Ethics of calculation

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The theme of this special issue of AI & Society, Ethics and Aesthetics of Technologies, is a welcome contribution to the evolution of the journal in widening and enriching the debates at the intersection of philosophical reflection, mediated technology and society. The guest editor of this volume, Arun Tripathi, a proponent and interlocutor of the diversity of intellectual cultures, brings together contributions of scholars from the international network and research circle on Ethics and Aesthetics. The philosophical tradition of the research circle is reflected by the diversity of these contributions that critically examine the concerns and possibilities of the emergence of mediating technologies on human life.

In Borgmann, we get an insight into the crisis of contemporary culture and the way the strategic conjunction of the market and technology is shaping institutional and governance culture, and how the modern technology as an engine of mechanization and commodification is seen as a temple of the expansion of affluence, happiness and vitality of contemporary culture. But questions arise: Where does this devotion to the reduction, mechanization and commodification come from? What are the implications of this reduction? And how is it possible to reconcile the widening gaps between the constructed reality and the basic reality of the human condition?

In Michelfelder, we get a deep sense that the more we get caught up in a process of self-commodification, the more we are threatened with the loss of our *existential autonomy*. Fallman alerts us to the implication of the

commodification thesis and the increasing faith in the *usability paradigm* arguing that contemporary researchers and practitioners of information technology cannot escape important social, cultural, ethical and moral issues. In exploring beyond the mechanistic paradigm, Fors in the very human-centred tradition leads us to view the richness of the lifeworld, disperse wholes and the diversity of reality, beyond the traditional inside–outside distinctions such as between subjects and objects. In the ‘measure of a man’, Introna introduces us to the rich ethos of hospitality, moving the debate on ethics from the relationship of the self to technological artefacts, to our hospitality to the Other and Otherness, throwing open a paradox of unconditional judgment. Nadin introduces us to the limits of the reductive model of cause and effect sequence and to the concept of anticipation in dealing with the complexity of human existence. The challenge is how to preserve complexity, not to reduce it; or how to handle ambiguity and non-determinism. In exploring the relevance of cognition to e-learning, Friesen makes a case for the symbiotic relationship and partnership between the learners and the computer. Introducing us to the realm of hermeneutic reflection, Capurro argues that the digital sphere as a product of human invention cannot become the final horizon of valuation for all possible understanding of the world and human existence. Rather, he sees the relativity of digital technology as a source for creative transformation of Western societies. Durban reflects on the widening ethical role of the professional activist. In Crisafi & Gallagher, we get an idea of the relationship between extended cognitive processes and institutional structures.

The contributions in this volume, underpinned by the ethical, aesthetic, hermeneutics and cultural traditions of scholarship, bear witness to the inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary culture of the journal. The theme of this

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special issue is an enriching contribution to the ongoing debate on Judgment to Calculation in AI & Society.

The origin of the Judgment to Calculation debate in the journal goes back to the launch of AI & Society in 1986, inspired by Joseph Weizenbaum's personal support for the journal and his book, *Computer Power and Human Reason* (1976). AI & Society celebrated its 21st birthday in 2007 by publishing a special issue on the theme of 'Judgment to Calculation'. We plan to publish a special volume of the journal on the theme 'Judgment to Calculation to Judgment' in Joseph Weizenbaum's memory, and in conjunction with the 25th birthday of AI & Society. In the early days of AI, Weizenbaum warned us against giving machines the responsibility for making genuinely human choices. *Computer Power and Human Reason* raised questions about the role of artificial intelligence and spurred debate about how man relies on technology in order to escape the burden of acting as an independent agent, and in deciding and pursuing what is truly valuable. These issues are becoming more and more urgent as technologies converge and become increasingly embedded and integrated in all facets of our lives. Cooley (2007) points out that technology in its multi-various forms is rapidly becoming all pervasive. It permeates just about every aspect of what we do and what we are. It ranges from the gigantic, the diversion of rivers and the repositioning of mountains, to the microscopic level of genetic engineering. Science fiction becomes reality as faces are transplanted and head transplants are confidently predicted. In the age of mediating technologies, the spirit of Weizenbaum's *ELIZA* (1976) seems to be alive and well today when we observe proponents of pervasive and streaming technologies, including policy makers, managers and researchers, becoming increasingly seduced by the possibilities of mechanizing institutional and organizational functions and processes in the name of competitiveness, security, transparency and accountability.

But should we be concerned by the so-called technological inevitability of mechanization? Mindful of the dangers of this idea of inevitability, we need to be alert to the implications of the convergence of two powerful forces, the market and mechanization, leading to the dominance of the culture of reduction and commodification. In this world of convergence, everything can be commodified, measured and calculated and can be put in the competitive market for sale, detached from its roots and purpose. Could it be that the forces of commodification and detachment are already shifting the role of the university from scholarship and learning environment, to a courseware production factory and ultimately to a "clearinghouse of best practices". It seems that the making of this knowledge market place is already familiar to many reflective practitioners in European universities, especially

the British universities. Could it be that David Noble's prophesy of 'technological transformation of the university into a Taylorized organization' (2002) is now on the path of the forces of detachment?

Within wider societal contexts, the logic of detachment leads to a shift from purpose of leadership to the management function, philosophy of service to instrument of measurement and from the rules of engagement to regulations of control. This is already creating a worrying shift in the roles of traditional public institutions from civic engagement to organizational detachment, resulting in the emergence of the management culture of the 'tick-box', targets and measurement. This management culture is increasingly being embraced by many public institutions and service organizations without much critical judgment as to its long-term impact on social cohesion, cultural diversity, economic life and the well-being of society. Such detachment devoid of deep human commitment and passion tends to ignore seeing all relevant inter-connectedness of the citizens with their personal and life realities. This instrumental view of civic life creates an environment of disinterest, alienation and distrust, thereby creating a sense of profound resignation on the part of the citizens. Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor (Love thy Neighbour, *The Guardian*, Saturday 3 January 2009) note that in the age of the rampant-free market and the selfish gene, compassion is seen as either narcissism or weakness. The cult of calculation and measurement has created an image of the self that is utterly lacking in natural generosity.

The convergence of network technologies further illustrates how the uncritical embedding of technologies in the human domain has become an instrument of the surveillance society, undermining the very identity of what it is to be citizen, let alone the concerns about the deepening of the ethical and moral crisis arising from it. Timothy Garton Ash (*The Guardian*, Thursday January 31, 2008) comments that Britain's snoopers state is getting completely out of hand. "The fantastic advance of information and communications technology gives the state—and private companies as well—technical possibilities of which the Stasi could only dream. The birthplace of laissez-faire liberalism has morphed into the database state. We have more CCTV cameras than anyone. We have the largest DNA database anywhere. Plans are far advanced to centralize all our medical records and introduce the most elaborate biometric ID cards in the world." He warns of the enormity of the potential abuse of the centralized database and cautions us against putting our trust in the good intentions of our rulers, civil servants and spooks. He says that we (the British) are sleepwalking into a surveillance society, and he calls for a wake up in the cause of liberty. In the tradition of human-machine symbiosis cultivated in AI & Society, Garton Ash proposes that "the balance between security and liberty needs to be

recalibrated”. He further alerts us to the danger of sleepwalking when he says that “the road to hell is paved with good intentions”.

But what has led to this uncritical faith in the culture of calculation and the promotion of the culture of detachment. Cooley sheds some light on this dilemma. He notes that our culture (western) conveys the sense that a calculation is precise, analytical and scientific. It is regarded as apolitical and non-judgmental. Judgment, being perceived as subjective and inaccessible to quantitative measurement, tends to be regarded as something contextual and peripheral. It is no wonder that ‘calculation’ in the name of objectivity, transparency and accountability remains a seductive instrumental tool to its proponents for managing and controlling society. We need to be vigilant to the dangers of the instruments of control and recognize that it is the culture of detachment that has become an instrument of undermining the philosophy of service from its roots in moral and ethical social code. Maybe there is now a ray of hope in that the recent economic recession is beginning to make people rethink the implications of the policies of instruments of integration of technologies in societies.

From its inception, AI & Society has provided a forum for socially responsive science and technology, promoting the evolution of the European tradition of Human-Centred Systems, rooted in the notions of diversity, tacit knowledge, symbiosis and purpose. Recently, AI & Society has broadened this forum in a new direction, encapsulating the theme of knowledge, culture and communication. In promoting the wider social, cultural, ethical and moral dimensions of the emerging integration of technology in all facets of human environments, AI & Society recognizes the need for expanding the conceptual limits of the notion of human-machine symbiosis traditionally rooted in the European industrial production culture. The Japanese concept of Kyosei (equality and mutuality), Chinese concept of Yin and Yang (seeking a balance) and Indian concept of Swikriti (plurality of existence) provide for an

enriching and expanding horizon of the European concept of symbiosis (Gill 2009). Seen from the wider perspective of human life, it is now no longer just a question of seeking a symbiosis of what machines can do best (calculation) and what humans can do best (judgments) in designing computer systems for production, it is becoming more and more a question of what it is to be human in the era of pervasive technology. Even if the machine reaches the capacity of turning most of human judgment into calculation, the question is not ‘could it happen’? but ‘should it happen’? The challenge is to recalibrate the spiral of Judgment to Calculation, moving forwards from Calculation to Judgment.

AI & Society is delighted to welcome contributions in this volume from reflective scholars providing insights into many of the intersecting issues of knowledge, culture and communication. The journal welcomes future reflective and insightful contributions on the possibilities, opportunities, limitations and implications of embedding and integrating technologies in society. Time has now come to square the circle and provide a forum for a debate on the theme of ‘Judgment to Calculation to Judgment’, reflecting the complex, uncertain, multicultural and interconnected world we live in.

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