Discussions about AI abound. But critics have begun to recognize that these debates have focused mostly on technical issues. That is, there are certain problems that need to be addressed and have technical solutions. Debate rages, accordingly, about how to resolve these issues and move the applications of AI forward. Perhaps Terry Winograd (1996) was correct when he lamented some time ago that interest in philosophy, what he calls high theory, has dissipated.

The application of AI, nonetheless, has pushed the discussion beyond technical devices and their possible uses. For example, critics have begun to recognize that AI can be quite alienating (Dreyfus 1992; Ritzer 1993). Workers at Amazon have provided an interesting case study. While blaming AI, they claim to be overworked and do not stayed employed for long. They complain regularly about manipulation, stress, job insecurity, and so on. Clearly, AI is not viewed to be their friend (Livingstone 2018; Vicent 2019).

On the other hand, AI can be quite dangerous. Take driverless cars! In this application, through the use of AI cars can learn how to navigate streets, other cars, pedestrians, and occasionally unanticipated obstacles. Any failure can result in a catastrophe, even death. Questions about the ability of AI to master truly complex activities—those with fluid or shifting frames—have come to the forefront (Goodfellow, Bengio, and Courville 2016).

And what about ethical issues? The focus of developing algorithms, for example, is not necessarily on job loss or intrusions into privacy. These issues seems to make context difficult to ignore. Persons tend to become especially nervous when their jobs or privacy are threatened. Although alienation and learning involve context, the ability to survive and the quality of life seem to go to the heart of the matter.

The time appears to be ripe, accordingly, to raise the issue of context in the development of advanced technology. Shoshana Zuboff (2019) strives to initiate this sort of discussion with her recent foray into the impact of late capitalism on AI. In this regard, Kate Crawford (2021) strives to move beyond the “nowhere spaces” where she contends most discussion of AI take place. She believes, for example, that AI is enmeshed in the world’s ecology. While these entreaties are interesting and relevant, the context provided by Twentieth Century philosophy is missing. Indeed, the pragmatic framework that is currently the focus of attention of these efforts provides some interesting insights into whether AI can learn or deal with knotty social issues

The emphasis of this manuscript, however, is the anti-Cartesian maneuver that characterizes much of contemporary theory. This change has enormous impact on the potential of AI. After all, Cartesianism is at the core of digitalization and modern data processing. Accordingly, the importance of this change in philosophical orientation for understanding the mind, facts, learning, and communication is a vital consideration. Basic to this reassessment is that the limits of AI become obvious in the absence of Cartesianism.

Throughout the Western intellectual tradition, true knowledge has been viewed to be timeless (Grayling 2019). That is, this information is assumed to be divorced from contexts and other human contingencies. If immersed in these situations, knowledge can never surpass opinion and only supply anecdotal evidence. Therefore, most philosophers sought foundations that are universal to establish firm epistemological and moral principles. Martin Heidegger (1969) refers to this trend as the onto-theological tradition.

In many ways, Cartesianism epitomizes this tendency. In fact, the aim of Cartesians is to advance clear and distinct knowledge, severed from opinion and other sources of human error (Bordo 1987). In this regard, these thinkers are not necessarily unique, although their strategy is novel. Rather than speculate about ethereal metaphysical principles, such as Ideas, gods, or cosmic unity, Cartesians make a straightforward proposal known as dualism.