

## **Thought for the Day: "this extraordinary technology must be harnessed to serve us, rather than the reverse".**

by Benjamin Gee - Monday, March 25, 2019

<https://chiefrabbi.org/all-media/thought-for-the-day-this-extraordinary-technology-must-be-harnessed-to-serve-us-rather-than-the-reverse/>

**The Chief Rabbi speaks about ethical concerns relating to artificial intelligence on BBC Radio 4's Today programme.**

A desperate struggle for control between Artificial Intelligence and its creators, which results in a catastrophic loss of life, may sound like the preserve of science fiction. But, tragically, some experts have suggested this may have been what happened on board the Ethiopian Airlines plane which crashed recently and the Lion Air plane that crashed in Indonesia last year. Media Reports suggest that in both cases, the pilot may have unsuccessfully battled against software which was designed to stop the plane from stalling, but which had malfunctioned.

Investigations are still in their early stages but If true, this raises several important questions about the use of AI. As the technology becomes ever more sophisticated and embedded in our everyday lives, I am troubled by one significant question: What happens when soulless Artificial Intelligence, devoid of feeling and emotion, is called upon to make moral or ethical choices on our behalf?

For example, in the development of driverless cars, should AI place the safety of its passenger before that of a pedestrian? In healthcare, which patient should receive lifesaving treatment first and why?

Yesterday, in Brussels, I addressed the European Parliament on precisely these challenges. According to The Book of Genesis, humankind is required to subdue the earth and establish a dominion of morality over it. Can we ever justifiably abdicate that moral responsibility into the hands of computers or, at least, a handful of people who program them?

If many of the world's major financial systems already rely on Artificial Intelligence, it is likely that such a system could one day have major financial repercussions for billions of people. If AI is already finding application in military technology, the decision to take another person's life might one day be made by a computer.

The development of Artificial Intelligence has the potential to be the source of enormous blessing to our world by augmenting human capacity, and not by replacing it. But the central imperative is clear: this extraordinary technology must be harnessed to serve us, rather than the reverse. It is therefore essential that these questions are discussed openly and transparently by governments and ethicists across the world rather than behind the closed doors of private corporations.

Eliezer Yudkowsky, founder of the Machine Intelligence Research Unit in California and passionate advocate of the benefits of AI, put it like this: “By far, the greatest danger of Artificial Intelligence is that people might conclude too early that they understand it.”

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