

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

- Machine v. Moral Code: The Search for Community in a Technological Age
- Dr. Michael Bugeja, Distinguished Professor of the Greenlee School of Journalism, Iowa State University



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication

INTERPERSONAL

Machine vs. Moral Codes and Impact on Democracy

Michael Bugeja, Professor
bugeja@iastate.edu, 118 Hamilton Hall
515-294-0481

Summary of Presentation

Question: Are we trading moral values for machine ones?

Problem #1: Loss of perspective on the human condition

Problem #2: Time spent in virtual rather than real habitat

Background: Technology's nature; *do you actually know it?*

Review: Ethical principles formed in time, place, culture

Overview: 10 machine values; *how many have voters adopted?*

Leadership: 10 humane values; *how many do candidates practice?*

Impact: Voter profiles: *What is the effect on the state of democracy?*

Goal: Political leadership in online and physical communities

The Human Condition: *Our Dual Psyche*

- Consciousness tells us that *we come into the world alone and we leave it alone*
- Conscience tells us *what is in me is in you*
- We spend our life *between those polarities*, at times being estranged from community, at others seemingly one with it
- Goal of ethical leadership—to help us lead abundant lives—is to balance the polarities *... so that one informs the other*



Harmonizing the Polarities

Conscience: inner knowing of right and wrong **involving others**

Consciousness: awareness of our place in physical space, **shared with others**

Conscience demands:

- (a) *we love and are loved by others*
- (b) *share meaningful relationships*
- (c) *contribute to society*



Consciousness requires:

- (a) *we assess consequences of thoughts, words and deeds*
- (b) *weigh impact of past actions on ourselves and others*
- (c) *foresee future acts so to lessen harm to ourselves, others*

Does Conscience Actually Exist?

REALITY CHECK:



- Remember a time when you heard the conscience, but opted **not** to heed the small voice inside you?
 - ✓ *Maybe you did or said something you shouldn't have ... maybe you opened a door or went down a wrong street*
 - ✓ *Most people live with regret, guilt or remorse*
- Now recall a time when you **obeyed** your conscience
 - ✓ *That usually harkens a sense of empowerment, affirmation*
 - ✓ *We feel grounded, balanced, whole*

Secular Acknowledgement

ARTICLE 1: *UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS*

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason (consciousness) and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood



Eleanor Roosevelt helped create

Theological Acknowledgement

“Conscience” lies beyond a person’s own will and reason (consciousness). Conscience is an indictment of the loss of unity with humankind and a warning against the loss of oneself. It is directed not toward a particular kind of doing but toward a particular mode of being.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran minister. Raised in Berlin, Bonhoeffer was one of the few clergymen who opposed Adolph Hitler and the rise of Nazism in 1930’s Germany.



Executed in 1945

Technology as “Mode of Being”

Americans average:

- *88 days looking at digital devices*
- *156 days when television is added*
- *103 days sleeping*

70 percent of our lives looking at a screen

QUESTION #1: HOW DOES THAT ALTER ETHICAL VALUES BASED IN TIME, PLACE, CULTURE?

QUESTION #2: HAVE VOTERS ADOPTED MACHINE VALUES?

QUESTION #3: HOW DOES THAT IMPACT DEMOCRACY?

Nature of the Machine



*French-Maltese
philosopher Ellul*

Technology: *developed by military to surveil and advanced by business to sell*

Ellul called it “a self-determining organism or end in itself whose autonomy transformed centuries’ old systems while being scarcely modified in its own features.”

What Ellul Meant and Foresaw

- Introduce technology into the economy, and the economy is all about the technology
- Introduce it into romance, and love is about the technology
- Introduce it into education, and learning is all about the technology
- Introduce it into religion, and faith is all about the technology
- Introduce it into politics, and elections are all about the technology
- Introduce it into home and work ... get the same result

From Knowledge to Consumer Economy

- Knowledge economy (1999-2012) based on education
 - ✓ *Requires reading, focus, attention span, critical thinking*
 - ✓ *Life-long education, using Internet to advance understanding*
 - ✓ *Goal to bridge digital and ethnic divides*
- Consumer economy (2012-present) based on data, profit
 - ✓ *People are reduced to nodes, represented by algorithms*
 - ✓ *Insistent connectivity to surveil and sell simultaneously*
 - ✓ *Goal to empower a digital service economy*

Note: A consumer economy is sustainable if sufficient numbers are employed; if machines replace too many people, debt may cause economic collapse

Hallmarks of Big Data Era

- **Power, Mobility and Access** of digital tools
- **Time** we spend using them
- **Influence** of mega-corporations making them
- **Transition** from devices like desktops and cell phones, which used to be controlled by people, to intelligent machines controlled by companies and governments
- **Advances in Technology** regarding tiny, inexpensive sensors embedded in the natural world and working in tandem with processors empowered by Moore's Law, or the doubling of computing capabilities every two years

Our World Without “Why?”

- **Machines excel at identifying and compiling data** about “who,” “where,” “what,” “when” and “how” but lack human intelligence and so cannot discern “why”
- **Computers correlate magnificently**, telling us **who** wants to know **how** a product or service works, **what** it costs and **when** it might be most desired and **where**
- **You do not need to know “why”** to sell something; sale is a sale is a sale
- **Because machines have no conscience**, “why” is unobtainable and unnecessary in consumer economies

Conscience Knows “Why”

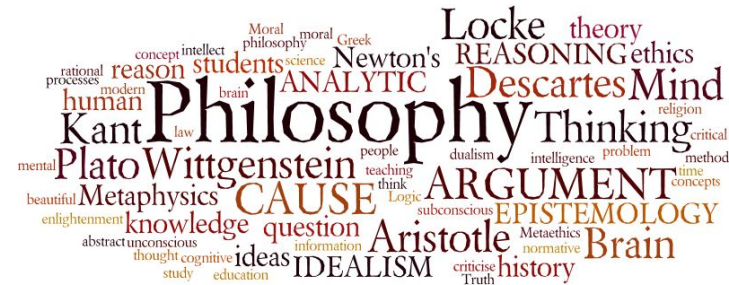
- **People always have been concerned with WHY.** *Why are we born? Why do we die?*
- **Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl** states in *Man's Search For Meaning*: “Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear almost any ‘how.’”
- **In the dystopia book 1984**, George Orwell defined totalitarianism: “I know how things happen, but I don't know why.”
- **Annie Dillard in *Total Eclipse* states:** “The mind wants to live forever, or to learn a very good reason why not. The mind wants the world to return its love, or its awareness; the mind wants to know all the world, and all eternity and God. The mind's sidekick, the body, will settle for two eggs over easy.”

Overview of Ethical Principles

10 Ethical Values shared worldwide by various cultures and societies:
Truth, Justice, Fairness, Responsibility, Duty, Kindness, Integrity, Dignity, Trust, Empathy

Moral Absolutes:

- *It is wrong to mistreat a child*
- *Wrong to humiliate someone*
- *Wrong to torment an animal*
- *Wrong to think only of yourself*
- *Wrong to steal, lie, break promises*
- *Right to be respectful of others*
- *Right to be charitable and generous*



Highest Moral Principles

PROTONORM: Human Dignity, Truth, Non-Violence

GRACE: Acknowledgement of Transcendence and Human Condition



Clifford G. Christians, philosopher



**Viktor Hugo's
"Les Misérable"**

10 Machine Values: *How many have voters adopted?*

#1: IMPORTANCE OF SELF over others

Example: The rise of the selfie in the front-facing camera of the iPhone 4

Result: The more corporations datamine the self, the more products they can sell you and your designated “friends”

#2: BOREDOM over attentiveness

Example: Any free moment, including in cars or at lecture in class, is boring, triggering urge to check smartphone or social media

Result: Dulling of conscience, splitting of consciousness

10 Machine Values: *How many have voters adopted?*

#3: OVERSHARING over privacy

Example: What we tell others, including friends of friends (often utter strangers) on social media

Result: “If everything is public, nothing is secret. If nothing is secret, nothing is sacred”—Author Wendy Shalit in *Return to Modesty*

#4: ENTERTAINMENT over knowledge

Example: [63 percent of U.S. households](#) include at least one frequent gamer; 65 percent of homes own a video game-playing device

Result: Among other things, including health and propensity toward violence, loss of critical analysis of news and impact on society

10 Machine Values: *How many have voters adopted?*

#5: INTERRUPTION over sustained interaction

Example: Digital notification programmed for insistent connection

Result: The tech companies keep you online, away from company of others in real community, the more they can sell and datamine

#6 DISTRACTION over concentration

Example: Human attention span shortened from 12 seconds to 8 seconds in more than a decade

Result: As early as 2012, 87% of teachers said technology created a distracted generation. (Also, new research cites youth lack of sleep)

10 Machine Values: *How many have voters adopted?*

#7: INCIVILITY over empathy

Example: 75 percent see incivility at "crisis levels" and 73 percent feel that the U.S. is "losing stature as a civil nation"

Result: Technology is omnipresent, so any interpersonal interruption is considered an intrusion and personal affront

#8: AFFIRMATION over information

Example: Social media is programmed to affirm our psychographics

Result: Among other things, including health and propensity toward vulgarity, loss of critical analysis of news and impact on society

10 Machine Values: *How many have voters adopted?*

#9: BELIEF over fact

Example: [41 studies of partisan bias](#) found conservatives and liberals show same levels of belief over evidence to the contrary

Result: Technology affirms belief no matter how biased to connect us to groups or individuals of like minds, again associated with sales

#10: ON DEMAND FANTASY over intimacy

Example: [40 million regularly visit porn sites](#); 35% of all internet downloads; 25% of all search engine queries; 33% women viewers

Result: [Loss of intimacy](#) associated with tech addition and overuse

Main Message of Technology

**SOMEONE SOMEWHERE ELSE IS MORE
IMPORTANT THAN THE PLACE YOU ARE
OR THE PERSON YOU ARE WITH**



*We objectify those in
our presence as if they
are not really there*

There is a “There” in Community



10 Leadership Values:

How many do candidates practice?

#1: ACKNOWLEDGE OTHERS

Conscience is programmed to serve others as well as ourselves

#2: BE ATTENTIVE

Consciousness is aware of our words and deeds in interactions

#3: PRACTICE DISCRETION

Conscientious interactions value restraint and power of words

#4: PURSUE KNOWLEDGE

Conscience requires self-knowledge; consciousness, education

#5: INTERACT GENUINELY WITH OTHERS

Conscience treats others as we wish to be treated

10 Leadership Values:

How many do candidates practice?

#6: FOCUS ON PRIORITIES

Consciousness requires concentration, especially on political goals

#7: EMPATHIZE WITH OTHERS

Conscience knows everyone goes through something

#8: STAY INFORMED

Consciousness requires reliable news and respect for fact

#9: EMBRACE IMPARTIALITY

Consciousness sees the world as it is; not as we wish it were

#10: ENGAGE CONSTITUENTS EMPATHICALLY

Conscience is nurtured by integrity, truth, non-violence

Impact on Democracy

Divided Political Parties: Little room for compromise

Contentious Relationships: Political arguments at home, school, work

Politicized Journalism: Outlets appeal to political affinity groups

Downsized Newsrooms: Talking heads align views to affinity groups

Loss of Local News: Remaining national outlets deepen division

Social Media: Validates division so perception becomes reality

Political Manipulation: Conspiracy theories replace fact-based reports

Impact: Loss of bipartisanship, compromise, civic virtues, civility, common good, party over patriotism, America's identity

What Can Be Done?

Acknowledge Biases: Your perception is not reality

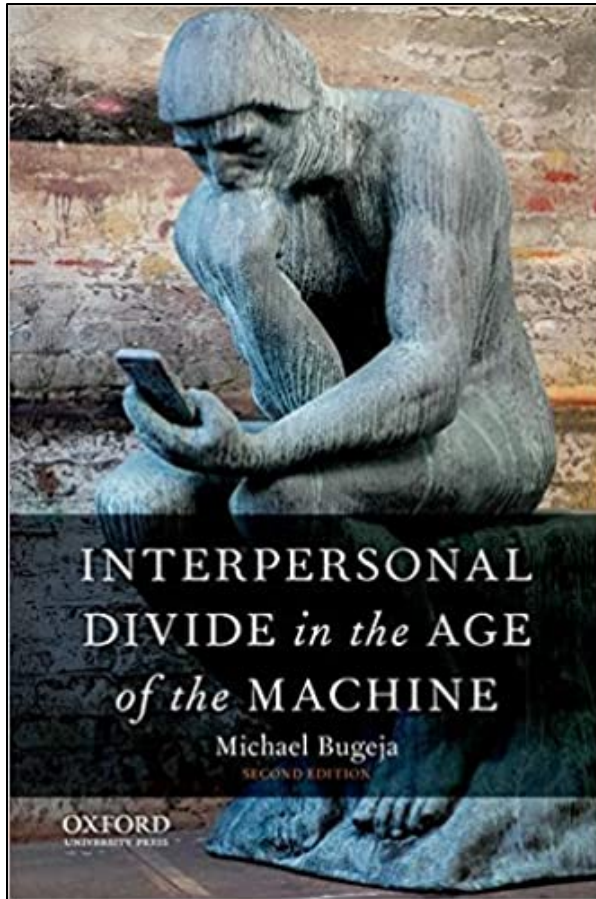
Limit Screen Time: Pandemic has increased digital exposure; reintroduce yourself to community and civil interactions

Subscribe to Reliable News: Ignore the op-eds but get reports from variety of outlets i.e. New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, National and Iowa Public Radio, Reuters, Associated Press

Embrace Civic Virtues: Equal opportunity, common interests over individual differences, respect for views of others, concern for future generations, respect for rights, privileges, freedoms in the Bill of Rights

Focus on Long-Term: No short-term fixes. Require media and technology literacy in the schools

For More Information



Interpersonal Divide in the Age of the Machine challenges us to scrutinize data science and take inventory of ourselves through the lens of the human condition, from which media and technology offer escape. Through a rich telling of media history and deep discussion of media and civic issues from an applied perspective, Bugeja illustrates how each medium changes the message, resulting in cultural upheaval that also causes deep rifts in personal and professional relationships.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication

INTERPERSONAL

Machine vs. Moral Codes and Impact on Democracy

Michael Bugeja, Professor
bugeja@iastate.edu, 118 Hamilton Hall
515-294-0481