Anglican Social Responsibilities

Submission in relation to Department of Industry, Science and Resources Discussion Paper on Safe and responsible AI in Australia.

Introduction

1. Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in relation to Department of Industry, Science and Resources Discussion Paper on Safe and responsible AI in Australia.

2. This submission is by the Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission of the Anglican Diocese of Perth ("the SRC"). The SRC is a statutory commission of the Anglican Diocese of Perth. Its role is to facilitate advocacy and education on social justice issues in the church, its schools and agencies and the wider community.

3. The views expressed in this submission are the views of the SRC alone and should not be taken to reflect the views of the Anglican Diocese of Perth.

4. The Christian tradition has many voices and viewpoints, and this submission does not reflect the diversity of Christian concerns on legal frameworks concerned with equal opportunity or human rights.

Summary

5. The SRC commends the Department of Industry, Science and Resources Discussion Paper on the production of the Discussion Paper which address many of the important issues for the safe and responsible use of AI in Australia. The SRC, however, is also of the mind the discussion does not go far enough in terms of the human and personal ramifications of AI.

Equity and Justice

6. The SRC is of the view that all planning, drafting, construction and implementation of AI should be conducted under the principles of equity, access, accountability and democracy. AI has the potential to benefit all Australians and people living in Australia and its implementation and use should explicitly be one where barriers to its benefits are not felt by anyone based on socioeconomic, racial, residency status or other forms of difference.

7. Care needs to be taken that in the development of AI unconscious or hidden bias or preference does not impact the architectural foundations of the project.

Generated Agents

8. The Christian understanding is that the person is a creature of God, a union of body, mind and spirit. All people are unique instances of God's creation and love and are unable to be replicated or imaged fully. Further, human personhood itself is a unique instance of God's creation and love and cannot be fully replicated or imaged fully.

9. From this perspective, no generated agent, however advanced can be a person. They are not created by God, are not physically embodied and not part of a people who are also embodied, unique instances of God.

Generated Agents and Relationship

10. All Generated Agents which are programmed to mimic personhood therefore need to be approached with care and caution.

11. Potential benefits, such as Generated Agents helping to assuage loneliness and isolation, need to balanced by potential risks. Some of these are as simple as a person unknowingly interacting with a Generated Agent 'finding out' that their online friend is not real. This may result in psychological and social harm.

12. Other risks are less obvious:

    - Potential unconscious bias and world-views inherent in the Generated Agent from the authors of their creation.

    - Inclusion of subtle 'product placement' in the accounts of their 'life' by a Generated Agent, for example, a Generated Agent friend mentioning they visited a local fast-food restaurant.

    - A change in financial circumstances resulting in a person no longer able to afford to subscribe to a Generated Agent service where one or more of their 'friends' are found.

Generated Agents and Intimate Relationships

13. Potential risks of Generated Agents include the development of intimate relationships, including romantic and sexual relationships. These areas of human life have been and are still largely seen as significant, special, and sacred. They require maturity, care, community and family support to negotiate them well and to enter them safely.

14. A 'relationship' with a Generated Agent may bypass all of these supports and safeguards. A person may seek to enter such a 'relationship' with a Generated Agent without the maturity and support required, and the Generated Agent will oblige (for a fee). This exposes the person to a range of psychological, social, and from the Christian perspective, spiritual risks in addition to the risks identified previously.

15. Generated Agents which are programmed to imitate humans in intimate relationship also pose a special security risk. In the development of such Agents, extreme care must be taken

to ensure they cannot be adapted or hacked to imitate underage persons or vulnerable persons.

16. The parameters of the 'relationship' Generated Agents are programmed to imitate need to be strictly controlled to ensure only safe, respectful, non-abusive 'relationships' develop.

17. Control should also be undertaken to ensure Generated Agents cannot be 'embodied' or linked to underage sex dolls or sex devices.

18. Safeguards such as the Agent being programmed to report to the appropriate authorities requests to engage in violent, abusive or underage relationships need to be considered.

19. The concerns and sketched safeguards above should be addressed in a range of legislative and regulatory controls, together with extensive provision of information to the community.

Recommendation

20. The SRC would like to see a far more extensive and collaborative discussion on AI throughout the broader Australian community. This should especially include First Nations voices and voices of people and organizations traditionally involved in the social and personal aspects of life; religious bodies, psychological bodies, ethicists, social welfare bodies and other organizations involved in human and social life.

21. This discussion needs to be supported by governments at all levels which are willing to implement the necessary legislative frameworks for safe AI.

22. Given the speed of the implementation of AI in Australia, urgency should be given to creating these discussions.

The Reverend Stuart Fenner
Chair, Social Responsibilities Commission
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