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"The trajectory from Adolf Hitler to Artificial Intelligence"

By

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Introduction

The comprehensive narrative of one of history's most notorious dictators, who in 1945 incited racial animosity and resulted in the deaths of millions, is as clear as day. While Hitler directly extinguished lives, artificial intelligence threatens to obliterate the potential and dreams of vulnerable individuals. Recently, billionaire and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk addressed this issue at a technology conference, forecasting that AI could undermine social justice, diminish the necessity for altruistic actions, and ultimately disrupt human interpersonal relationships. As the 21st century commenced, the volume of literature produced concerning Hitler since his passing surpassed that of works written about Napoleon in the fifty years following the latter's death. Furthermore, the temporal and spatial separation from the events of World War II has influenced the historical analysis of Hitler's legacy.

There is a widely accepted view regarding his significance in history, a designation that does not necessarily carry a favourable connotation. Hitler was primarily, and singularly, accountable for the initiation of World War II, a situation distinct from the multifaceted responsibilities of leaders and diplomats associated with the outbreak of World War I. His culpability in the execution of the Holocaust—specifically, the transition of German policy from the expulsion to the systematic extermination of Jews, ultimately encompassing Jews from all over Europe and European Russia—is also evident.

While no definitive document exists that explicitly conveys his directive for such actions, Hitler's speeches, writings, accounts of conversations with colleagues and foreign dignitaries, as well as testimonies from those who executed these policies, have frequently been referenced as substantiation of his involvement. Numerous instances of his most extreme rhetoric were documented by his aides during his "Table Talks," including the somewhat dubious "Bormann remarks" from February to April 1945. For instance, on January 30, 1939, during a speech commemorating the sixth anniversary of his regime, Hitler proclaimed to the Reichstag: "Today I will once more be a prophet: If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more in a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the Earth and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe."

We will understand if we examine the history, 1. A prominent member of Adolf Hitler's inner circle was Joseph Goebbels, who served as the minister of propaganda and was a staunch

supporter of Hitler, chosen to be his successor as chancellor. Nevertheless, Goebbels held this position for merely one day before taking his own life. Other significant figures included Hermann Göring, a leading member of the Nazi Party and a principal architect of the Nazi police state in Germany; Heinrich Himmler, who ranked just below Hitler in power; Joachim von Ribbentrop, the foreign minister responsible for negotiating various treaties; Martin Bormann, one of Hitler's closest aides; and Walther Funk, an economist who held the presidency of the Reichsbank.

While Hitler's actions resulted in the physical extermination of individuals, artificial intelligence poses a different threat by undermining mental well-being and jeopardizing employment opportunities. A comprehensive analysis of this issue will be provided in the subsequent chapters.!

Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics.

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics represents a pivotal advancement in digital technologies that is poised to profoundly influence human development in the forthcoming years. These innovations prompt essential inquiries regarding the appropriate applications of such systems, the roles these systems should assume, the potential risks they present, and the mechanisms through which we can exert control over them.

The ethical considerations surrounding artificial intelligence and robotics frequently centre on various "concerns," a common reaction to the advent of new technologies. Many of these concerns may appear somewhat outdated (for instance, the notion that trains travel too swiftly for the human spirit); others are often misguided, positing that such technologies will irrevocably alter human nature (as seen in claims that telephones will undermine personal communication, writing will erode memory, or video cassettes will render social outings obsolete). Some concerns are generally accurate yet only marginally pertinent (such as the assertion that digital technology will obliterate industries reliant on photographic film, cassette tapes, or vinyl records). However, certain concerns are both broadly accurate and significantly pertinent, exemplified by the argument that automobiles pose a danger to children and will drastically transform our environments. The objective of this article is to critically examine these issues while also addressing those that lack substantive relevance.

Certain technologies, such as nuclear energy, automobiles, and plastics, have sparked ethical and political debates, prompting substantial policy initiatives aimed at regulating their development, often only after adverse effects have been observed. Beyond these ethical dilemmas, emerging technologies also confront existing norms and conceptual frameworks, a matter of particular relevance to philosophical inquiry. Furthermore, once we comprehend a technology within its contextual framework, it becomes imperative to formulate an appropriate societal response, encompassing regulation and legal measures. These characteristics are similarly evident in the realm of new artificial intelligence and robotics technologies, compounded by a more profound apprehension regarding the potential for these innovations to undermine human dominion on the planet.

The discourse surrounding the ethics of artificial intelligence and robotics has garnered considerable media attention in recent years, which, while bolstering related academic inquiry, may also inadvertently hinder it. The media often presents the ethical dilemmas as mere forecasts of future technological developments, implying a consensus on what constitutes ethical behaviour and the means to achieve it. Consequently, media narratives tend to emphasize concerns related to risk, security (Brundage et al. 2018, referenced in the Other Internet Resources section below, hereafter [OIR]), and the anticipated effects on various sectors, such as employment. This leads to a focus on technical challenges aimed at realizing specific outcomes. Furthermore, current dialogues within policy and industry are frequently

driven by considerations of public image and reputation, where the term "ethical" has become akin to the contemporary notion of "green," potentially serving as a guise for "ethics washing." For an issue to be classified as an ethical concern in the realm of AI, it must be one for which the appropriate course of action is not immediately apparent. Thus, while issues like job displacement, theft, or lethal actions involving AI may not inherently pose ethical dilemmas, the question of their permissibility under certain conditions does represent a genuine ethical challenge. This article aims to address the authentic ethical issues for which clear answers are not readily available.

Behavioral Manipulation.!

The ethical considerations surrounding the use of artificial intelligence in surveillance extend beyond the simple gathering of data and the focus of attention. They encompass the application of information to influence behaviour, both in digital and physical contexts, in ways that compromise the capacity for autonomous rational decision-making. While attempts to influence behaviour are not a novel phenomenon, their integration with AI technologies may introduce a distinct dimension. The extensive engagement of users with data systems, coupled with the profound insights these systems provide about individuals, renders them susceptible to subtle influences, manipulation, and deceit. With adequate historical data, algorithms can be employed to specifically target individuals or small groups with tailored inputs designed to sway their decisions. A 'nudge' refers to modifications in the environment that steer behavior in a predictable manner that benefits the individual, while remaining easy and inexpensive to disregard (Thaler & Sunstein 2008). This concept presents a precarious pathway leading to paternalism and manipulation.

In addition, social media has emerged as the primary platform for political propaganda. This form of influence can be leveraged to manipulate voting behaviour, as evidenced by the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica incident (Woolley and Howard 2017; Bradshaw, Neudert, and Howard 2019). If such manipulation proves effective, it may undermine individual autonomy (Susser, Roessler, and Nissenbaum 2019).

The advancement of artificial intelligence technologies designed for deception has transformed what was once considered credible evidence into something that can no longer be trusted. This shift has already affected digital photographs, audio recordings, and videos. In the near future, it will become increasingly straightforward to generate "deep fake" content—text, images, and videos—featuring any desired narrative rather than merely modifying existing materials. Furthermore, the ability to simulate real-time interactions through text, phone calls, or video will also be compromised. Consequently, as our reliance on digital communications grows, the trustworthiness of these interactions diminishes.

Another critical concern is that machine learning methodologies employed in AI necessitate extensive datasets for training purposes. This requirement often leads to a conflict between the need for privacy and data rights and the technical excellence of the resulting products. Such dynamics significantly impact the consequentialist assessment of practices that infringe upon privacy.

The landscape of policy in this domain exhibits considerable fluctuations: Civil liberties and the safeguarding of individual rights face substantial challenges from corporate lobbying, intelligence agencies, and various governmental bodies reliant on surveillance practices. The level of privacy protection has significantly eroded in comparison to the pre-digital era, characterized by communication methods such as written correspondence, analogue telephony, and face-to-face interactions, during which surveillance was subject to stringent legal limitations.

The Engagement Between Humans and Robots.!

Human-robot interaction (HRI) has emerged as a distinct academic discipline that increasingly focuses on ethical considerations, the perceptual dynamics between humans and robots, and the diverse interests and complexities inherent in social contexts, such as collaborative work (e.g., Arnold and Scheutz 2017). Notable surveys addressing the ethics of robotics are provided by Calo, Froomkin, and Kerr (2016); Royakkers and van Est (2016); and Tzafestas (2016), while a comprehensive anthology of relevant research can be found in the work of Lin, Abney, and Jenkins (2017).

Artificial intelligence possesses the capacity to influence human beliefs and actions (refer to section 2.2), yet it also has the potential to control robots, which can become problematic if their design or functionality involves deceit, undermines human dignity, or contravenes the Kantian principle of "respect for humanity." Humans have a tendency to ascribe mental attributes to inanimate objects and to empathize with them, particularly when these objects exhibit characteristics reminiscent of living beings. This propensity can lead to the manipulation of humans (or animals) into ascribing greater intellectual or emotional value to robots or AI systems than is warranted. Certain aspects of humanoid robotics raise ethical concerns in this context (for instance, Hiroshi Ishiguro's remote-controlled Geminoids), and there have been instances of clear deception for public relations purposes (such as the claims regarding the capabilities of Hanson Robotics' "Sophia"). It is important to note that fundamental principles of business ethics and legal standards also apply to robots, including product safety, liability, and the prohibition of deceptive advertising. These established guidelines address many of the concerns that arise. Nevertheless, there are instances where human-to-human interactions encompass uniquely human elements—such as care, love, and sexual relationships—that may not be replicable by robots.

Automation and Employment!

It is evident that advancements in artificial intelligence and robotics are poised to yield substantial increases in productivity, thereby enhancing overall wealth. The pursuit of productivity enhancement has historically been a characteristic of economic systems, although the contemporary focus on "growth" is a relatively recent development (Harari 2016: 240). Nevertheless, the productivity improvements associated with automation often result in a reduced need for human labour to achieve the same level of output.

This reduction does not necessarily equate to a decline in total employment, as the increase in wealth can stimulate demand sufficiently to offset the effects of productivity gains. Over the long term, enhanced productivity in industrialized societies has generally resulted in greater overall wealth. Significant disruptions in the labour market have been observed historically; for instance, in 1800, agriculture employed more than 60% of the workforce in Europe and North America, whereas by 2010, this figure had dwindled to approximately 5% in the EU, and even lower in the most affluent nations (European Commission 2013). Between 1950 and 1970, the UK experienced a 50% reduction in the number of hired agricultural workers (Zayed and Loft 2019). Such disruptions often lead to a shift of labour-intensive industries to regions with lower labour costs, a trend that continues to evolve.

Traditional automation has supplanted human physical labour, while digital automation is now taking over cognitive functions and information processing. Unlike their physical counterparts, digital systems are relatively inexpensive to replicate (Bostrom and Yudkowsky 2014). This shift may lead to a more profound transformation in the labour market. Consequently, a critical inquiry arises: will the repercussions differ this time around? Will the emergence of new employment opportunities and wealth generation match the rate of job displacement? Furthermore, even if the outcomes are similar, what are the associated transition costs, and who will be responsible for them? Is there a necessity for societal reforms to ensure an equitable distribution of the costs and benefits arising from digital automation?

The phenomenon of unemployment fundamentally revolves around the equitable distribution of goods within a society. A prevalent perspective posits that principles of distributive justice should be determined from a standpoint of impartiality, often referred to as a "veil of ignorance" (Rawls 1971). This concept implies that individuals should make decisions without knowledge of their eventual societal position, whether as a labourer or an industrialist, among others. Rawls argued that such principles would promote essential liberties and ensure a distribution that maximally benefits the least advantaged members of society. However, the characteristics of the AI-driven economy present significant challenges to achieving this form of justice. Firstly, it functions within a largely unregulated framework, complicating the assignment of responsibility. Secondly, it is characterized by markets that exhibit a "winner takes all" dynamic, leading to the rapid emergence of monopolies. Lastly, the so-called "new economy" of digital services relies on intangible assets, a phenomenon described as "capitalism without capital" (Haskel and Westlake 2017). This reliance complicates the regulation of multinational digital corporations that do not depend on a physical presence in any specific location. Collectively, these three attributes suggest that allowing free market mechanisms to dictate wealth distribution is likely to result in a profoundly inequitable outcome, a trend that is already observable.!

Analysing the ethical framework of Hitler's ideology.!

In "Hitler's Ethic," Weikart elucidates the enigma surrounding Hitler's malevolence by compellingly illustrating the unexpected conclusion that Hitler's immoral actions were rooted in a systematic ethical framework. Influenced by evolutionary ethics, Hitler endeavoured to realize a utopian vision aimed at the biological enhancement of humanity. This evolutionary ethical perspective informed or shaped nearly all significant aspects of Nazi policy, including eugenics (which encompassed initiatives to enhance human heredity, such as mandatory sterilization), euthanasia, racism, territorial expansion, aggressive military actions, and the systematic extermination of certain racial groups. Furthermore, Hitler posited that morality was inherently biological, leading him to believe that the eradication of the "evil" Jews would facilitate moral advancement.

It is important to recognize that the rationale behind Nazi initiatives such as involuntary euthanasia, forced sterilization, eugenics, and human experimentation was significantly shaped by prevailing perceptions of human dignity. Analysing the historical evolution of these perceptions is crucial in contemporary discourse, as debates surrounding human worth and value are fundamental to the fields of medical ethics and bioethics. By understanding how the concept of human dignity became so perverted, we can glean insights that may help prevent the recurrence of analogous distortions in the future.!

An examination of historical contexts uncovers five overarching assumptions that significantly influenced medical ethics during the Nazi period. These same five principles are currently being advocated in various forms within modern bioethical discussions. Ethical debates concerning human embryos centre on the assessment of their moral standing. Economic constraints compel individuals and societies to question the value of certain lives. The concept of human dignity is increasingly perceived as a relative characteristic attributed to specific individuals rather than an intrinsic quality. Such perspectives profoundly shape the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable in the realm of medical ethics.

Ethical considerations frequently centre on the processes by which individuals determine what is deemed ethical in specific situations or regarding particular issues. However, it is equally important for ethics to investigate the origins of the fundamental beliefs that shape these decisions. The Nazi initiatives involving involuntary euthanasia, forced sterilization, eugenics, and human experimentation were profoundly influenced by the prevailing perceptions of human dignity during that era. These perceptions had gained traction in

Germany and much of the Western world since the late nineteenth century, contributing to the decline of previously dominant concepts such as the intrinsic value and dignity of all human life. Alternative beliefs gained prominence and acceptance, including ideas that certain lives were unworthy of living, that some races were unfit for reproduction, and that the elimination of the "unfit" was justified. Hitler's assertions in Mein Kampf echoed sentiments that had been articulated repeatedly in both academic and popular discourse.!

Malthusianism!

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, various social policies were frequently introduced to address issues such as poverty. Despite the influx of wealth resulting from industrialization and colonization, poverty persisted as a significant challenge, prompting the establishment of numerous social programs. Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834) put forth a novel and contentious perspective grounded in biological observations, noting that animal populations tend to exceed the available food supply. He stated, "The cause to which I allude, is the constant tendency in all animal life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it.... Necessity, that imperious all-pervading law of nature, restrains them within the prescribed bounds." Malthus ultimately argued that existing poor laws were more detrimental than beneficial and should be repealed, thereby encouraging the impoverished to assume responsibility for their own circumstances.

Malthus introduced the notion that ongoing population expansion might not be an inherent or beneficial phenomenon. He argued that, although providing assistance to the impoverished seemed to be a compassionate approach, it was ultimately misguided. His biographer remarked that the extensive criticism directed at him earned him the title of the "most maligned individual of his time." Charles Darwin subsequently recognized the significant impact Malthus had on his intellectual development. More broadly, Malthus established a framework for an ethical perspective grounded in the observation of biological behaviour (science), as opposed to relying on philosophical or theological principles.

Examination of Background!

The commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Nazi concentration camps has once again highlighted one of the most troubling periods in human history. The roles of medicine and nursing during the Nazi regime continue to provoke critical examination and introspection, compelling us to confront our own identities and the reasons we ascribe value to human life. The insights gained from this reflection have significant implications for our ethical frameworks and the manner in which we interact with one another.

A particularly troubling aspect of the Nazi atrocities is the involvement of trained medical and nursing professionals within a supposedly advanced and civilized society. It raises profound questions about how individuals dedicated to the care of others could stand by as patients were subjected to inhumane treatment and even murder. Alarmingly, some of these healthcare providers actively engaged in unethical and criminal acts. This leads to a critical inquiry: what could have motivated such behaviour?

The quest for understanding necessitates an exploration of the foundational beliefs prevalent during that era. This inquiry is essential, as the resurgence of such beliefs raises concerns about the potential reemergence of similarly reprehensible actions. The roots of the Nazi atrocities extend beyond the concentration camps established by a totalitarian regime;

they are deeply embedded in ideologies propagated by specific social philosophies and practices that originated in medical institutions.

Ethics typically centres on the processes through which we determine what is morally acceptable in specific situations or issues. However, it is equally important for ethics to investigate the origins of the beliefs that shape these decisions. The Nazi initiatives involving involuntary euthanasia, coerced sterilization, eugenics, and human experimentation were profoundly influenced by contemporary perceptions of human dignity. These perceptions gained traction in Germany and much of the Western world from the late nineteenth century onward, contributing to the dismissal of previously prevailing notions regarding the intrinsic value and dignity of every human life.

Artificial Moral Agents.!

When considering machine ethics as pertaining to moral agents in a significant manner, it is appropriate to refer to these agents as "artificial moral agents," which possess both rights and responsibilities. Nevertheless, the discourse surrounding artificial entities calls into question several prevalent concepts in ethics, and it may prove beneficial to analyse these ideas independently of human contexts (cf. Misselhorn 2020; Powers and Ganascia forthcoming).

Various scholars employ the term "artificial moral agent" in a less stringent context, drawing parallels to the concept of "agent" within software engineering, where issues of accountability and rights do not emerge (Allen, Varner, and Zinser 2000). James Moor (2006) identifies four categories of machine agents: ethical impact agents (such as robot jockeys), implicit ethical agents (like safe autopilot systems), explicit ethical agents (which utilize formal methods to assess utility), and full ethical agents (defined as those capable of making explicit ethical judgments and generally able to provide reasonable justifications for them, with the average adult human serving as an example of a full ethical agent).!

Several methodologies have been suggested to develop "explicit" or "full" ethical agents, including the incorporation of operational morality through programming, the cultivation of ethics itself via functional morality, and the attainment of comprehensive morality alongside full intelligence and sentience (Allen, Smit, and Wallach 2005; Moor 2006). Programmed agents are occasionally deemed not to be "full" agents due to their ability to perform competently without true understanding, akin to the functioning of neurons in the human brain (Dennett 2017; Hakli and Mäkelä 2019).

In various discourses, the concept of "moral patient" is significant: Ethical agents bear responsibilities, whereas ethical patients possess rights, as their well-being is of ethical concern. It is evident that certain entities qualify as patients without being agents, such as basic animals capable of experiencing pain yet lacking the capacity for rational decision-making. Conversely, it is generally accepted that all agents inherently function as patients, particularly within a Kantian ethical framework. Typically, the designation of personhood is what qualifies an entity as a responsible agent, one who can hold duties and be the focus of moral considerations. This notion of personhood is often deeply intertwined with attributes such as phenomenal consciousness, intention, and free will (Frankfurt 1971; Strawson 1998). Torrance (2011) posits that "artificial (or machine) ethics could be defined as designing machines that do things that, when done by humans, are indicative of the possession of 'ethical status' in those humans" (2011: 116)—which he interprets as "ethical productivity and ethical receptivity" (2011: 117)—terms he uses to describe moral agents and patients.

Conclusion:

The understanding of human dignity underwent significant transformation during the early twentieth century, largely influenced by the principles of social Darwinism. This shift led to a rejection of the intrinsic dignity and unique worth of individuals, facilitating the extensive loss of life during the Nazi regime. The ethical framework of this period was shaped by five core tenets of social Darwinism: the relativistic nature of morality, the absence of a unique human status, the relativity of human dignity, the belief that certain lives lack value, and the notion that "survival of the fittest" serves as a guiding ethical principle. These ideas are increasingly reflected in contemporary bioethical discussions and carry serious implications for current ethical and social challenges. Absent a strong commitment to the belief that all human life possesses inherent dignity, there is a risk that the destruction of human life may be increasingly viewed as a viable ethical solution to complex moral dilemmas in fields such as medicine, nursing, and biotechnology.

The achievements of Hitler in the past have now been paralleled by artificial intelligence, which seeks to undermine human capabilities and exert control over individuals.!

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