

Innovation

Meets

Ethics

Moral Responsibility in the Age of AI

The swift rise and transformative power of artificial intelligence (AI) present humanity with opportunities and challenges both profound and unprecedented. This revolutionary wave of technological advancement is reshaping every dimension of contemporary life—from how we communicate and heal, to how industries and governments make decisions. We stand at the threshold of a new era, replete with extraordinary potential for both creation and destruction. For Yeshiva University, AI demands engagement that is reflective, principled, and deeply rooted in our values.

The question before us is not whether to embrace or resist innovation. Rather, it is whether we are prepared to guide it with wisdom, compassion, and foresight. My son-in-law, Yehonatan Muchtar, a student of Rabbi Adin

Steinsaltz, recently shared with me an insight from his teacher about the forbidden fruit and the Tree of Knowledge. Judaism at its core, Rabbi Steinsaltz said, champions innovation and the creative spirit. Yet our tradition also reminds us that timing is critical. We must not consume the fruit before it is ripe or attempt to harness knowledge before we are equipped to wield it wisely.

Are we ready? Have we undertaken the labor necessary to lay the ethical and philosophical foundation for this transformative age? These questions resonate deeply, particularly as the global community grapples with AI's implications. At a recent conference I attended in Hiroshima, global faith leaders and preeminent AI thinkers convened to explore how humanity might navigate the moral terrain of this new frontier. Interesting to me was the way in which some countries were



Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

*President and Rosh Yeshiva,
Yeshiva University and RIETS*

considering the positive uses of AI. The Japanese government, for example, confronting an existential crisis of declining birth rates and an aging population, views AI as a potential remedy to isolation and societal strain. Yet, the prospect of AI supplanting human connection raises profound concerns, exposing the risks inherent in a technology capable of reshaping truth, autonomy, and the bonds that define our shared humanity.

These questions transcend national boundaries. The global implications of AI are starkly apparent. From the erosion of trust through deepfakes and AI-generated misinformation to the relentless commodification of personal data, the challenges are as pressing as they are complex. Perhaps the most existential fear is that AI, if left to its own devices, might one day eclipse humanity itself. Yet amidst these uncertainties, voices of optimism emerge. I have heard from a number of industry leaders that “good AI” will be wielded to counteract “bad AI.”

But reliance on technology to regulate itself is insufficient. Our values—not the machinery of innovation—must steer the course. Progress, relentless in its momentum, cannot be halted. The pressing question, then, is who will guide it and toward what ends. The Jewish tradition, grounded in reverence for human dignity, the sanctity of life, and the pursuit of justice, offers a moral compass uniquely suited to this juncture in history.

As we embrace AI’s promises, we must remain vigilant against its perils. Our tradition teaches that humanity’s dominion over creation is not one of unbridled power, but of sacred responsibility. We are called not only to seek knowledge but to temper our pursuits with discernment, ensuring that technological advancement serves humanity’s highest purposes. Rabbi Steinsaltz eloquently reminds us that wisdom lies not in the mere act of innovation, but in understanding the demands of the moment and responding with clarity and humility.

For Yeshiva University, this moment presents an extraordinary opportunity. As stewards of a tradition rich in ethical insight, with vast intellectual resources in both rabbinic thought and scientific discovery, we are uniquely positioned to contribute to the discourse on AI’s moral development. Our community can help shape a future where AI becomes a tool for human flourishing, not a force that diminishes our humanity. By drawing upon the depth of our values, we can forge frameworks and safeguards that uphold human dignity and ethical integrity in a world increasingly driven by artificial intelligence.

In this evolving landscape, Yeshiva University and all those who find nourishment from the wellsprings of Torah must stand at the forefront, illuminating a path where technological progress aligns with the enduring principles that define our faith. Together, with courage and wisdom, we can navigate this new era, ensuring that the spirit of creativity serves the cause of sanctifying our Creator by upholding the timeless cause of justice, compassion, and human dignity.

