

**EXAMINING THE FEASIBILITY OF THE
PRACTICALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF HUMAN
RIGHTS IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
(AI)**

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Abstract

With the ingress of Artificial Intelligence into the everyday life of humanity, we are now in an era where Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping every facet of human life. However, one critical question remains:

Can we protect fundamental human rights in the age of AI? This paper argues that while AI presents unprecedented challenges to the practicality and sustainability of human rights, it also offers a unique opportunity to advance these rights in new and meaningful ways. This paper defends the idea that, through the integration of human rights principles into AI development and governance, it is possible to create a framework where technology not only respects but also upholds human dignity, equality, and freedom. It explores the historical evolution of human rights and how AI threatens to undermine these gains, but also proposes how these two seemingly disparate realms, AI and human rights, can be synergized to achieve a sustainable and practical future. The paper further recommends actionable strategies such as international regulation, algorithmic accountability, and digital literacy to ensure that AI serves humanity, without diminishing its rights. Ultimately, it is through a collaborative, rights-based approach that AI can be leveraged to foster a fairer and more just society.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, AI Governance, Ethical AI, Algorithmic Justice

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a transformative force reshaping the fabric of human existence, from how we communicate and work to how we are governed and judged. As AI becomes more pervasive in public

and private spheres, concerns about its impact on fundamental human rights have gained significant traction. The concept of human rights, rooted in human dignity, autonomy, and freedom, now contends with algorithmic systems that are often opaque, biased, and designed with utilitarian logic. This paper explores the feasibility, practicality, and sustainability of human rights in an era dominated by AI. It seeks to understand whether the universal ideals enshrined in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) can meaningfully endure in a digital context where power is increasingly delegated to non-human agents. Achieving this requires not only a reassertion of ethical and legal norms but also a critical interrogation of the structures and values embedded within AI technologies.

The practicality of human rights in the age of AI is challenged by the opacity and autonomy of AI systems. For instance, predictive policing and surveillance technologies have often resulted in discriminatory practices, undermining rights to privacy and equality. As Frank Pasquale notes, “algorithmic decision-making often lacks the transparency necessary for due process, thus compromising justice in a democratic society”²⁹¹. This

²⁹¹Pasquale, Frank. *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 9

means that individuals are frequently subjected to decisions about their welfare, employment, or freedom without the opportunity to understand or contest the logic behind those decisions. In this regard, the paper argues that unless mechanisms of transparency and accountability are embedded into AI design and governance, the practicality of upholding human rights will remain elusive. The key lies in ensuring human-centered AI development guided by ethical principles, legal safeguards, and multidisciplinary oversight.

Sustainability, on the other hand, speaks to whether human rights can not only be preserved but also evolve in tandem with technological innovation. AI's potential to erode social contracts and marginalize vulnerable populations calls for a redefinition of rights in digital terms. As philosopher Luciano Floridi observes: "AI is not simply about replacing human agents, but about reshaping the informational environment in which human agency is exercised"²⁹². Floridi's insight reveals that human rights must be reconceptualized not as static doctrines, but as dynamic tools capable of navigating the complexities of digital societies. This paper defends the position that the sustainability of human rights in the age of AI is achievable, but only through a

²⁹²Floridi, Luciano. *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 89

deliberate effort to integrate rights-based approaches into AI policy, ethics, and design from the outset. Furthermore, fostering global dialogue on AI governance is vital, particularly in the Global South, where technological adoption often outpaces regulatory frameworks.

It is against this backdrop that this paper critically examines the possibility of harmonizing the technological imperatives of AI with the ethical imperatives of human rights. The paper defends the view that while challenges abound, the practicality and sustainability of human rights in the AI age are not only possible but necessary. Achieving this entails reimagining legal institutions, embedding ethical oversight in technological development, and educating AI designers on the normative foundations of human dignity. Human rights cannot be sacrificed at the altar of innovation. Rather, they must be the compass guiding AI's trajectory in modern society. This paper, therefore, insists that the age of AI must not mark the decline of human rights, but a renewed commitment to safeguarding them in ever-evolving forms.

Human Rights Explained

Human rights, as commonly understood today, refer to inalienable entitlements inherent to all individuals by virtue of being human. Historically, the idea of human rights can be traced back to ancient civilizations such as Babylon, where the Cyrus

Cylinder (539 BCE) is often considered the first charter of human rights, proclaiming freedom of religion and abolishing slavery in conquered territories. However, the philosophical foundation of modern human rights was laid during the Enlightenment era, particularly in the works of thinkers like John Locke, who asserted in his *Two Treatises of Government* that individuals possess “natural rights” to “life, liberty, and property”²⁹³. These rights, Locke argued, are not granted by governments but are innate and must be preserved by any legitimate political authority. His ideas profoundly influenced the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789), marking a shift from divine-right monarchy to human-centered governance.

The aftermath of World War II further catalyzed the global institutionalization of human rights, particularly with the creation of the United Nations and the adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) in 1948. Drafted in response to the horrors of Nazism and global conflict, the UDHR asserts in its preamble that: “Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the

²⁹³Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. Edited by Peter Laslett. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 287

world.”²⁹⁴ This document provided a comprehensive framework for protecting civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights across the globe, laying the groundwork for later covenants such as the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR). These instruments form what is often called the “International Bill of Human Rights,” signifying a global consensus on the universality of certain fundamental rights.

Human rights are typically categorized into three “generations,” a concept introduced by Karel Vasak in 1979. The first-generation rights include civil and political liberties such as the right to free speech, freedom of religion, and the right to a fair trial. These rights are often associated with liberty and non-interference by the state. Second-generation rights refer to economic, social, and cultural entitlements like the right to education, healthcare, work, and social security. These emerged from the recognition that liberty is meaningless without the means to actualize it. Third-generation rights, or solidarity rights, are more collective in nature and include the right to development, environmental protection, peace, and digital access. These newer

²⁹⁴United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. (New York: United Nations, 1948), Preamble

rights reflect the evolving nature of human dignity in a globalized, technologically complex world²⁹⁵.

The rationale for protecting human rights stems from both moral philosophy and legal obligation. Philosophically, rights affirm human dignity and serve as a shield against arbitrary power. Immanuel Kant, for instance, argued that individuals must always be treated as ends in themselves, never merely as means. He writes in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.”²⁹⁶ Kant’s principle emphasizes the ethical foundation of human rights by affirming the intrinsic value of every human being. In legal terms, international law now holds states accountable for violations of these rights, and institutions such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecute crimes like genocide and crimes against humanity.

Despite widespread endorsement, human rights remain contested and frequently violated. In many regions, authoritarian regimes suppress freedoms of

²⁹⁵ Vasak, Karel. “A 30-Year Struggle: The Sustained Efforts to Give Force of Law to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *UNESCO Courier*, November 1977: 30

²⁹⁶ Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated and edited by Mary Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 429

speech and assembly; in others, systemic inequality denies access to education or healthcare. The digital age adds new challenges: AI systems, mass surveillance, and data exploitation pose fresh threats to privacy and equality. As Samuel Moyn argues, “human rights have often been wielded as tools of Western hegemony, applied selectively and enforced inconsistently”²⁹⁷. Nevertheless, the normative power of human rights continues to inspire civil society, inform legislation, and shape international diplomacy. Their enduring appeal lies in their capacity to offer a universal language for justice and moral accountability.

In contemporary discourse, the importance of human rights is increasingly framed within intersectional and inclusive paradigms. Feminist, postcolonial, and Indigenous thinkers have critiqued early human rights frameworks for their Eurocentric and patriarchal biases. Makau Mutua has called for the decolonization of human rights, arguing that they must be redefined to reflect diverse cultural contexts and historical injustices. He notes: “The human rights corpus and movement... must divest from its Western genealogy and be truly global and inclusive.”²⁹⁸.

²⁹⁷Moyn, Samuel. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 23

²⁹⁸Mutua, Makau. “Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights.” *Harvard International Law Journal* 42, no. 1 (2001): 204

This implies that protecting human rights today is not merely about enforcement but about reimagining them as dynamic, pluralistic, and adaptable to diverse sociopolitical realities. Thus, even as the AI age threatens to render traditional rights mechanisms obsolete, it also provides an opportunity to rethink and reinforce the essence of what it means to be human in a digital world.

It is therefore essential to safeguard human rights not just as legal doctrines but as living commitments to human dignity, equality, and freedom. This protection must evolve to meet the demands of a world undergoing rapid technological transformation. As AI begins to mediate relationships, decisions, and identities, the human rights project must be recalibrated to ensure it continues to serve its foundational purpose: that is, defending the human person against exploitation, oppression, and exclusion. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine how the ideals of human rights, rooted in historical struggle and moral vision, can be practically and sustainably maintained in the age of artificial intelligence.

Artificial Intelligence: An Overview

Artificial Intelligence (AI), though a relatively recent technological development, has deep intellectual roots in philosophy, mathematics, and cognitive science. The idea that machines could emulate human reasoning traces back to classical antiquity, but it

was not until the mid-20th century that AI emerged as a formal discipline. The publication of Alan Turing's seminal paper, *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*, is widely considered the conceptual foundation of AI. In this work, Turing introduced what is now famously known as the Turing Test, a measure of a machine's ability to exhibit intelligent behavior indistinguishable from that of a human. He asked provocatively:

I propose to consider the question, 'Can machines think?' This should begin with definitions of the meaning of the terms 'machine' and 'think.' The definitions might be framed so as to reflect so far as possible the normal use of the words, but this attitude is dangerous... Instead of attempting such definitions, I shall replace the question by another, which is closely related to it and is expressed in relatively unambiguous words²⁹⁹.

What prompted the emergence of AI was largely the intersection of growing computational capacity, theoretical breakthroughs in logic and language processing, and the desire to model human cognition. The Dartmouth Conference of 1956, often hailed as the birth of AI as a field, brought together pioneers

²⁹⁹Turing, Alan. "Computing Machinery and Intelligence." *Mind* 59, no. 236 (1950): 433

such as John McCarthy, Marvin Minsky, Claude Shannon, and Herbert Simon. Their shared optimism was captured in the proposal: “Every aspect of learning or any other feature of intelligence can in principle be so precisely described that a machine can be made to simulate it.”³⁰⁰. This bold claim laid the groundwork for decades of research, despite fluctuating expectations and funding known as “AI winters.”

AI’s advantages in contemporary society are substantial. It enhances productivity through automation, improves healthcare with diagnostic tools, supports environmental sustainability via smart data analysis, and advances education through personalized learning platforms. Russell and Norvig affirm that: “AI systems today outperform humans in many tasks, such as identifying objects in images, translating languages, and even defeating world champions in complex games like Go and chess.”³⁰¹. The ability to analyze massive datasets in real-time and adapt through machine learning algorithms gives AI a significant edge in complex, data-driven decision-making scenarios.

³⁰⁰McCarthy, John, Marvin Minsky, Nathaniel Rochester, and Claude Shannon. “A Proposal for the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence.” 1955. <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~ai/>.

³⁰¹Russell, Stuart, and Peter Norvig. *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach*. 4th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2020), 102

Moreover, AI's potential to promote human rights through increased access to information, improved service delivery, and efficient legal processes has been noted. For instance, AI-driven platforms can help identify human rights violations via satellite imagery or social media analysis, empowering global watchdogs. Floridi and Cowsls have argued that, "The challenge is not whether AI will affect human rights, it already does; but whether it will do so in ways that are ethical, inclusive, and respectful of human dignity."³⁰². However, AI also brings significant drawbacks that threaten the very fabric of human rights. Issues such as algorithmic bias, data privacy violations, surveillance, and job displacement have prompted concerns globally. Noble Safiya shows how search engines and recommendation systems perpetuate systemic racism and sexism. She writes thus: "What we find is that machine learning and algorithms are not neutral. They reflect and reproduce the biases in society, sometimes magnifying them under the cloak of objectivity."³⁰³. This demonstrates that while AI may be technologically neutral in its design, its applications

³⁰²Floridi, Luciano, and Josh Cowsls. "A Unified Framework of Five Principles for AI in Society." *Harvard Data Science Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2019, 7

³⁰³Noble, Safiya Umoja. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 12

are often embedded with human prejudices and systemic inequities.

Concerns about AI's threat to human autonomy and democratic values have intensified. Shoshana Zuboff's notion of "surveillance capitalism" paints a grim picture of a future where human behavior is commodified and manipulated: "Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. These data are then computed and packaged as prediction products sold in behavioral futures markets."³⁰⁴ Such applications of AI not only challenge privacy but also democratic governance and the ability of individuals to exercise free will.

In summary, AI emerges as both a tool of empowerment and a potential instrument of domination. While it holds tremendous promise in improving lives and protecting rights, its deployment without sufficient ethical oversight can endanger the very liberties it purports to advance. It is against this backdrop that this paper evaluates the feasibility of the practicality and sustainability of human rights in an age increasingly defined by artificial intelligence.

The Practicality of Human Rights in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The question of whether human rights remain practical in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

³⁰⁴Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance*, 8

invites critical reflection on the nature of rights, technology, and governance. While human rights are often conceived as universal and inalienable, their implementation depends heavily on socio-political and economic structures that AI is now transforming. The practicality of human rights in this context hinges on our ability to translate these normative ideals into enforceable digital and technological frameworks. As Bostrom and Yudkowsky argue: “

The development of artificial intelligence will profoundly affect the realization of values in human society. Its design must be aligned with moral commitments, including human rights and justice, if it is to be beneficial³⁰⁵.

This implies that rights must now be reconceptualized not merely as moral norms, but as practical frameworks that can be encoded and safeguarded within technological ecosystems.

A central argument for the practicality of human rights in the AI age is their adaptability. Human rights, as living norms, have historically evolved to accommodate new realities, from slavery and colonialism to digital privacy and climate justice. The

³⁰⁵Bostrom, Nick, and Eliezer Yudkowsky. “The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.” In *The Cambridge Handbook of Artificial Intelligence*, edited by Keith Frankish and William M. Ramsey, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 319

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), while framed in 1948, contains principles broad enough to be interpreted in light of emerging technologies. Article 12, which protects individuals against “arbitrary interference with privacy,” now applies directly to AI systems that monitor behavior, track biometric data, or analyze communication. As Moyn asserts, “Human rights have never been static; they are shaped by political circumstances, and their relevance depends on their capacity to address real-life challenges”³⁰⁶. Thus, their practicality in the AI era lies in this very dynamism and interpretative flexibility.

Also, the infrastructure to protect rights in the digital age is increasingly being put in place. Regional and international legal frameworks such as the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) have demonstrated that human rights, particularly the right to privacy and data protection, can be embedded in legislative codes with transnational relevance. Article 22 of the GDPR, for instance, grants individuals the right *not* to be subjected to decisions based solely on automated processing. As explained in the regulation: “The data subject shall have the right not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing... which produces legal effects concerning him or her or similarly significantly affects him or

³⁰⁶Moyn, Samuel. *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 93

her.”³⁰⁷. This reflects a direct effort to make human rights enforceable and practical within AI-driven systems.

However, practical challenges remain. One of the core issues is the asymmetry between the pace of AI innovation and the development of human rights legislation. AI technologies evolve rapidly, often in opaque corporate environments, whereas legal systems and international human rights institutions are typically slow and reactive. As Latonero notes, “The development of AI often outpaces regulatory efforts, creating gaps that leave individuals vulnerable to rights abuses before protective measures are in place.”³⁰⁸. This time lag questions the practical capacity of human rights systems to respond to the ever-evolving capabilities and risks posed by AI.

Another barrier is the global inequality in technological governance. While some states and regions, like the EU, are developing sophisticated AI oversight mechanisms grounded in human rights, many others lack the infrastructure or political will to do so. This results in a fragmented global landscape where rights protections are uneven. In the words of

³⁰⁷General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Official Journal of the European Union, 2016, Article 22

³⁰⁸Latonero, Mark. *Governing Artificial Intelligence: Upholding Human Rights & Dignity*. New York: Data & Society Research Institute, 2018), 8

Amartya Sen, “Rights are not only declarations of ideals but require capabilities and institutions to be realized. Without institutional backing, they remain empty pronouncements.”³⁰⁹. Thus, the practicality of human rights in the AI age is closely tied to international cooperation and capacity-building across borders.

Still, efforts by civil society organizations, technologists, and ethicists are creating practical pathways for rights implementation in AI systems. Initiatives such as “ethics-by-design,” human-in-the-loop models, and transparency protocols aim to embed rights-respecting practices into AI development from the outset. Floridi and Taddeo emphasize: “Practical ethics in AI is about designing technologies that respect moral principles and actively promote values like transparency, accountability, and inclusivity”³¹⁰. These approaches affirm that it is not only possible but increasingly necessary to make human rights a practical element of technological design and deployment.

³⁰⁹Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 152

³¹⁰Floridi, Luciano, and Maria Taddeo. “What is Data Ethics?” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 374, no. 2083 (2016): 3

This paper argues that at this point, human rights remain practical in the age of artificial intelligence, but only insofar as states, corporations, and international actors deliberately integrate rights-based thinking into technological development and regulation. The universality and adaptability of human rights give them the normative strength needed to confront AI's challenges. It is against this backdrop that this paper defends the view that human rights are not obsolete ideals in the AI era, but vital tools for ensuring that technology serves humanity rather than subjugates it.

The Sustainability of Human Rights in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The sustainability of human rights in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) requires more than the mere adaptation of existing legal frameworks. It necessitates a fundamental rethinking of the ontological foundations of rights in relation to evolving digital ecosystems. Sustainability, in this context, is understood not only as the durability of rights over time but also as their adaptability in the face of technological change. Boddington Paula argues that, "AI is not simply a technological change, but a cultural and ethical shift that has implications for how we understand ourselves and our values."³¹¹. If human rights are to remain effective and

³¹¹Boddington, Paula. *Towards a Code of Ethics for Artificial Intelligence*. (Cham: Springer, 2017), 34

meaningful in the long term, they must be resilient to such paradigmatic shifts. This paper defends the position that while AI poses serious threats to the sustainability of human rights, the situation also presents an opportunity to reformulate and strengthen those rights to withstand future disruptions.

One of the most pressing challenges to the sustainability of human rights lies in the epistemic asymmetry introduced by AI systems. These systems often operate in ways that are opaque to the average citizen, making accountability difficult. As Floridi notes:

The black-box nature of many AI systems means that decisions which affect human lives are increasingly made without intelligible justification, thereby undermining the core human rights principles of transparency and due process³¹².

This challenge is particularly acute in predictive policing, automated welfare distribution, and credit scoring. If the mechanisms behind rights-impinging decisions are unintelligible or inaccessible, then the long-term enforceability and legitimacy of human rights become compromised. Thus, AI's epistemological opacity is a structural barrier to sustainability.

³¹²Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution*, 301

The economic incentives behind AI development are often in conflict with human rights objectives. The commodification of personal data and the prioritization of efficiency over fairness mean that AI technologies frequently evolve in ways that disregard or even subvert rights. As Zuboff warns, “Surveillance capitalism’s economic imperatives are not only indifferent to human rights; they are actively hostile to them, framing human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data”³¹³. This economic paradigm undermines the long-term viability of rights such as privacy, freedom of expression, and even human dignity. Unless deliberate safeguards are introduced through legal and ethical mechanisms, human rights will remain at the mercy of corporate interests, lacking sustainability in a profit-driven AI environment.

However, the possibility of rights sustainability should not be dismissed outright. International and regional efforts toward embedding human rights principles into AI governance provide a counter-narrative. The European Union’s *Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI* outlines principles like human agency, technical robustness, privacy, and transparency, all aligned with human rights frameworks. These efforts represent a growing recognition that AI must be not

³¹³Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 93

only legally compliant but also normatively accountable³¹⁴. The United Nations also calls for a “human-centered approach to AI that promotes peace, security, and human rights.”³¹⁵. These initiatives, if sustained and expanded, can form the bedrock for a rights-based digital future.

Importantly, education and digital literacy must be integral to any sustainable human rights agenda. Without public understanding of how AI affects rights, enforcement becomes abstract and elitist. As Mittelstadt and Floridi explain, “Sustainable ethical governance of AI requires participatory mechanisms that involve the very people whose rights are at stake, not just experts and regulators.”³¹⁶. This suggests that rights sustainability is not just a legal or technological matter but a democratic one. Involving communities, especially marginalized groups, in conversations about AI governance is essential to building a durable human rights culture.

Another essential aspect of sustainability is the evolution of rights discourse to accommodate AI’s

³¹⁴European Commission. *Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI*. (Brussels: High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, 2019), 67

³¹⁵UNESCO. *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*. (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2021), 7

³¹⁶Mittelstadt, Brent, and Luciano Floridi. “The Ethics of Big Data: Current and Foreseeable Issues in Biomedical Contexts.” *Science and Engineering Ethics* 22, no. 2 (2016): 337

unique threats. Traditional human rights categories, while foundational, may need expansion. Mantelero Alessandro proposes the inclusion of new digital rights, such as the right to algorithmic transparency and the right to be free from algorithmic discrimination³¹⁷. These rights acknowledge that the sustainability of older rights like equality and privacy depends on confronting new technological realities head-on. Thus, sustainability is not about preserving rights in their original forms but about recalibrating them to meet the demands of a new era.

While AI introduces challenges that could erode the long-term relevance of human rights, it also presents opportunities for renewal. Through regulatory innovation, democratic participation, international cooperation, and a forward-looking rights discourse, human rights can be made not only practical but sustainable. It is against this backdrop that this paper argues that the sustainability of human rights in the age of AI depends on a proactive, inclusive, and adaptive approach that treats human dignity not as a historical artifact, but as a living, evolving ideal capable of thriving even amidst algorithmic revolutions.

³¹⁷Mantelero, Alessandro. "AI and Big Data: A Blueprint for a Human Rights, Social and Ethical Impact Assessment." *Computer Law & Security Review* 34, no. 4 (2018): 756

Bridging the Gap: Towards an AI-Integrated Human Rights Framework

The ongoing tension between the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the need to protect human rights has created a precarious gap. This gap exists not only in terms of the practical application of rights but also in their long-term sustainability. While human rights frameworks have evolved to safeguard dignity, equality, and freedom in human society, AI presents a challenge to their applicability and effectiveness in the digital age. The question then becomes how to bridge this gap. To that end, a comprehensive, AI-integrated human rights framework is essential. As Floridi highlights, “Ethical AI must be built upon a foundation of human rights principles that not only preserve individual freedoms but also promote collective well-being in the digital space.”³¹⁸ This framework must allow for the adaptation of traditional human rights to the specific challenges presented by AI, without sacrificing the foundational principles that define human dignity.

One of the primary obstacles to bridging this gap is the lack of consistent regulatory standards for AI across different sectors and jurisdictions. AI operates in a globalized environment where algorithms, data flows, and technological infrastructures transcend national borders. Yet, human rights protections remain largely territorial and state-centric. As the

³¹⁸Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution*, 309

OECD *AI Principles* emphasize, “International collaboration is crucial to ensuring that AI benefits society as a whole while addressing its ethical, social, and economic challenges.”³¹⁹ The fragmentation of regulatory approaches not only creates uncertainty for businesses and governments but also increases the risk of human rights violations in AI applications. Therefore, a global, unified approach to AI governance is critical to ensuring that human rights are universally respected and enforced.

The integration of human rights within AI systems also requires a fundamental rethinking of design and development processes. As Floridi notes, “to ensure that AI systems respect human rights, they must be designed from the ground up to be transparent, accountable, and subject to effective human oversight.”³²⁰ This involves embedding human rights considerations into the very architecture of AI systems. In practice, this could mean requiring AI developers to engage in human rights impact assessments before deployment, ensuring that privacy, non-discrimination, and freedom of expression are safeguarded. By adopting a rights-centric approach to AI design, technology companies can preemptively address the

³¹⁹OECD. Recommendation of the Council on Artificial Intelligence, 2019, 6

³²⁰Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution*, 311

risks AI poses to human rights, fostering greater public trust and participation.

Also, bridging the gap between human rights and AI requires a reconceptualization of ethical AI frameworks that prioritize societal impact over mere profit maximization. Zuboff's critique of surveillance capitalism reveals that when economic imperatives are placed above ethical considerations, human rights are often undermined. She argues, "Surveillance capitalism thrives by commodifying personal data, converting it into behavioral predictions, which in turn undermine the very essence of individual autonomy and privacy"³²¹. To close this gap, policies must be introduced that regulate the collection, use, and sharing of data within AI systems. These policies should protect individuals from exploitation and discrimination while ensuring that AI technologies contribute to social good. This shift from a profit-driven to a rights-driven model of AI development is fundamental for building a sustainable future for human rights in the age of AI.

In addition to regulatory and design reforms, another key component of bridging the gap is promoting digital literacy and participatory governance. The complexity and opacity of AI systems often create barriers to public understanding and engagement. As Mittelstadt and Floridi

³²¹Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance*, 94

emphasize, “Sustainable governance of AI requires not only the expertise of regulators but also the active involvement of the public in decision-making processes.”³²² If human rights are to be sustainable, the public must be informed about the potential risks of AI and empowered to hold AI systems accountable. This includes fostering a culture of transparency where users are informed of how AI affects their rights, from privacy breaches to decisions made by algorithms. By making the governance of AI more inclusive and democratic, it is possible to ensure that human rights are upheld in the face of technological advancements.

The concept of algorithmic justice is also essential in bridging the gap between human rights and AI. As AI systems increasingly influence key aspects of society, such as criminal justice, healthcare, and finance, ensuring fairness in algorithmic decision-making is critical. As O’Neil Cathy states, “Algorithms are opinions embedded in code, and as such, they must be designed with human biases in mind to avoid perpetuating inequality and injustice.”³²³ By creating mechanisms that audit AI systems for bias, discrimination, and unfair outcomes, society can

³²²Mittelstadt and Floridi, *The Ethics of Big Data*, 10

³²³O’Neil Cathy. *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*. (NY: Crown Publishing Groups, 2016), 18

mitigate the risk of deepening social inequalities. An AI-integrated human rights framework must, therefore, incorporate checks and balances that ensure algorithms function equitably and do not infringe upon individuals' rights.

The bridging of the gap between human rights and AI requires a varied, proactive approach. This involves strengthening global cooperation, integrating human rights into the very fabric of AI development, ensuring participatory governance, and addressing algorithmic bias. As such, AI should not be seen solely as a challenge but also as an opportunity to advance the human rights agenda, especially if AI technologies are designed and governed with a rights-based approach. It is within this framework that the potential for AI to contribute positively to human society can be realized, aligning technological advancement with the protection and promotion of human rights.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while the age of Artificial Intelligence presents substantial challenges to the practical application and sustainability of human rights, it also opens new avenues for rethinking how these rights are protected and enforced. The integration of human rights into AI systems requires a global effort to establish universal frameworks that prioritize transparency, accountability, and fairness. Governments, developers, and civil society must

collaborate to ensure that AI technologies respect human dignity, avoid discrimination, and enhance social well-being. It is clear that AI, if aligned with human rights principles, can not only avoid exacerbating existing societal inequalities but also contribute positively to global progress.

To bridge the gap between human rights and AI, this paper recommends the establishment of international regulations that mandate human rights impact assessments for AI systems, with a strong emphasis on data privacy and algorithmic justice. Additionally, there must be an increased focus on digital literacy and public participation in AI governance to foster transparency and trust. By adopting these measures, the future of AI can be both practical and sustainable, ensuring that technology serves humanity without compromising fundamental rights. It is against this backdrop that a rights-based approach to AI development is not just feasible but imperative for the equitable advancement of society.

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