

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 seventh issue of our Digital Ethics Newsletter, a highly curated weekly collection of topics and opinions on [Digital Ethics](#), and part of our continuing [#TechVsHuman](#) conversation.

In this week's edition, we've added two new sections: 'Societal Impact' and 'Governance'. Increasingly we are seeing a new awareness about the ethical impact of new technologies on the future of work, and economic dynamics such as taxes. As everything becomes connected in a meta-intelligent cloud or global brain, governance needs to include a whole new set of parameters.

We hope you're enjoying our new shortened format!

Happy reading,

Gerd.

Highlights

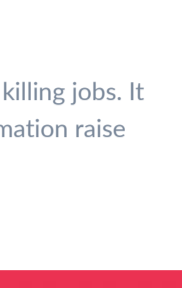
An optimist at heart: Bill Gates shares his positive take on technology

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Despite all the dystopian stories we read about the impact of technology, some remain optimists at heart. In this article, Bill Gates shares his positive take on the world:

"I think the big picture is that it's better to be born today than ever, and it will be better to be born 20 years from now than today."

Here are the [10 breakthrough technologies](#) that Bill Gates identified.



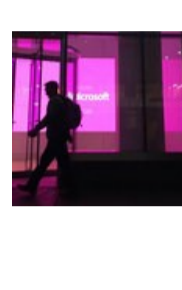
Societal Impact

Experts believe AI will lead to the end of the middle-class

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The world's top AI researchers met to consider the threats posed by their research. The global economy could be the first casualty.

"They looked at the real US economy, the real reasons for the "hollowing out" of the middle class. The problem isn't immigration—far from it. The problem isn't offshoring or taxes or regulation. It's technology.

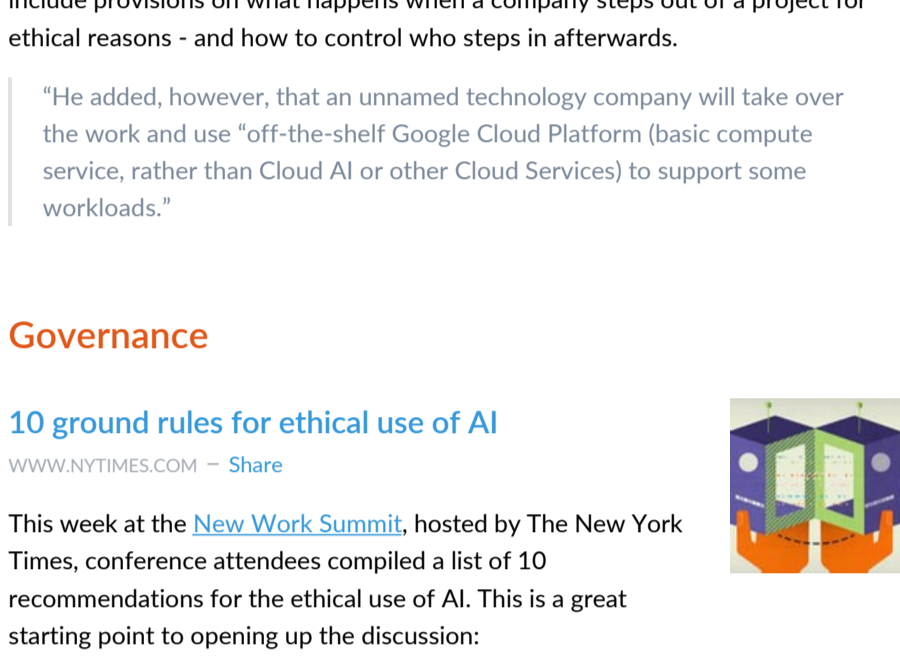
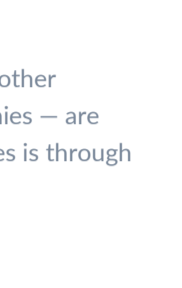


Why governments should tax robots

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A couple of years ago, taxing robots or automation was considered a fallacy. But as the staggering impact of artificial intelligence and robots on jobs is manifesting, many experts re-open the conversation.

"The purpose of taxing robots is not simply to stop them from killing jobs. It is to level the playing field, to ensure that investments in automation raise productivity."



Technology is not something we should allow to rule our lives.

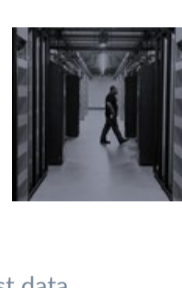
Corporate Digital Activism

Tech Workers voice ethical concerns: a new form of activism?

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Employees at tech companies have recently become much more emboldened to speak out on ethical concerns, and have forced changes from Silicon Valley giants.

"These protests speak to the newfound power of employees...Often companies want to do things, but then they have to backtrack because they don't want to displace employees."



Is Ethical A.I. Even Possible?

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Employee ethical protest is laudable, but most probably not enough: governments will need to step in.

"The most significant changes have been driven by employee protests, and pointed research from academics and other independent experts. Some activists — and even some companies — are beginning to argue that the only way to ensure ethical practices is through government regulation.



Google Hedges on Promise to End Controversial Involvement in Military Drone Contract

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Google's senior vice president for global affairs appears to hedge on its commitment to fully cut ties with Project Maven, the military drone initiative. Ethical governance in the future may also have to include provisions on what happens when a company steps out of a project for ethical reasons - and how to control who steps in afterwards.

"He added, however, that an unnamed Google Cloud Platform (basic compute service, rather than Cloud AI or other Cloud Services) to support some workloads."



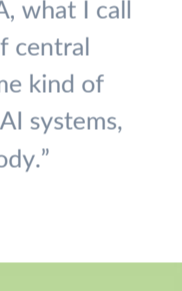
Governance

10 ground rules for ethical use of AI

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This week at the [New Work Summit](#), hosted by The New York Times, conference attendees compiled a list of 10 recommendations for the ethical use of AI. This is a great starting point to opening up the discussion:

"The 10 recommendations are: Transparency, Disclosure, Privacy, Diversity, Bias, Trust, Accountability, Collective Governance, Regulation and Complementarity."

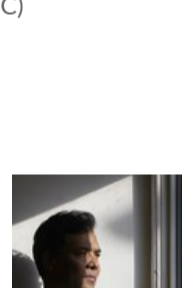


Data Is Not the New Oil

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In this [WIRED](#) article, Antonio García Martínez (@antagonim) argues that data isn't the new oil and the metaphor is supremely unhelpful.

"Data isn't the new oil. And it never will be, because the biggest data repositories don't want it to be. Ultimately, the majors like Google and Facebook will raise the castle walls around their data (and users) and disclaim any knowledge of data brokering, the "data-as-oil" traders."



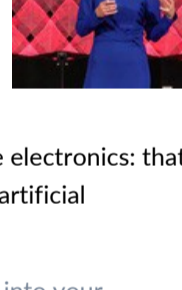
Justice/Court/Law

Why the AI black-box can't be an excuse for bad behaviour

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While it may seem obvious, you can't hide behind the AI black-box to make unlawful decisions.

"Human makers, users and owners will be liable for black box unlawful behaviour. Building algorithms that pass judgment on people will require that we understand that process by which that judgment is made and that date upon which it's based. And throwing up your hands and saying "the algorithm made me do it" is probably not going to be a good defence."



Technologies

The Need For A New Data Deal

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Last week we reported on Telefonica's [New Digital Deal](#). Now, Taiwan's HTC joins the party with new handsets giving users control over their personal data. And yet another initiative, led by MIT's Alexander Pentland, seeks to use an open source AI algorithm to give individuals collective bargaining power and control over their own data.

"We need a new deal on data," says Pentland, who has spent the last 12 years working on ways to ethically extract insights from data without endangering privacy or security"



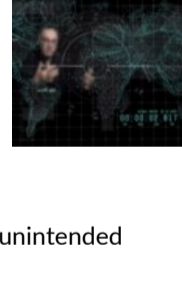
Reports/Whitepapers

TechUK: Digital ethics has to hit the boardroom this year

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UK IT industry lobby organisation TechUK has released a position paper contending that digital ethics must become a boardroom matter in 2019.

"Given the reach and scope of advanced digital technologies, now is the time for other regulators to also become informed and active in the digital ethics debate."



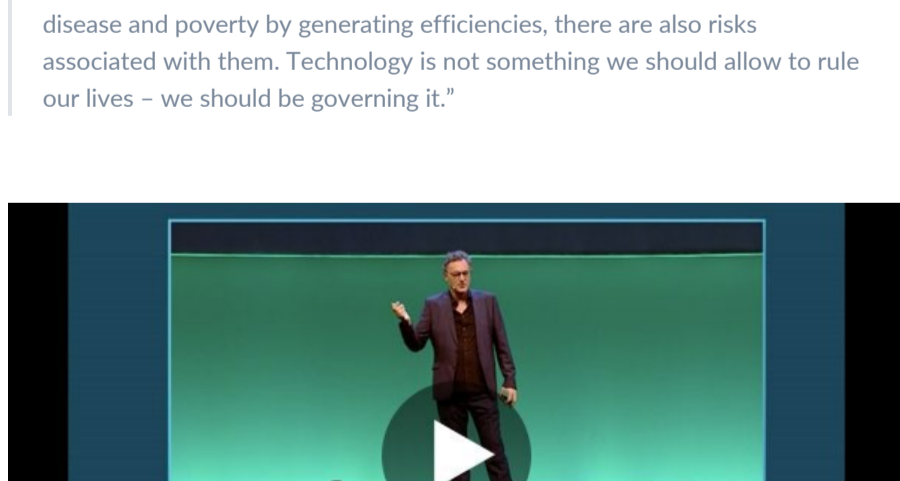
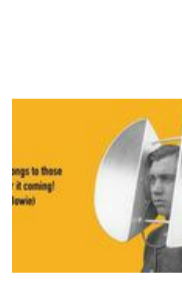
Books we are reading (or trying to read)

Amy Webb wants to create a Global Alliance to counter the AI threat to democracy

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In her new book, [The Big Nine: How the Tech Titans and Their Thinking Machines Could Warp Humanity](#), Futurist and NYU professor Amy Webb argues that we are heading towards an artificial intelligence catastrophe due to the convergence of worrying technological, political, and economic trends.

"One of my biggest recommendations is the formation of GAIA, what I call the Global Alliance on Intelligence Augmentation: some kind of central organization that can develop global norms and standards, some kind of guardrails to imbue not just American or Chinese ideals inside AI systems, but world-views that are much more representative of everybody."



Gerd calls for a Global Digital Ethics Council (GDEC)

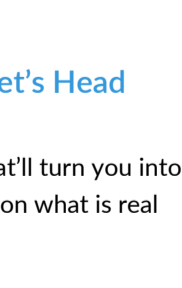
Disturbing things

A medical check-up could collect DNA material from ethnic minority groups - it happens in China

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China wants to shake the country's Uighurs, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group, more subservient to the Communist Party. Collecting genetic material is a key part of China's campaign.

"In at least some of the cases, people didn't give up their genetic material voluntarily. To mobilize for the free medical checkups, police and local cadres called or sent them text messages, telling them the checkups were required... There was a pretty strong coercive element to it...They had no choice."



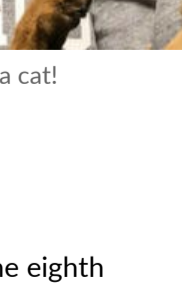
Snippet of the week

Why You Shouldn't Upload Your Brain To A Computer (says Polina Anikeeva)

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Neural engineer [Polina Anikeeva](#), Associate Professor of Materials Science and Engineering at MIT, has a great TEDx talk on the differences in natural "brain hardware" and solid-state electronics: that distinction leads to a possible collaboration between human and artificial intelligence.

"We are missing the opportunity of an AI as a specialist plugin into your generalist's brain... So, why should we spend energy in uploading this compact generalist into an army of specialist machines?"



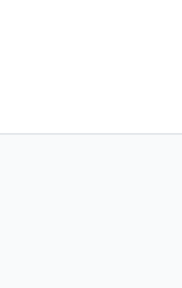
Meme of the week

Get ready for the age of sensor panic

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Cameras, microphones and other sensors are showing up everywhere. Many are just hidden in devices such as thermostats and intelligent assistants. The intention is that we forget them, and that is just the beginning.

"A startup called Xnor this week announced no-battery, solar-powered, AI-enhanced core cameras that offer "a simple, valuable way to gather data." The core differentiator is that the solar power and wireless connectivity mean you set them and forget them — just about anywhere."



The Democratization of Surveillance

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When not "only" corporations, governments and institutions deploy facial recognition systems and other sensors, but also every individual can spy each other, are we heading towards a democratization of surveillance? And who will be in control?

"While the development in facial recognition technology is remarkable, there is consequential need to question the motive and understand and evaluate its impact on the social fabric: on diversity, discrimination, race, religion, trust, accountability, transparency, privacy, access to services, mobility, freedom, community, social justice and security. It is fundamental that this growing power is exercised fairly, responsibly and in accordance with human rights, civil liberties and the rule of law."



Who will be Mission Control for Humanity?

Podcasts

Our latest podcast on how to humanise the IoT (Internet of Things)

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Here is our latest podcast based on Chapter Five of Gerd's book [Technology vs Humanity: the Ethics of Inhuman Things](#). This week we covered the topics of Inhuman ecosystems and supply chains, and planning for externalities and unintended consequences.

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The Internet of Inhuman Things ?

Gerd's Latest

As Technology Becomes Cognitive, All Paths Must Lead To Collective Human Flourishing

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Gerd was recently invited to contribute to [Forbes' Cognitive World](#), a knowledge hub, ecosystem and marketplace for dealmakers involved in AI transformation. Societies are driven by their technology but defined by their humanity! Here is the [link to Gerd's Forbes post](#).

Free book excerpt from 'Navigating the digital age' by PaloAltoNetworks: The Ethics of Technology and the Future of Humanity

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Gerd contributed to 'Navigating the digital age' by PaloAltoNetworks. His chapter (12) is about the Ethics of Technology and the Future of Humanity. Please download the free PDF [here](#).

Gerd sends a wakeup call: Who is mission control for humanity?

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Gerd recently sent a wake-up call to the crowd at Xerocon London 2018.

"We should not let Silicon Valley be the mission control for humanity. While there are many positives to AI and big data, such as helping eradicate disease and poverty by generating efficiencies, there are also risks associated with them. Technology is not something we should allow to rule our lives - we should be governing it."

Gerd's wake-up call at Xerocon 2018

Smiley - Animal Farm

What is real? Try Super Realistic Replicas Of Your Pet's Head

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Finally, now you can order custom-made super realistic masks that'll turn you into a human clone of your pet. The ideal way to get utterly confused on what is real and what is fake :-)

Artificial Reality: on the Internet, nobody knows I am a cat!

End note

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

The *Digital Ethics (DE)* newsletter is provided at no cost. If you are reading it and value it, we wouldn't mind if you gave my digest some love through [Twitter](#) :-) - or just forward it to a friend.

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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