



Technology and AI



Technology and AI: Modern progress and ancient questions

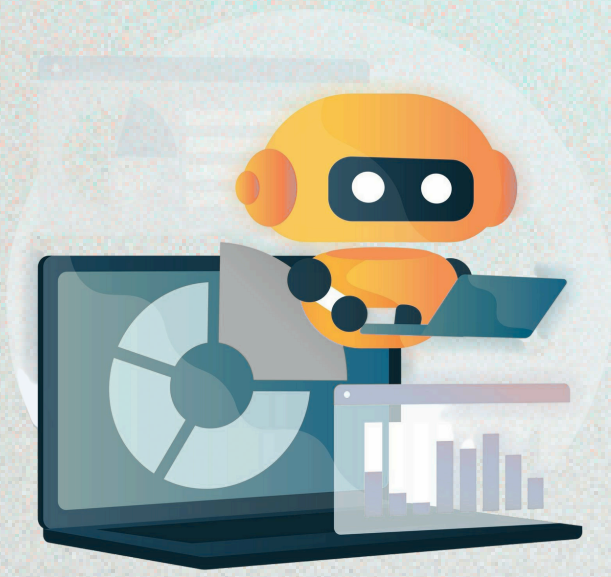
After the peak of modern space travel in the 60s of the last century, man's dreams of technological progress were almost in a deep slumber. Only in the last few years have big tech entrepreneurs like Elon Musk made man's dream of space exploration tangible again.

Nothing seems to be impossible for humans any more - everything that is conceivable seems to be within reach. Computer systems that work with artificial intelligence trying to copy human thinking via neural networks have long since arrived in our everyday lives in one form or another.

Contrasting Worldviews

“Artificial intelligence is the ability of a machine to imitate human abilities such as logical thinking, learning, planning and creativity.”

The question immediately arises as to whether this powerful technological tool is an advantage or a disadvantage for human development.



AI Benefits

- Medical diagnostics
- Industrial automation
- Chatbots and voice assistants
- Energy optimization
- Public security
- Acceleration of life and inventions



But is acceleration just an advantage?

The German sociologist Hartmut Rosa researches the interpersonal disadvantages of modern society. And he comes to the following conclusion:

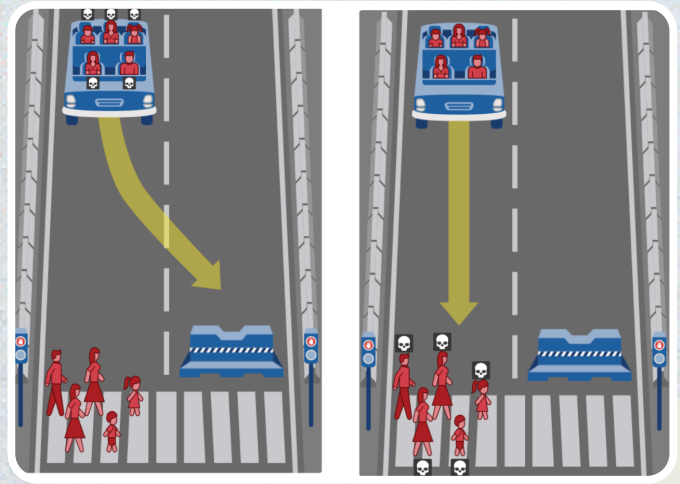
“The same techniques that help us save time lead to an explosion of world options. No matter how fast we become, our share of the world, i.e. the ratio of the options we have realized and the experiences we have had to those we have missed out on, is not increasing, but constantly decreasing.”

AI Dangers

- Algorithmic bias: systematic errors in algorithms that lead to distorted or discriminatory results
- Greater centralization of power: More Money → More AI capacity → More influence, power and money
- Social acceleration and alienation: Our personal lives get shaped by terms like efficiency and cost-effectiveness
- Loss of ethical control: How should a machine decide in case of doubt?

Example: MIT: The Moral Machine

The scenario is as follows: a car controlled by an AI gets into an emergency situation and the algorithm has to decide: do I endanger the occupants or the people on the road?



The big question behind this is: What ethics do I program into an artificial Intelligence?

Which ethics are the right ones?

Which life is worth living?

Modern progress leads us to ancient questions

What does natural human intelligence mean?

What does progress mean for human beings?

What is right and wrong?

Or, in very fundamental philosophical terms, what does it mean to be human?

AI, modern progress and transhumanism

Well-known historian and bestselling author Yuval Harari writes his book “Homo Deus”:

“Having raised humans above the beastly level of survival struggles, we now want to upgrade humans to gods and turn Homo sapiens into Homo Deus.”

The idea is perfectly understandable:

If technological progress and especially the acceleration of scientific knowledge with the help of AI allows us to understand more and more what life means and how biology works, then it is reasonable to assume that in the foreseeable future we will be able to technologically overcome all suffering, decay and death. And then we can express our personality in ones and zeros in algorithms. But here, too, ideas about what the future will look like for humans differ widely.

On the one hand there is the idea that as AI becomes more and more powerful, it will eventually become so intelligent and autonomous that it will pose a threat to humans.

If at first glance this sounds like a science fiction invention, numerous researchers see exactly this threat on the horizon. Even Elon Musk, who is changing the world with his technological optimism, remains skeptical about AI and calls it “unkillable digital dictator”.

The big picture: Is AI a threat to humanity?

Fundamentally, this is a question of worldview or religion. And this question is precisely this: what does it mean to be a human being?

There are two possibly answers:

A: The secular answer:

As atheist Shaw Carroll put it: *“We humans are lumps of organized mud, (....) the meaning we find in life, is not transcendent.”*

If true, our personalities could finally be expressed through algorithms. We could be uploaded. We could be copied and thus replaced.

However, some scientists already see enormous problems with this:

The German neurosurgeon Professor Sturm, says:

“There is consciousness, but we can't explain it at all. There is no access to it. And I am also very, very sure that we will never be able to explain it. One of the great mysteries”



B: The theistic (Christian) answer:

There is a God who created humans in his image *“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26)*

“Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Genesis 2:7)

From the dust of the earth: We are matter, yes. But not there is more!

The Jewish-Christian worldview based on the Bible paints us a great picture of the human being. We are matter, we are part of creation, a little part of nature. But that alone does not define our nature. We are also blessed by God. We are created in the image of God. This means that each and every one of us is individual and endowed with irreplaceable dignity.

So what does this level of worldliness mean in view of the development of state-of-the-art technology such as artificial intelligence?

We can search the Genesis account for this question:

1. Man is not only matter but also a living soul (Gen 2:7)
2. Humans are endowed with a sense of beauty, not just functionality (Gen 2, 8-9)
3. Humans are created for relationships, not for efficiency (Gen 2:23)
4. Humans are given a sense of work and creativity (Gen 2:15 / 4, 21-22)
5. Humans are born with language, curiosity and a spirit of research (Gen 2,20)
6. Humans need God: In separation from God there is no life (Gen 2: 17)
→ These aspects challenge us as Christians when it comes to artificial intelligence and technological progress.



Finally: What does human progress mean?

The author Yuval Harari, who has already been quoted, paints a picture of the future of man that represents the next stage of human development without mortality, without disease and without decay. Homo sapiens becomes homo deus, the god man.

Ultimately, old religious hopes are reflected here: immortality, omniscience, omnipotence. But let me ask you a question:

How many of you believe that if technological progress and artificial intelligence one day land us on Mars, we will find a life there without Conflict, without disease, without war, without death?

→ The heart of the problem is the human heart!

Human progress, according to the bible, is this:

About 2000 years ago, the man Jesus Christ appeared on the world stage and said about God the Father in heaven “I and the Father are one”. The Homo-Deus already lives!

Omniscience, omnipotence and immortality is not science fiction. All these human desires make sense because we come from God!

Our problem is that we are looking for these things in the wrong place. They can be found in faith in Jesus Christ.



Questions for reflection:

1. What might be the main threat through AI?
2. What might be the greatest benefit?
3. Do you see social alienation through life acceleration in your own context? - What makes us human according to your conviction?
4. In what does the Christian Faith give us a helpful perspective on technological progress?



About the Speaker

Christian Günzel is a Fellow of the OCCA (The Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics) and a speaker at the Pontes Institute for Science, Culture and Faith in Germany. After completing his Master of Science in Engineering in Bayreuth, he worked for several years as a speaker for SMD, a network of Christians in schools, universities, and the academic world. He subsequently studied at the OCCA and at Wycliffe Hall, University of Oxford (Certificate in Theological Studies).

He particularly enjoys providing a rational explanation of the Christian faith in lectures and discussions, thereby inviting reflection on existential questions. Günzel lives near Stuttgart with his wife and children.



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