



Artificial intelligence: Curse or blessing?



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Artificial intelligence (AI) has permeated all our lives and made them more convenient in many regards. Almost every one of us has a smartphone equipped with weak AI. If our smartphone has face recognition, this function is enabled by AI. Our face is covered with 30,000 invisible infrared dots that register every single feature. Learning algorithms match the scan with the stored data to identify the user and decide whether or not to unlock the smartphone.

AI-supported navigation systems are more than just electronic maps. Many such systems use AI for real-time traffic monitoring. They not only show us the shortest route, but also guide us past traffic jams.

Social media accounts personalise the content of users' feeds and make friend suggestions, and all because the system has learnt which posts receive the most likes based on past behaviour patterns. I would like to clearly emphasise the negative aspects of social media, such as hate speech, the psychological impact on young people in particular, its interference in political campaigns and processes, and personal insults, none of which are filtered out by AI. Email, spell checkers, antivirus programs, search engines and voice assistants also all work based on AI.

Do we consider it progress or a threat that AI-equipped software can often evaluate radiographs, MRI scans and histological slides more accurately and safely than trained physicians? How do we feel about computer programs that can learn from our own experience? Do we have to impose limits upon systems that can think and act independently of human control?

Jerry Kaplan¹ points out the urgency of the questions to be answered: "Advances in the intellectual and physical capabilities of machines will change the way we live, work, play, find a mate, raise our children, and care for our elderly. They will also make certain human activities in the labour market superfluous, cause social change and push private as well as public institutions to their breaking point. It makes no difference at all whether we regard these machines as conscious or mindless, appreciate them as a new way of life or simply see them as clever devices: In all likelihood, they will play an increasingly important role and be inextricably linked to many areas of our daily lives."

A fundamental change occurs when, as in the past, it is no longer the machine that learns from the human, but the human that learns from the machine. The change brought about by AI will take on a new ethical dimension when the current weak AI, which is still dictated by humans, is replaced by strong AI, which shapes and develops itself. The extremely positive sides of AI, such as the significantly improved diagnostic possibilities in medicine, are overshadowed by increasing scepticism in society. A representative survey conducted by YouGov in 2020 found that one in seven people (15%) thought the benefits of the technology outweigh the risks, whereas 45% of respondents believed the number of risks and opportunities are equal, and 26% rated the risks as greater than the potential benefits. The survey also reported that 40% of companies did not want to use artificial intelligence, even considering it a threat to their business model².



The ethical dilemma of whether AI should make decisions without human input and what the consequences are if harm occurs needs to be discussed and clarified. Who is liable for the consequences of decisions made: the machine, even though it is not a legal person? Ethical and responsible use of AI requires transparency; it must remain controllable and monitorable. Since 2017, the UN, among other organisations, has also been examining AI from an ethical perspective. To achieve strong, self-developing AI, ethical requirements must no longer be directed only at humans, but also at the machine itself; it needs an artificial morality. In our anthropocentric world view, ethically sound AI is a *conditio sine qua non*.

As a result of the establishment of phenomenology by Husserl³, we are aware that all phenomena are emotionally evaluated by humans, and this holds true in our everyday lives as well as in science. As stated by Arkin⁴, however, all forms of AI act rationally because their actions are not subject to emotionally charged volition. If we adopt an optimistic perspective, this is a major benefit of strong AI. For all our ethical reservations, we should not allow the opportunities AI offers us to be drowned in pessimism⁴.

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Optimistically, and without the support of AI, I wish you all a successful and happy new year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Werner Schupp".

References

1. Kaplan J. Artificial Intelligence: What Everyone Needs to Know. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
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