intelligence."

This is fully in line with my concept of a Global Digital Ethics Council (watch this recent [keynote at the EU](#))

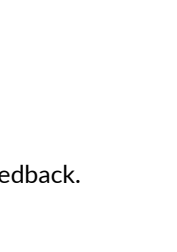


My call for a Global Digital Ethics Council

Disturbing things

The surveillance state is no longer limited to the state: 50% is in private hands

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"A new generation of tech firms has made it possible for private citizens to use the devices, known as automatic license plate readers, or ALPRs—without the strict oversight that governs this type of data collection by law enforcement."

"But it also raises untold numbers of new legal and ethical issues, few of which have yet been tested in the courts, experts warn."

The protection of wealth and power stands in the way of making tech more human

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The long read: Today's titans of tech and finance want to solve the world's problems, as long as the solutions never, ever threaten their own wealth and power. This is where digital ethics touches the very root of capitalism: as long as a system propagates this kind of injustice all other efforts at making tech more human will fail!

"New data published this week by Oxfam showed that the world's 2,200 billionaires grew 12% wealthier in 2018, while the bottom half of humanity got 11% poorer... Rich American men, who tend to live longer than the average citizens of any other country, now live 15 years longer than poor American men, who endure only as long as men in Sudan and Pakistan... What is at stake is whether the reform of our common life is led by governments elected by and accountable to the people, or rather by wealthy elites claiming to know our best interests."

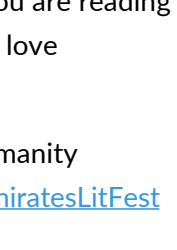


Adds Gerd: With great power comes great responsibility!

Snippet of the week

Why the Post-Human Future is a Fairytale

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[David Mattin](#) is Global Head of Trends and Insights at TrendWatching and sits on the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Consumption. [His latest post](#) is a great antidote to the transhumanist narrative of singularity and superhumans.

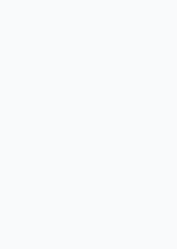
"How can I be happy? Am I loved? Am I creative? Am I everything I can be?" are the questions that drive the human pursuit of connection, status and meaning.

"The post-human future is a myth. What's more, it's one that serves the interests—and egos—of the powerful rising techno-elite centred around Silicon Valley... It's far more likely that the 21st-century will see not the end of the human story, but an overwhelming amplification of it."

Podcasts

Podcast on Chapter 2 of my book 'Technology vs. Humanity'

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I just published the second weekly podcast featuring different chapters of my book [Technology vs Humanity](#): a conversation with Peter Van. In chapter 2, entitled "Tech vs. Us", I ask what makes us human. What is the difference between human intelligence and machine intelligence? Why should we talk about protecting what makes us human? What are [#andorithms](#)?

"Being human is not something that we can—or should—just consume by buying some fancy technology. There is no app for happiness."

Subscribe to my podcasts on [Spotify](#), on [iTunes](#) or on [Soundcloud](#).

This is probably the best ethical question to ask: "Should This Exist?"

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Quartz wants to challenge the Techno-Utopians:

"But with all the good news, so much bad news! We've had massive failures, things didn't go as planned, bad people ended up winning, good people ended up losing. Just look around: [algorithmic bias and discrimination](#), [CRISPR babies](#), [perpetual surveillance](#), [screen-induced depression](#), the [pillaging of our data](#), and the [migration of trolls from Middle Earth into our daily lives](#). And, we have to take a hard look at ourselves, Techno Utopians: it turns out we weren't as good at self-regulation as we'd promised."

Quartz is now launching a [new series of podcasts](#) on technology ethics, challenging and helping entrepreneurs to think through the human side of their technologies.

This is the right question to be asked:

"How is technology impacting our humanity? Should This Exist? How can this product be used for good?"

Meme of the week

Pinker meets Rosling: Humanism is the "goal of maximizing human flourishing"

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Another book review, actually two-books-review by [The New York Review of Books](#). This time about Steven Pinker's ["Enlightenment Now"](#) and Hans Rosling's ["Factfulness"](#)

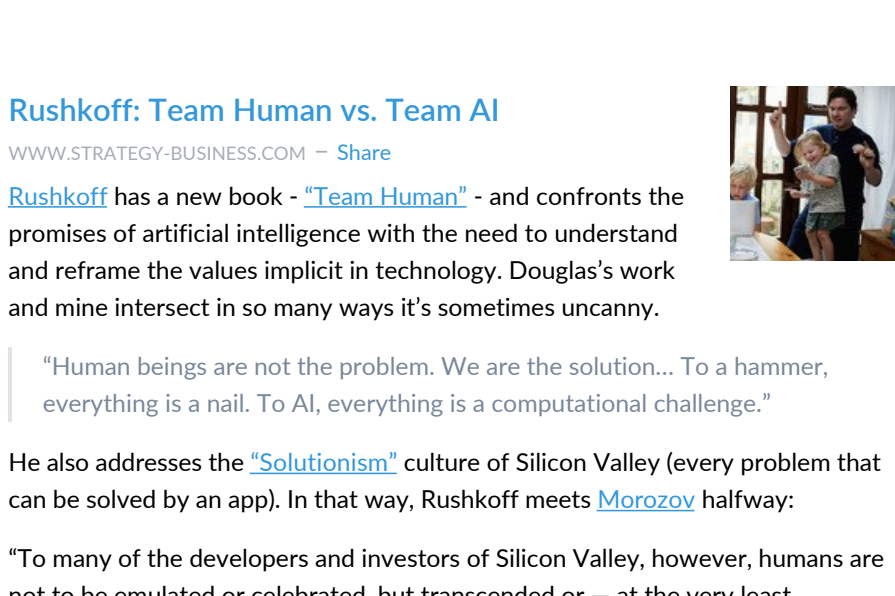
"Humanism is defined as the "goal of maximizing human flourishing... As a possibilist, I see all this progress, and it fills me with conviction and hope that further progress is possible. This is not optimistic... It is having a worldview that is constructive and useful."

Gerd's Latest

My website has been completely redesigned!

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My [totally redesigned website](#) just went live. I would love your feedback.



Best moments and key messages from my 2018 keynotes

Smiley

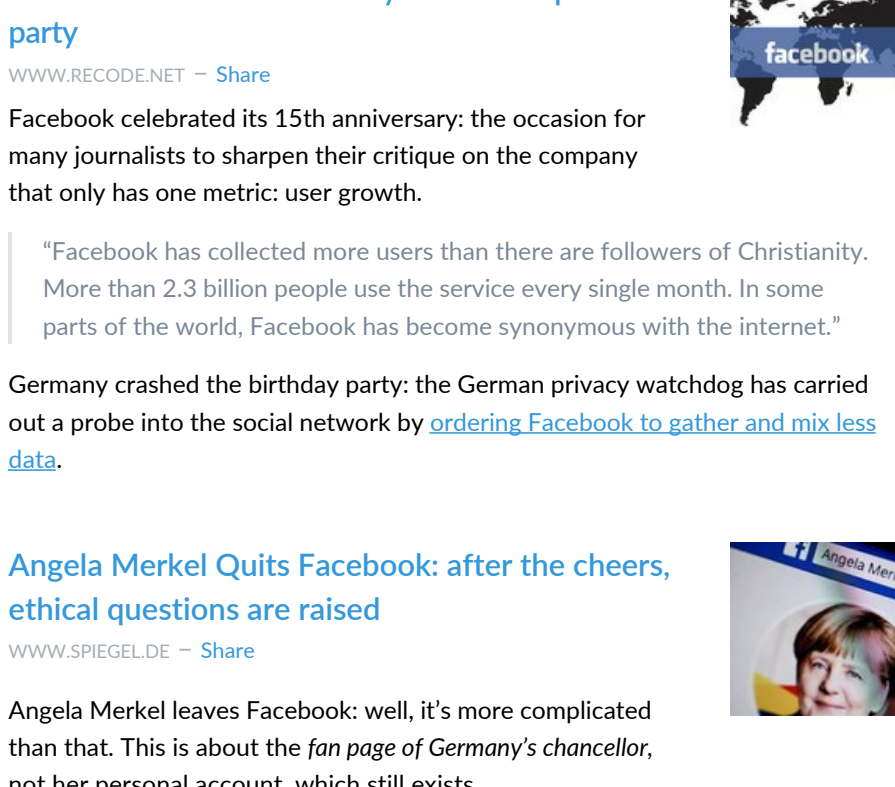
Tinder for dogs?

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Called GetPet, the app lets dog lovers swipe for the perfect pet match. The app was launched last month and is getting hundreds of new users daily and already has made a few matches.

"It is like Tinder, but with dogs"



"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

Cartoon by Steiner

That's it for this week. I'll be back next Tuesday with the fifth edition of our newsletter.

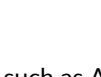
The [Digital Ethics \(DE\)](#) newsletter is provided for free. If you are reading it and value it, I wouldn't mind if you gave my deigest some love through [Twitter](#) -> Or just forward it to a friend.

Bonus: meet Gerd Leonhard Author of [Technology vs Humanity](#) [#techvshuman](#) [www.techvshuman.com](#) for his talk at [@EmiratesLitFest](#) March 2 in Dubai [https://gerd.fm/2177ZL9](#)

Warm regards,

[Gerd](#)

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