

Digital Ethics by Futurist Gerd Leonhard

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

Introduction

Welcome to the ninth issue of our [Digital Ethics](#) newsletter, part of our continuing [#TechVsHuman](#) conversation. This newsletter is co-created by Futures Agency Curator [Peter Van](#).

We've decided to expand our newsletter to include a wider range of themes, so this will be the last issue in its current form. Moving forward, we're excited to look at new topics covered in Gerd's keynotes and his general 'Humanity Futures' work. You can expect themes such as the future of work and jobs, education and learning, the coming convergence of technology and biology, and new economic systems that are fit for a world of abundance.

Check out the note at the end of the newsletter for more information about what's happening next.

Happy reading!

Gerd & Peter.

Need more context to understand our weekly futurist updates? Try Gerd's best-selling book ["Technology vs Humanity"](#), now available in 11 languages.

Highlights

AI as a Human Right?

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As some thought leaders advocate for the recognition of access to AI as a human right, the question arises - how do we achieve that?

"It can be hard to distinguish sci-fi fantasies from projections on where artificial intelligence is headed. Achieving the positive scenarios for AI, let alone anointing it as a human right, will require our noblest angels and the collaboration of broad majorities among governments, businesses and the general population"

Will Google want to control DeepMind's development of Artificial General Intelligence?

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Demis Hassabis founded a company to build the world's most powerful AI. Then Google bought him out. [Hal Hodson](#) asks who is in charge: will Google let DeepMind usher AGI into being, right under their nose but beyond control?

"Five years after the acquisition by Google, the question of who controls DeepMind is coming to a crunch point. The firm's founders and early employees are approaching earn-out."

Who is Mission Control for Humanity?



Societal Impact

Ideas are getting more expensive: AI is reinventing the way we invent

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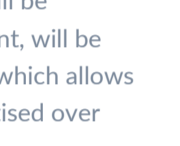
The biggest impact of artificial intelligence will be to help humans make discoveries we couldn't make on our own.

"AI could dramatically change the cost of doing R&D in many different fields." Much of innovation involves making predictions based on data. In such tasks, Cockburn adds, "machine learning could be much faster and cheaper by orders of magnitude."

Corporate Digital Activism

Are Tech companies walking the digital ethics talk when it comes to military contracts?

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Protests at companies like Google and Microsoft have grabbed headlines, but an Air Force demo day last week hosted dozens of startups eager to work with the Pentagon.

"If these sorts of ethical dilemmas were weighing on the dozens of startups gathered inside the Marriott last week, it didn't show. Instead, they whooped and applauded when one speaker noted that about half the companies in the room had never worked with the government before, and laughed when another joked that it's now quicker to get an Air Force contract than it is to get a beer in New York City."

Governance

Programmers Need a Hippocratic Oath

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Ethics training and oversight should be mandatory for software engineers.

"This is a good time to apply the "Black Mirror rule": Ask yourself if this software were the subject of a Black Mirror episode, how would everything go to hell? This gives you and your team a chance to model—and then prepare for—worst-case scenarios."



The future can be heaven or hell - it's up to us

CRISPR experts are calling for a global moratorium on heritable gene editing

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Some of the biggest names in gene editing want to stop anyone from manipulating cells that will pass on changes to the next generation.

"The world might conclude that the clinical use of germline editing is a line that should not be crossed for any purpose whatsoever," the group says. "Alternatively, some societies might support genetic correction for couples with no other way to have biologically related children, but draw a line at all forms of genetic enhancement. Or, societies could one day endorse limited or widespread use of enhancement."

The Facebook 'Digital Ethics' case study

Bruce Schneier's suggestions for Facebook's privacy overhaul

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[Bruce Schneier](#) shares a list of changes he's expecting if Facebook is serious about changing its business model and improving user privacy.

"But as long as the most important measure of success is short-term profit, doing things that help strengthen communities will fall by the wayside. Surveillance, which allows individually targeted advertising, will be prioritised over user privacy. Outrage, which drives engagement, will be prioritised over feelings of belonging. And corporate secrecy, which allows Facebook to evade both regulators and its users, will be prioritised over societal oversight."

Facebook's new move isn't about privacy. It's about domination

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Mark Zuckerberg announced that Facebook would be 'pivoting to privacy'. That's an empty pledge, says [Siva Vaidhyanathan](#) for [The Guardian](#).

"For too long, we have taken Mark Zuckerberg at his word. Too many times he has betrayed us. Let's not fall for it again. This move is not about protecting you. It's about defeating other companies and consolidating global power."



Domination should be regulated

Zuckerberg wants to establish Facebook's own Supreme Court

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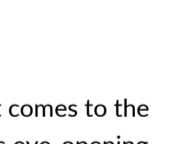


If the Facebook CEO's reflection tour has revealed anything it is that even as he wrestles with the harms the platform has wrought, he is busy dreaming up new ones.

"Instead, Facebook will establish its own Supreme Court, he told Zittrain, an outside panel entrusted to settle thorny questions about what appears on the platform. "I will not be able to make a decision that overturns what they say," he promised, "which I think is good."

Mark Zuckerberg And The Tech World Still Do Not Understand Ethics

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What is it about technology startups that leads people to cut corners, ignore ethical concerns and disregard the social consequences of their activities? And why do investors, the media and much of the public turn a blind eye?

"From the misunderstanding of disruptive innovation, it's a short step to fusing the concept with Schumpeter's ill-defined notion of "creative destruction." Throw in some free-market fundamentalism and you arrive at disruption as an unquestioned good."

Challenges

The AI Governance Challenge

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Until now, no government or supranational body has sought to develop the governance mechanisms needed to maximise AI's potential and manage its risks.

"At a time when technology and data are flowing freely across borders, the power of national policies to manage AI may be limited. As attempts at Internet governance have shown, creating a supranational entity to govern AI will be challenging, owing to conflicting political imperatives."

Technologies

Is it ethical to genetically engineer people?

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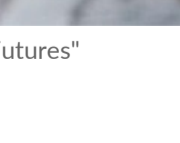
Given the news from China of genetically modified twins, what kinds of restrictions should there be on genetic engineering?

"Children, as human beings, have the right to certain 'fundamental conditions' necessary to pursue a good life, which might include but are not limited to: the capacity to act, to move, to reproduce, to think, to be motivated, to have emotions, to interact with others and the environment, and to be moral."

Organizations

Turing Institute AI director discusses the ethical issues of artificial intelligence

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As the number of companies using AI rises, the ethical issues surrounding the use of artificial intelligence need to be addressed.

"As we move out of use cases in the consumer landscape that don't have such significant impacts on our lives and role as citizens, to use cases in business that have significant implications and consequences, ethical considerations need to be made."

Reports/Whitepapers

2019 Tech Trends Annual Report - good stuff!

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300+ Tech and Science Trends, 5 weak signals for 2020, 48 scenarios describing plausible near futures, 9 toolkits and frameworks, 5 technology primers, 3 glossaries, and a list of the 50 world's smartest cities. Excellent report.

"While you cannot solve for future uncertainty, you can prepare your teams to think strategically using data-driven signals, trends, and outcomes. Focus on connections, not predictions. Doing so will help your organisation get ahead of disruption in order to build your preferred futures."

Disturbing things

The Automatic Weapons of Social Media

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For more than 30 years, [John Battelle](#) believed that technology companies were a force for good. But recently he lost that faith thanks to the overwhelming evidence that these platforms are being intentionally manipulated to undermine democracy.

"This is an existential crisis, both for civil society and for the health of the businesses being manipulated. Automated machines in the hands of malicious actors are not only destroying our rational discourse, they are destroying the future value of the companies which host them. This is existential, people. It's time to act."

The dark and shady practices of Silicon Valley (by Roger McNamee)

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In this absorbing talk spanning the last 20 years of tech, [Roger McNamee](#) starts at the origins of the PayPal Mafia and traces them to Silicon Valley's global domination.

"Data is used by online vendors in all industries to make behavioural predictions for profit – often in unethical or cloaked ways. Did we sign up for this? Roger McNamee calls for a halt to blind participation and asks for a national debate on whether commerce based on personal data (but not for personal benefit) should be legal."

People

Chess legend Garry Kasparov: "Humans still have the monopoly on evil"

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At Austin's SXSW festival, Garry Kasparov - who many consider the [greatest chess player of all time](#) - made an appearance to speak on ethics in AI, and warn of security threats.

"There's not much difference between Google data collection and KGB data collection. There are consequences for people in China, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and other undemocratic countries. We need to hold the corporations responsible for dealing with this data. The Facebooks and Googles of the world have so much power now, we should look at the ways they are dealing with this information."

Surveillance: Are we Pawns or Chess-Players?

Snippet of the week

Startup Betterthansex uses AI to Redefine Love

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In DNA dating, People will use their DNA, big data and artificial intelligence to create their Perfect Dates with max compatibility. Their Personal Dating Avatars will find, diagnose and transact to make sure your date candidate is not a psycho. Next, there will be sentiment and behavioural analysis, along with a compatibility check for lifestyle, economics, culture, and values.

"And AI will revolutionise the way we find our possible significant others and ultimately help us choose the right one. From our sleeping and exercise patterns to financial habits, everything can be controlled, monitored and predicted with astonishing accuracy."

Meme of the week: 'Information Fiduciaries'

Zittrain and Zuckerberg discuss encryption, 'information fiduciaries' and much more

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Should Facebook be considered an 'information fiduciary' when it comes to the privacy of its clients? Just one of the far reaching questions in this eye-opening, 1.5 hour interview with Mark Zuckerberg.

Zittrain and Zuckerberg discuss 'information fiduciaries'

Gerd's Latest

Dubai needs to adopt a 'humanistic' view of technology - a hard-hitting interview with Gerd

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On the sidelines of the [Emirates Airlines Festival of Literature](#), Gerd was speaking with [Arabian Business'](#) [Shayan Shakeri](#). Gerd is calling for governments in the region to consider "digital ethics councils" to help drive technology to benefit humankind. [Here](#) is the full article.

"Currently, there is always a short-term idea of promoting the location. But imagine if Dubai did incorporate an ethics council. That would be a truly big message because it would be looking at things a bit further. Ethics does not involve just being digital but human rights, the environment etc. This is a much bigger story."

Gerd calls for a Global Digital Ethics Council

Smiley

Mind the Gap: this newsletter is moving to "Humanity Futures"

End note

That's it for this week. Starting with next week's edition, this newsletter will be renamed ["Humanity Futures"](#) and will be merged with Gerd's existing newsletter at [www.gerd.digital](#). We know that you'll find it just as interesting as the content we've bought you so far!

Worry not, your subscription will be transferred automatically. You will still be able to browse the archives at the old URL, [www.digitalethics.co](#), which will become an integral part of Gerd's main website at [www.futuristgerd.com](#).

We are always interested in your opinion, so please feel free to [ping us anytime](#) with comments or feedback.

Live long and prosper!

[Gerd](#) and [Peter Van](#)

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