A I and Contemporary Challenges: The Good, Bad and the Ugly

Venni V. Krishna

Professor, School of Humanities and Languages, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
&
Editor-in-Chief, *Science, Technology and Society (Sage)*

On 29 March 2023, over 1,000 technology leaders and researchers, including Steve Wozniak, Co-Founder of Apple; Elon Musk of Tesla; Rachel Bronson, President of Bulletin of Atomic Scientists; Tristan Harris, Yoshua Bengio, among others, called for a moratorium on the artificial intelligence (AI) system's research and development. All these leaders realized that AI represents 'profound risks to society and humanity'. This open letter from Future Life Institute stressed that, 'powerful AI systems should be developed only once we are confident that their effects will be positive and their risks will be manageable'. At the same time there are equal number of other technology leaders like Kai-Fu Lee, former head of Google China who are quite optimistic about the future of AI in society. He argued in his recent book on *AI Superpowers* that there is a vision in which artificial intelligence transforms key economic sectors and that office worker in 2040 will travel in autonomous vehicle.

The emergence of the 4th Industrial Revolution technologies and the current discourse on AI and society has posed a number of challenges. It has brought into sharp focus the sociological perspectives of technological determinism *versus* the social shaping of technology. The General Conference of the UNESCO in November 2021 issued a series of recommendations on 'the ethics of Artificial Intelligence'. In no uncertain terms this international body expressed concern on the profound and dynamic positive and negative impact of AI on societies on all its dimensions of everyday living. Further, it clearly spelled out that AI technologies 'can deepen existing divides and inequalities in the world, within and between countries, and that justice, trust and fairness must be upheld so that no country and no one should be left behind'. The way in which powerful AI technologies could transform our lives, society, economics, governance and most importantly ethics and morality surrounding it is quite popular in every day news media as well as our drawing room discussions at home.

Historically speaking, it will be a big folly and surely not the intention of this talk to take a *luddite* argument or oppose the growth of transformative and disruptive technologies such as AI. But the fact of social reality is that AI and related technologies are moving ahead of regulation and ethical concerns surrounding our 'daily life worlds'. There is considerable fear among individuals and communities. Profit seeking global mega corporations have already poured in billions of dollars in AI research and development to maximise their profits. Rouge and non-state actors are weaponizing AI technologies as well as giving rise to new *fake platforms*. We are not far away from killer robots, autonomous weapons and robotic war fare as depicted in the film *Slaughterbots*. The main purpose of this talk and essay is to understand what is good, bad and ugly in AI developments? What are the positive and negative impacts of AI on our contemporary society? Should we leave AI technology within the perspective of technological determinism or is there a scope to socially shape the new technology for the benefit of our society. In other words, as one Australian scholar, Toby Walsh draws our attention, the fundamental challenge we have here is how to align the commercial imperative with public good?