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# Bioethical Issues in Artificial Intelligence

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## Abstract

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the legit debate of the question “what is man?” will be put forward by the bioethics. The most relevant benches of the answer will be provided by the reflection on the artificial intelligence impact and condition, i.e. on certain computer software capable of learning without any external support. The assimilation of “machine” functioning and human mind may raise righteous controversies related to the peculiar differences between the man and an object he created, but the mirroring role of the artificial intelligence systems fails to rely on the answer provided by the ground we currently hold given the issue of man and machine resemblance, since it is determined by an incontestable feature of artificial intelligence, which that it is programmed by the man.

## Keywords

*Bioethics, artificial intelligence, human beings, feelings, life, death*

The bioethics appeared at the time when man hold such power that no authority other than his own consciousness could control. This would not mean that God is unable to command man, He always disposed of the power to encumber the crimes or other wrongful deeds, but He allows him

to decide freely. Until now, the man's liberty in doing wrong was limited by the ability relatively restrained to influence circumstances or by certain ethical systems which he assumed along with the cultural environment where he thrived. Currently, though, he holds a power almost unlimited over the nature and other fellow human beings, and the culture bringing forth the Western man is seized by the code of ethics relativization, therefore the man's liberty is only limited by his consciousness. Science and technique allows man to interfere within the life and death realm and no other religion or code of ethics may be imposed to him, but for his own consciousness.

Likewise, man intervened within the realm of life and death during the periods before the post-modern condition, though birth and crime. The former represents a type of redemption of the ancestral sin, whereas the latter is a perpetuation of the ancestral sin. Within the crime, man is aware of the guilt, by abortion, eugenics and euthanasia, the death claims to make life easier.

The unqualifiable death before birth, the abortion<sup>1</sup> is presented as a solution to the personal or couple life issues.<sup>2</sup> In order to make possible the transplants, it was required a consistent progress of the medicine, but also the change in death defining, and the intelligent prosthesis bring back into present the question *what is man?* This occurs in a period when it is obvious that a complete answer to such a question opens the path to totalitarisms. The two large totalitarian systems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Nazi and Communist regime, made use of such definitions in order to justify torture

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<sup>1</sup> Still abortion are considered the so called contraceptive measures acting on the fertilized ovule; particularly; they intervene after the conception, therefore they fail to be contraceptive.

<sup>2</sup> The fight against abortion is one of the surprisingly meeting points between the Church teaching and the communist totalitarian state policy. For demographic policy reasons, it forbade the abortion by severely sanctioning those who practiced it or were companions into such practices. The marginalization of the Church entailed only a biological understanding of man and life, thus the abortion was presented a natural and justified path to avoid an unwilling pregnancy, forbidden by the state but for political reasons, since a state with numerous citizens becomes a much more powerful state. With no awareness of life sacredness, men used this method under inappropriate conditions, including serious medical and criminal risks; therefore, the abortion permission represented one of the first laws to be applied after the fall of the communist regime. Such circumstances caused that numerous believers frightened by the number of abortion practiced after '89 found themselves regretting the former communist regime.

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and crimes<sup>3</sup>, perpetrated in the name of institution of the Arian race or the “new man”. The eugenics raise both spiritual and social issues (generally, the measure is approved by the population, but its exaggerations lead to the individuals’ liberty and dignity violation), and the possibility of antenatal diagnostic or even genetics intervention bring again forth into the discussion the question *what is man?*), and the abortion condition (in case of the embryos elimination which are considered “abnormal”). The issue of medical treatment accessibility raises social issues still: how to decide on the beneficiaries? Accessibility is to be granted only to those who are able to pay, those who more entitled medically speaking, or according to the social importance? Eventually, the theories related to the life quality refer to the question about the man also. On equal terms, cloning raises the issue of man’s identity and the individual’s responsibility towards his fellow human beings and the creation, because, beyond all fantastic movies and stories presenting the possibility of producing similar identical individuals, it is to be outlined the issue of cultivation limit rate of certain parts of the body for transplant procedures, in fact, the issue of spirit and matter rate.

All the above entitles us to ascertain that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the legit debate of the question “*what is man?*” will be put forward by the bioethics. Within the stipulated arguments, the most relevant benches of the answer will be provided by the reflection on the artificial intelligence impact and condition, i.e. on certain computer software capable of learning without any external support. Daniel Hills<sup>4</sup> argued on the similarity of human mind and the computer intelligence. The material support (*hardware*) of the computer is much better than humans’, since the information speed through the electric circuits is faster by a great deal than within the neuronal circuits, the superiority that man can still benefit from in taking de-

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<sup>3</sup> We are facing the premises of a totalitarian system every time an isolated part claims to substitute the whole, when it is ascertained that one totality may be constrained within the boundaries of a definition or theory. Whoever alleges such a claim, individual or political regime, places itself on the seat of God, since only for Him all are given at once, since only He can constrain everything. Man fails to be apprehended within one definition or one nature, for he is infinite in as far as he is the Face of God. Consequently, in any circumstances, every time we will speak of “human nature” or “human condition”, we must be aware that we are dealing with a limitation of man. With a quibbling, we may say that man’s nature is to be supernatural.

<sup>4</sup> *Thinking Machine*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2001.

cisions is owed to the manner the information is structured and selected (*software*), pointing out that, for Hills, the said superiority is not given to man by a presumed Creator, but he is the outcome of the long evolution of human species, a process which the artificial intelligence may more rapidly cover.

The artificial intelligence is for man a mirror including the dimension of time as well, a mirror where he can reflect himself in order to understand his nature. The picture in a common mirror repeats the same movements as the character's reflecting in it, though this reflection can be larger, smaller or altered. This picture is used by the man to see himself from the outer perspective, as others look onto him.

The assimilation of "machine" functioning and human mind may raise righteous controversies related to the peculiar differences between the man and an object he created (though the artificial intelligence is not, properly, an object), but the mirroring role of the artificial intelligence systems fails to rely on the answer provided by the ground we currently hold given the issue of man and machine resemblance, since it is determined by an incontestable feature of artificial intelligence, which that it is programmed by the man.

The way in which a system controlled by an artificial intelligence takes decisions is connected to how it learns, and the manner in which it learns is determined by the initial programming. At first consideration, the fact that an artificial intelligence is programmed to learn seems to eliminate any claim of freedom, but this thesis may not be accepted but on the ground of a very strict determinism, where man either would benefit from the freedom of the will, since man takes decisions in line with the manner he was thought to learn too, in line with a certain "programming" provided by the education in the family, by the process of socialization and by the school. Thus the individual's identity and personality takes shape, consequently the child becomes a grown-up, a person endowed with judgment and responsibility.

Feelings, affectivity in general, have been considered human specific and an argument for which a robot may never take decisions like a man, but also for the decision taken based on feelings, it is still a decision of the reason, so that even a robot may take decisions similar to those taken based on feelings, provided it is appropriately programmed. Since a "computer" can be programmed to learn, as every man, to assess certain arguments

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according to the emitter, not only by their accurateness, in other words, a computer may be programmed to be “subjective” and, though it was programmed, to become autonomous in its assessments, like all men.

Its subjective preferences will always rely on the initial program, but this is similar to man, who will always be influenced by his genetics, but also by the learning and the experiences he had at different ages. The liberty at a larger extent towards the physical conditioning and the computing power enables the machine to develop the consequences to the initial alternatives within much longer and more complex scenarios than man would be able to and, thus, it can see itself, in fact, acting, remaining, nevertheless, an external actor. It will know better itself, since, in fact, it is within the profound interior of those actions.

Symmetrically, we may ascertain that the artificial intelligence either, developing according to a software including man’s history and cultural preferences, fails to be exterior to mankind. This issue brings us back to the question related to the difference between man and machine, since “the mind” of the machine may cause a behavior similar to man’s. Man is not just reason, he is also “feelings”, and the existence of feelings could be alleged as differentiation criteria, though the mind of the machine may act as it had been seized by feelings, yet it fails to have any.

The answer resides on the meaning of the word “feelings”. Whether it refers to the sensitivity to certain external or internal stimuli (cold, physical attraction, hunger), then we may not use it as a criteria, since for man too, all these happens on the brain level and a robot may be programmed to feel the hunger, the cold and the physical attraction too, in line with the data communicated by the sensory receptors. Provided it is something different, like a complementary form to reason, then the answer to the question may be rephrased: *can the robot fall in love?* The answer, once again, depends on the meaning of the word “love”. Whether it is a feeling, then, as we have shown above, the artificial intelligence may fall in love, may have knowledge of the tension between the contradictory effusions of the fascination and the rejection. On these terms understood, the love is studied by the science having demonstrated that it last up to two years and is characterized by markers of abnormal values of certain substances within our body. Whether it fails to be considered a feeling, what could it be then? If thought and sensations acquire meaning within the mind and, thus, they are assimilable by an artificial intelligence, love should have its

“dwelling” somewhere else. When, on the every day language level, we speak of feeling with the heart and thinking with the mind, we fail to utter that the organ pumping the blood could “shelter” the feelings, but we consider<sup>5</sup> a different kind of heart. The physical heart pumps the blood to all organs, preserving the life of the organism. Whether the reason helps us understand and train ourselves and communicate with the world, with our fellow human beings, with ourselves, the heart, within the above meaning, helps us communicate beyond all understanding with what supports us, fellow men and the world, providing all with the source of life. In this case, love is not a feeling, but a way of life. Its definition, though, brings us close to totalitarianisms, since every definition of love includes a definition (= limitation) of man and very few times history shows us that men have been killed because of a perverted love towards man.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, beginning with its concerns for systematical study of human behavior and the impact upon life from the perspective of several moral principles, bioethics faces one of the most resilient issues of present times, the tension between the necessity of defining man and the awareness of the risk to assume such definition. Provided we accept that

“Christian bioethics is not only an academic subject standing before the canvas of everyday life [...], it stands for a Christian way of life, to experiment, to take part in sexuality, in reproduction, in sufferance, in illness, in invalidities, in health care and in death”<sup>7</sup>,

thence it may show a way to overcome or support the tension mentioned above, since the answer to this issue fails to be of theoretical nature any longer, easily altered towards totalitarianism, but it is our life.

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, most of the times, we fail to point out anything precisely, but we use an expression in relation to which we may say that the tongue thought of it on our behalf.

<sup>6</sup> Consequently, perhaps the sole definition of love may be provided by specifying certain milestones showing us if we are getting closer of it or leaving it far behind us, as in Corinthians I, 13, 4 – 7.

<sup>7</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2005, p. 502.