Speaker Series: Safeguarding Democracy in the Age of AI

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Artificial Intelligence and Common Goods: An Uneasy Relationship

ABSTRACT

Philosophers are grappling with whether artificial intelligence (AI) systems should be permitted to participate in high-stakes moral and political decisions (e.g. List 2021). I draw on Alasdair Macintyre's political philosophy (1998; 2007; 2017) to resist this possibility. AI cannot qualify as a moral agent or a moral advisor because it cannot participate in reflective deliberations on the common good. Common goods are constitutive of individual goods, since individuals can only reason about their own good as 'individuals -in-their-social-relationships', involved in practical activity of common practices. Common practices have *goods internal to the practice* that can only be achieved in common. This requires cultivating and exercising relational capacities. Increasingly, AI is mediating social relations, doing so in a disembodied manner. AI mediation risks fragmenting social interaction and deskilling the relational capacities necessary for common practices. I demonstrate how this threat might unfold in the context of the common good of knowledge. Knowledge can be perceived as an 'epistemic commons': the sharing in the production of knowledge as a common good, with 'care-taking' (Bella and King 1989) as a fundamental good internal to the practice. This involves the accumulated (often embodied) wisdom of communities of practices sharing a common commitment to listening, thinking, examining, and talking about what is said in the name of knowledge because they care. A tragedy of the epistemic commons occurs when knowledge is pursued for achieving goods external to the practice—money, fame, power, dopamine—things that currently dominate social media practices and AI training. Given AI mediation and disembodiment, AI-generated knowledge risks creating epistemic distance, distrust and "ir-reciprocity" between humans, undermining the prospects for a 'common practical life' necessary both for the common good and humans' individual good.

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