

International Symposium on “Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Democracy” Held

Vienna – Austria

The international symposium “Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Democracy” was organized by the Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna, with the participation of a group of prominent European, American, and Iranian professors and researchers.

This scientific gathering, which took place on 19 Tir 1405, corresponding to 10 July 2026, at the Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna, was held on the occasion of the Persian translation and publication of four books by Professor Mark Coeckelbergh, a prominent philosopher of technology and Professor of Media and Technology in the Philosophy Department at the University of Vienna. The books were published in Iran by Qoqnoos Publishing, the Faculty of Literature at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, and Degsa Publishing. The event was dedicated to examining the most important philosophical, ethical, and political questions surrounding the expansion of artificial intelligence in the contemporary world.

Participants in this symposium emphasized that artificial intelligence is not merely a new technology, but a fundamental transformation with extensive implications for the future of humanity, social structures, political systems, and the concept of ethical responsibility.

In the “Artificial Intelligence and Democracy” section, speakers examined the challenges arising from the increasing role of algorithms in public decision-making and warned about dangers such as the manipulation of public opinion, the spread of fake news, the reduction of citizens’ role in democratic processes, and the possibility of power becoming concentrated in the hands of large technology companies or authoritarian governments.

The topic of “Artificial Intelligence and Ethics” was also one of the main axes of this gathering. Speakers stressed the necessity of developing legal and ethical frameworks to hold companies active in the field of artificial intelligence accountable and called for preventing the reproduction of human discriminations and biases in algorithmic systems. Fundamental questions about the future relationship between humans and machines and humanity’s ethical responsibility toward advanced technologies were also discussed.

In another part of the program, the topic of “Artificial Intelligence and Authorship” was examined. The ever-increasing ability of intelligent systems to produce content, the future of human creativity, the position of writers and artists, and the necessity of supporting the material and intellectual rights of creators in the age of artificial intelligence were among the topics raised in this section.

This symposium was held with the presence and speeches of a group of international professors and specialists. The speakers of this scientific event were:

Professor Mark Coeckelbergh, philosopher of technology and professor at the University of Vienna; Professor David J. Gunkel, professor of Communication Studies at Northern Illinois University, USA; Dr. Amir Horr, Senior Scientist at the Austrian Institute of Technology (AIT); Dr. Rouhollah Eslami, Associate Professor of Political Science at

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad; and Dr. Reza Gholami, Assistant Professor at the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, researcher in political philosophy, cultural and civilizational studies, and Iran's Cultural Counselor in Austria.

Below is a report of the five presentations from this gathering:

The Light and Shadow of Artificial Intelligence over Democracy; From the Danger of “Techno-Fascism” to the Emergence of a “Digital Renaissance”

Professor Mark Coeckelbergh (Mark Coeckelbergh), Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna and member of the United Nations Independent Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence, in a comprehensive presentation titled “Artificial Intelligence, Democracy, and the Common Good,” examined the deep and complex dimensions of the intersection between technology and politics.

1. Moving Beyond Ethics; Toward a Political Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence

Professor Coeckelbergh in the first part of his presentation emphasized that discussions related to artificial intelligence should go beyond the level of common ethical concerns such as privacy, security, bias, the future of jobs, and the moral status of non-human entities. Referring to the challenges posed by large language models (LLMs), he stated that these technologies have created fundamental questions about the concept of authorship, the teaching of critical thinking skills, and legal issues such as copyright.

According to him, technology is never value-neutral or politically neutral. Therefore, we need to move from “AI ethics” to a “political philosophy of artificial intelligence” so that we can analyze the impact of these technologies on concepts such as freedom, equality, justice, and democracy.

2. Warning Bell for Democracy, Erosion of Knowledge, and the Emergence of “Techno-Fascism”

The warning section of this gathering was dedicated to the destructive impacts of artificial intelligence on the foundations of democracy. Coeckelbergh, referring to precedents such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, listed dangers such as misinformation, manipulation of public opinion, surveillance, and the increasing power of large technology companies. He warned about the danger of authoritarianism in the West and emphasized that the main problem is not the dominance of robots, but totalitarian tendencies in individuals and mega-corporations (such as the Palantir case); a phenomenon he refers to as “techno-fascism.”

This philosopher warned that artificial intelligence is eroding the epistemic foundations and social trust of democracy. Algorithms, by creating “epistemic bubbles,” destroying the boundary between reality and falsehood, and creating asymmetries of power and knowledge, weaken citizens’ epistemic agency. Coeckelbergh compared this situation to Hannah Arendt’s warnings about the roots of totalitarianism, which are fed by social isolation, the lack of a shared world, and the inability to distinguish truth from lies.

3. Artificial Intelligence for Democracy and the Pursuit of the Common Good

Despite these challenges, Coeckelbergh also considers artificial intelligence as part of the solution. He proposed the idea of using technology to strengthen democratic institutions and advance participatory and deliberative democracy. One of the examples presented was the “Habermas Machine” (developed by Google DeepMind); an AI-mediated tool that, by receiving and analyzing various opinions, attempts to find common ground, build consensus, and produce group statements in collective discussions.

However, he emphasized that purely technological solutions are not sufficient. Societies need a “new renaissance” and an Enlightenment project based on “digital humanism” that includes cultural changes, interdisciplinary education, and the cultivation of political virtues oriented toward the common good. Coeckelbergh, drawing on the ideas of John Dewey, reminded that democracy is more than a system of government; it is in fact “a way of life based on communication and shared experiences.”

4. The Necessity of an Intercultural Perspective and Global Governance

In the final section, this member of the UN panel emphasized the necessity of a global perspective. He stated that Western approaches to artificial intelligence (which are influenced by Western religious myths and narratives) may overlook understandings of concepts such as the “common good” in other cultures. He called for engagement with non-Western thoughts (such as the concept of Ubuntu and lessons from Asian thinking) and the inclusion of cultural and linguistic diversity in technology development.

Professor Coeckelbergh concluded his remarks by emphasizing the need for the formation of a “global governance” for artificial intelligence. In his opinion, issues such as the high speed of technological changes (such as generative and agentic AI), the concentration of power in the market, the impact on children’s rights and mental health, and the fragmentation of oversight tools require coordinated and integrated policymaking at the international level.

Professor David J. Gunkel: Authorship in the Age of Artificial Intelligence Requires Rethinking the Role of Language

Professor David J. Gunkel, a prominent philosopher and researcher in the field of technology ethics and artificial intelligence, examined the concept of “logocentrism” (i.e., placing language and speech at the center of knowledge and the expression of truth) and showed how this concept is linked to the issue of authorship in the age of artificial intelligence.

Professor Gunkel explained in this presentation that the term “logocentrism” was first proposed by the German philosopher Ludwig Klages in the early twentieth century. According to this view, a tradition has been formed in Western philosophy and science that considers language and words as the fundamental tools for expressing, interpreting, and representing external reality.

He emphasized that in the logocentric approach, language is not merely a means of everyday communication, but one of the most important foundations of knowledge, the transmission of

truth, and the formation of thought. Many Western intellectual currents have believed that humans understand, categorize, and judge the world through language.

Language and the Foundations of Authorship

An important part of this presentation was dedicated to the role of language in the formation of authorship. Professor Gunkel reminded that authorship has always been recognized throughout history as a human and creative activity; an activity in which the author expresses their experience, thought, feeling, and perception of the world through language in the form of text.

In the logocentric tradition, a text is not merely a collection of words, but a manifestation of the process of knowing and expressing truth. From this perspective, authorship has a deep connection with the author's identity, intention, lived experience, and intellectual responsibility.

Artificial Intelligence and Text Production

Professor Gunkel then turned to the emergence of artificial intelligence language models and explained that these technologies operate on the basis of analyzing, processing, and producing text. Language models, using vast amounts of linguistic data, identify and reproduce patterns of meaning, speech structures, and conceptual connections.

He added that the ability of artificial intelligence to produce fluent and coherent texts has confronted the traditional boundaries between “human author” and “machine-produced text” with new questions. This transformation shows that language in the age of artificial intelligence is not only a tool of communication, but the main material for content and knowledge production in many intelligent systems.

Challenges of Authorship in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

In this section of the presentation, Professor Gunkel addressed important questions about the nature of authorship: If an artificial intelligence system can produce a coherent, reasoned, and even creative text, can it be considered an “author”? What is the role of intention, human experience, and intellectual responsibility in defining authorship?

He emphasized that the answer to these questions is not merely technical, but requires philosophical and ethical reflections on the relationship between language, meaning, and humanity. From his point of view, text produced by artificial intelligence may be linguistically coherent, but this alone is not sufficient to attribute authorship identity to a machine.

Rethinking the Concept of the Author

Professor Gunkel noted that the expansion of artificial intelligence use in text production has confronted researchers and activists in the fields of culture and media with the necessity of rethinking the concept of the author. In these circumstances, it must be clarified how human creativity, conscious word choice, ethical responsibility, and communicative intent are defined in the text production process.

He added that this issue is important in various fields, including journalism, literature, education, research, and digital content production. The use of artificial intelligence can facilitate the writing

process, but at the same time it creates questions about the authenticity of the text, intellectual ownership, and audience trust in the produced content.

Logocentrism and the Future of Authorship

Professor Gunkel, in concluding his remarks, stated that the concept of logocentrism can provide a theoretical framework for understanding these transformations. If language in the Western philosophical tradition has been central to knowledge and the expression of truth, artificial intelligence technologies today are also producing, reproducing, and expanding meaning by relying on language.

Therefore, authorship in the age of artificial intelligence is not merely an issue related to new text production tools, but concerns deeper questions about the role of language in the formation of thought, the author's identity, and the relationship between humans and technology.

At the end of this program, Professor David J. Gunkel emphasized the necessity of continuing research and scientific dialogues about the future of authorship in the age of artificial intelligence and reminded that a deeper understanding of the role of language in meaning production is essential for understanding the cultural and social impacts of these technologies.

Examining the Future of Human Civilization in the Age of Artificial Intelligence; Emphasis on Preserving the Human Position in Governance and Technology

Dr. Amir Horr, the third speaker, in a presentation titled "Artificial Intelligence, the Evolution of Human Knowledge, Technology, and the Future of Human Civilization," examined the historical process of the evolution of human knowledge and the role of artificial intelligence in the future of science, technology, civilization, and governance.

By explaining the path of knowledge transformation from experience, observation, social interactions, utilization of resources, scientific thinking, and technological progress, he considered artificial intelligence as a new stage in the evolution of human knowledge systems and emphasized the necessity of developing "human-centered intelligence," "responsible innovation," and "collective intelligence."

By raising the question of whether the ever-increasing expansion of artificial intelligence will accelerate human progress or, in the long term, lead to the weakening of human cognitive abilities, he examined the opportunities and challenges of this technology. According to him, excessive dependence on artificial intelligence can lead to reduced creativity, erosion of cognitive abilities, weakened sense of responsibility, increased bias in decision-making, vulnerability of automated systems, security threats, and the expansion of economic inequalities.

Dr. Horr also raised this fundamental question of whether artificial intelligence should remain in the position of a "cognitive assistant" or become a "cognitive replacement" for humans. He emphasized the necessity of keeping humans in the decision-making cycle, protecting human judgment, creativity, and responsibility, determining the boundaries of artificial intelligence use,

ensuring transparency and explainability of systems, and creating a balance between human capabilities and technology.

Another part of this presentation was dedicated to the topic of soft power, civilizations, and governance models. By comparing civilizations and empires, he considered soft power as the foundation of the formation of enduring civilizations and explained the role of culture, identity, religion, knowledge systems, and social capital in creating social cohesion and resilience. In his opinion, Islamic civilization is based on spirituality, justice, knowledge, identity, and the persuasion of hearts, and unlike models based on domination and hard power, its expansion is shaped on the basis of conscious acceptance, ethical growth, and social solidarity.

In conclusion, emphasizing that the future of civilization and governance depends on creating a balance between technology, ethics, rationality, and human values, he noted that artificial intelligence should serve to enhance human capacities, expand interdisciplinary cooperation, sustainable development, and civilizational progress, and not replace humanity's fundamental abilities.

Artificial Intelligence Must Serve Democracy and Human Dignity

Dr. Rouhollah Eslami, Associate Professor of Political Science at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, examined Professor Mark Coeckelbergh's ideas on the relationship between artificial intelligence, ethics, and democracy in this symposium.

Dr. Eslami, who is the Persian translator of the book "Artificial Intelligence and Democracy" by Professor Mark Coeckelbergh, at the beginning of his speech thanked Dr. Reza Gholami and the organizers of this scientific event and introduced himself as a researcher focused on political philosophy, public policy, and the relationship between technology and governance.

Referring to his experience translating Professor Coeckelbergh's book, he stated: "The translation of this work has created a bridge between intellectual traditions and contemporary discussions on AI ethics and has provided the possibility of deeper dialogue between political thought and technological transformations."

Three Political Approaches to Artificial Intelligence

Dr. Eslami, continuing his speech, categorized contemporary debates about artificial intelligence into three major political approaches.

First, the liberal market-oriented approach, which mainly sees artificial intelligence as a factor of innovation, economic growth, and scientific progress. He linked this view to the intellectual tradition of thinkers such as John Locke and Friedrich Hayek.

Second, the state-centered approach, which considers artificial intelligence as a tool for national security, public management, and social coordination. In this section, the speaker referred to concepts of sovereignty in Thomas Hobbes's thought and the concept of power in the works of thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.

Third, the ethical-democratic approach, which, according to Dr. Eslami, Professor Mark Coeckelbergh is one of its prominent representatives. This perspective, instead of focusing solely on maximizing the market or state power, raises this fundamental question: “How can artificial intelligence be compatible with democracy, human dignity, and ethical responsibility?”

He traced the roots of this approach in the political philosophy tradition of thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, John Rawls, Karl Popper, and Hannah Arendt and added that in this view, technology is neither absolutely rejected nor unconditionally praised; rather, innovation must always be guided by ethical values and democratic institutions.

Interdisciplinary Methodology in Coeckelbergh's Thought

Dr. Eslami considered one of the most important features of Professor Coeckelbergh's thought to be his interdisciplinary methodology; an approach that links political philosophy, ethics, sociology, and computer science in a dialectical dialogue.

Referring to Coeckelbergh's influences from thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Auguste Comte, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas, he stated that studying his works is like a journey through the history of political philosophy; a journey in which the ideas of classical thinkers, including Plato and Aristotle, enter into dialogue with the ethical challenges of the age of artificial intelligence.

Opportunities and Threats to Democracy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

In another part of this speech, Dr. Eslami pointed to the opportunities of artificial intelligence for strengthening democracy. He listed better access to information, digital participation, improvement of public services, and evidence-based decision-making as among the positive capacities of this technology.

However, he warned that artificial intelligence can also bring serious threats to democratic systems. The spread of false information, intensification of social polarization, manipulation of public opinion, and concentration of power in the hands of governments or large technology companies were among the dangers that were addressed in this speech.

Dr. Eslami, quoting Professor Coeckelbergh's views, emphasized that democracy in the age of artificial intelligence requires transparency, accountability, controllability, and democratic oversight of intelligent technologies. According to him, “Technology should strengthen public dialogue and democratic deliberation, not replace it.”

Emphasis on the Common Good and Ethical Policymaking

In the conclusion of this speech, Dr. Eslami highlighted three key points. First, that Professor Coeckelbergh's philosophy is essentially a defense of the common good and evaluates artificial intelligence not merely based on efficiency, but on the basis of its contribution to justice, democracy, and human dignity.

The second point was the necessity of combining critical reflection with practical policy proposals for the responsible guidance of the development and application of artificial

intelligence. The third point was also an invitation to critical dialogue with other perspectives, including political realism and technological optimism.

Dr. Eslami, at the end of his speech, thanked Professor Mark Coeckelbergh for supporting the publication of his works in Persian and for his deep commitment to ethics, democracy, and humanity, and wished him further success.

Democracy Besieged by Algorithms: The Necessity of Publicizing Philosophy and Reviving Intellectual Authority

The last speaker of the symposium, Dr. Reza Gholami, warned about the profound impacts of artificial intelligence on the foundations of democracy. In this speech, he emphasized that democracy has never been merely a method of counting votes, but has always been a culture based on shared reasoning and informed judgment, which is now threatened by algorithmic environments.

Fundamental Challenges to Democracy and the Crisis of Truth

Dr. Gholami considered the most important damage from the expansion of artificial intelligence to be the crisis of truth and the disappearance of society's "shared epistemic space." The prevalence of deepfakes and misinformation has weakened public trust in reality and destroyed the foundation of political dialogue. In these conditions, algorithms, by analyzing behavioral data, reduce the democratic process of persuasion to invisible engineering and behavioral manipulation. This trend, by filtering information, disrupts human agency and concentrates political influence without democratic legitimacy in the hands of digital platforms; to the point that these infrastructures can become new dictators.

Publicizing Philosophy and Reviving Intellectual Authority in Modern Society

This professor of political philosophy, for overcoming this crisis and resisting algorithmic hegemony, placed special emphasis on two vital elements: first, the "publicizing of philosophy" and its exit from the confines of universities. According to him, philosophy must find its way into the public sphere, schools, media, and everyday conversations so that by teaching "how to think," it equips citizens' rational judgment against the deceptions and manipulations of artificial intelligence. The second fundamental solution is the "revival of the authority of the intellectual current." Dr. Gholami warned that in the face of superficiality and predictability arising from the age of intelligent machines, modern society needs to rebuild its intellectual life; something that can only be achieved by supporting thinkers, journalists, writers, and restoring authority to independent intellectuals so that the depth of public reasoning and critical thinking is preserved in society.

Responsible Governance and the Future of Democracy

The head of the Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna, alongside these two axes, considered it necessary for technology companies to ensure transparency, confront commercial secrecy in important algorithmic decisions, and simultaneously develop civic and digital literacy for the young generation. Dr. Gholami concluded by noting that the main danger is not machines becoming smarter, but humans gradually abandoning critical thinking and ethical judgment. The

future of democracy depends on the values by which humans guide artificial intelligence. If freedom, justice, and human dignity are placed at the center, artificial intelligence can become a tool for strengthening democracy; because democracy is ultimately an ethical achievement and its survival depends on the wisdom of human societies.

The holding of this international symposium in Vienna was evaluated as a step toward strengthening scientific and philosophical dialogues among thinkers from different countries about the future of technology, the position of humanity, and the necessity of linking scientific innovation with ethical and democratic values. This event, which was accompanied by a question-and-answer session, was met with the welcome of Austrian, Iranian, and other nationalities' researchers, professors, and students, and provided a platform for the exchange of views and the raising of fundamental questions about the future of human societies in the age of artificial intelligence.