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Humanities in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Ethical Challenges

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Abstract:
The present research paper tries to explore the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the humanities with the special emphasis on ethical challenges in the use of AI. It is machine-based learning which has made a significant development in the world of technology. The research paper tries to define Artificial Intelligence (AI). The paper discusses appropriate contexts for using AI in the humanities, stressing its role as a helping tool rather than a substitute for human interpretation and creativity. Humanities is a broad term that talks about understanding, interpreting, and expressing the experiences, values, ideas, and creative achievements of human beings. The humanities emphasize critical thinking, interpretation, ethical reflection, historical awareness, and the imaginative expression making use of Artificial Intelligence. In academic context, humanities are disciplines which study human life and culture through analytical, critical, and speculative methods, which has a primary concern for meaning, values, language, and creativity. It gives the fundamental guidelines for effective prompt design to ensure meaningful and responsible human-AI interaction. The research paper addresses major ethical concerns and issues in the age of AI.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence (AI), humanities, Artificial Intelligence (AI), humanities, analytical, critical, ethical, context, interpretation, creativity, prompt design etc.*

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a rapidly growing advanced technology in the 21st century which has profoundly shaped and reshaped the ways of contemporary modes of knowledge production, communication and interpretation in Humanities. The unique development of artificial intelligence (hereinafter AI) has brought in the era of innovative technology. Humans have realized that the influence of AI expanded their knowledge beyond technological advancement. The astonishing intelligence of AI has made humans challenge their knowledge boundaries. It is performed as a major source of information in the world. The people can ask for any information based on their needs in any field. AI is capable of processing and analyzing large amounts of data with understanding of the human condition through literature, language and linguistics, history, philosophy, religion and culture, art, music, aesthetics, classical studies, ethics and moral values. AI reveals automation, computation and algorithm reasoning for the analysis and interpretation. It is quoted from a research paper of Ch. Sirisha Rani, "It is a creative process, as it involves the use of algorithms for natural language processing (NLP). The reasoning algorithm is capable of producing creative work in English literature through vast collections of textual data such as poetry, prose, summaries, short stories, novels, microfiction, story outlines, essays, news articles and text translations" (Rani, 120). The encounter between Artificial Intelligence and ethical challenges marks a crucial cognitive movement in contemporary education. AI has emerged as one of the most influential technologies shaping contemporary knowledge systems. Originally developed for scientific and computational purposes, AI has rapidly entered the humanities, affecting disciplines such as literature, linguistics, history,

philosophy, and cultural studies. Tools based on 'Large Language Models (LLMs) are increasingly used for textual analysis, translation, summarization, and academic writing, thereby transforming traditional scholarly practices' (Russell and Norvig 37).

Humanities are fundamentally related with interpretation, creativity, and ethical reflection. The growing dependence on AI-generated content raises serious concerns and issues regarding authorship, originality, intellectual labor, and moral responsibility. As Nussbaum states, 'humanistic education must preserve critical thinking and ethical reasoning, values that risk erosion when technological efficiency replaces reflective engagement' (Nussbaum 25). This paper examines AI in the humanities through an ethical lens, focusing on definitions, appropriate usage, prompt design, and ethical challenges.

Definitions of Artificial Intelligence (AI):

Artificial intelligence (AI) is innovative technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity and autonomy. Applications and devices are now well equipped with AI that can see and identify objects very easily. As per the prompt, AI can understand and respond to human language. It can learn from new information and experience. AI can make detailed recommendations to users and experts on their pertaining issues or search. AI can act independently, replacing the need for human intelligence or intervention. Most AI researchers, practitioners and most AI-related issues are focused on generative AI that can create original text, images, video and other relevant content to the search. It is essential to understand generative AI. Therefore, it is important to understand the technologies on which generative AI tools are built as machine learning and deep learning.

Machine learning involves creating models by training an algorithm to make predictions or decisions based on the given data. It contains a broad range of techniques that enable computers to learn from and make inferences based on data without being explicitly programmed for the specific tasks. Deep learning is a subset of machine learning which makes use of the multilayered neural networks called deep neural networks. It closely simulates the complex decision-making power of the human brain and enables us to learn the underlying structure of data and generate new, realistic, and contextually relevant content.

AI is a fully developed application that can be broadly categorized into specific (narrow) AI and General AI. Specific AI refers to systems designed to perform limited tasks such as translation, speech recognition, or text generation. All AI tools currently used in the humanities fall under this category. 'General Artificial Intelligence (GAI), by contrast, refers to a hypothetical system capable of human-like reasoning across domains, which remains unrealized' (Russell and Norvig 1020).

Large Language Models and GPT:

Large Language Models (LLMs) are trained on extensive datasets to generate human based language responses. GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) models function by predicting probable word sequences in sentences and paragraphs rather than understanding the meaning. 'While their responses appear cohesive, coherent and logically interconnected and authoritative, they lack consciousness and intentionality, raising ethical concerns in interpretive disciplines like the humanities' (Bender et al. 616).

Large Language Models (LLMs) are AI systems trained on a vast corpus of textual and multimodal data to predict and generate language. One of the most influential architectures is GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer).

- Generative: Capable of producing new content
- Pre-trained: Trained on large datasets before task-specific use
- Transformer: Uses attention mechanisms allowing fast and parallel data processing

LLMs are thoroughly used in humanities research for summarization, explanation, drafting, and analysis. However, it does not "understand" meaning in a human sense; but they generate outputs based on the statistical patterns. This limitation has serious ethical implications in interpretive disciplines.

AI Assistants and AI Agents:

AI Assistants such as Siri, Alexa, and ChatGPT provide user-directed support, whereas AI agents perform semi-autonomous tasks like content management or academic summarization. The increased delegation of intellectual labor to AI agents raises ethical concerns about human agency, responsibility, and the commodification of creativity (Postman 18). AI tools in the humanities can be categorized as AI assistants and AI agents.

- AI Assistants (e.g., Siri, Alexa, ChatGPT) respond to user queries and support tasks such as writing, translation, and information retrieval.
- AI Agents perform semi-autonomous, role-based tasks such as content administration, image management, marketing, academic summarization, or course assistance.

AI agents put ethical concerns regarding the dilution of human agency, accountability for automated decisions, transparency of algorithmic processes, data privacy, bias amplification, intellectual ownership, and potential displacement of the human expertise, particularly within knowledge-driven and humanities-based contexts.

Common AI Tools Used in the Humanities:

Here is a list of AI tools used in humanities such as:

- DeepL – translation and academic writing
- ChatGPT – general-purpose language generation
- TypingMind – AI interaction interface
- Otter.ai – transcription and note-taking
- ElevenLabs – AI voice and audio generation
- NotebookLM – document summarization
- Perplexity AI – AI-powered search and synthesis
- Vanderbilt.ai – institutional academic AI platforms

These tools help to enhance human beings efficiency and access but they must be used ethically and transparently.

Use of AI in Humanities:

AI can be ethically used in the humanities for supportive and non-authorial tasks such as summarizing the academic texts, assisting in the syllabus design of BA, B. Com, B.Sc, and other courses in higher education, brainstorming and innovative research ideas, conducting quantitative and qualitative textual analysis, preparing a graphs based on the quantitative data, preparing effective power point presentations, transcribing interviews, and refining literature searches. However, AI has certain limitations, it should not replace close reading, critical interpretation, or original scholarly argumentation on the piece of literary work. As Heidegger warns, ‘technology should remain a means, not an end that dominates human thought’ (Heidegger 5). AI does not replace man but it increases the possibility and maintains a balance.

AI can be ethically and productively used in the humanities for the following reasons and they are as follows:

- Summarizing books, articles, and documents
- Course and syllabus design
- Brainstorming research ideas, conference papers, and essays
- Quantitative textual analysis and pattern recognition
- Drafting presentation slides, both design and draft
- Drafting letters of recommendation (with human oversight)
- Drafting research and grant proposals
- Administrative and time-intensive academic tasks
- Deciphering handwritten archival materials
- Refining library catalogue and database searches

In all cases, AI should function as a supportive tool, not as a substitute for human interpretation, critical thinking, or authorship.

Guidelines for Ethical Prompt Design:

For the effective use of AI, responsible AI users depend

significantly on the prompt design. Prompts should be clear, context-specific, and role-defined. Providing examples, source materials, and step-by-step instructions improves accuracy and accountability of AI. 'Ethical prompt design ensures that AI outputs remain aligned with scholarly intent and minimizes the risk of misinformation or misuse' (Floridi et al. 692). Responsible use of AI depends significantly on how prompts are designed:

1. Clarity and Directness: Unlike the daily conversation, be direct and clear as possible, say what you need without any hesitation. Prompts should clearly state the task without any ambiguity or biasness (e.g., "Summarize the text and identify three main arguments").

2. Defining Perspective and Role from which the answer will be given means that define a role or perspective. Users should specify the viewpoint from which the response is expected (e.g., "Write from the perspective of a humanities dean").

3. Contextual Framing: Set the scene by giving a context and providing adequate background information improves the relevance and ethical accuracy. For example, 'Write a blog post about National Education Policy 2020 from the perspective of higher education in India'.

4. Use of Specific Questions: Use specific questions to indicate your answer from a specific point of view. For example, what are the common errors committed by the learners of English in Writing?

5. Use source text and other materials by uploading by word files, pdf files, or images and ask to AI analyze it and provide ways of reference these source materials in specific ways.

6. Step-by-Step Instructions to increase focus, while giving prompt users should use a step-by-step process that increases focus of the relevant information. Breaking complex tasks into stages ensures focus and accountability.

7. Multimodal Capabilities

Ethical use includes translating images, handwriting, or spreadsheets into accessible academic formats.

Prompt design is essential to get intended outcomes or resources. It becomes an ethical practice that governs the quality and responsibility of AI output. AI users should give the correct, detailed and effective prompt. What do you want? In which form? and for what purpose?

Ethical Challenges of AI in the Humanities:

1. Copyright and Intellectual Property:

Copyright is a kind of intellectual property right that protects original work of the authorship as soon as the author fixes work in a tangible form of expression. One of the most pressing ethical issues concerns copyright. AI systems are often trained on copyrighted materials without explicit consent, leading to the legal disputes over intellectual property, attribution, and financial compensation. As Samuelson rightly said, 'AI-generated outputs may also closely mimic existing works, blurring the line between inspiration and infringement' (Samuelson 45). Major concerns include:

- Unauthorized use of copyrighted materials for AI training
- Generation of content that closely mimics copyrighted texts
- Lack of attribution or compensation for original creators
- Removal or alteration of copyright management information

These issues affect intellectual property rights, financial compensation, authorial control, and legal precedents. Recent legislative efforts such as the Generative AI Copyright Disclosure Act (2024) attempt to address some of these challenges.

2. Authorship and Academic Integrity

AI-generated content challenges traditional notions of authorship and originality. In academic contexts, unacknowledged use of AI can constitute plagiarism, undermining scholarly integrity and learning outcomes. Institutions increasingly debate whether AI-assisted work should be classified as cheating or legitimate academic support. There are many scholars who often argue that AI violates authorship and academic integrity in humanities.

3. Bias and Epistemic Authority

Bias and epistemic authority raises serious ethical, social and intellectual concerns. Bias and epistemic authority is a fundamental challenge of AI, wherein biased data-driven systems increasingly shape and legitimize knowledge, raising serious ethical concerns about fairness, representation, and the delegation of truth-making power from humans to machines. AI systems may reproduce cultural, ideological, and linguistic biases embedded in their stored data. 'Treating AI outputs as authoritative risks marginalizing alternative perspectives and reinforcing dominant narratives, a concern particularly significant in humanities scholarship' (Benjamin 77).

4. Use of AI in Higher Education

The integration of AI in higher education has greatly transformed teaching-learning, evaluation, research and academic administration. AI powered tools are automated systems, learning analytics, plagiarism detectors and AI assistants have efficiency and personalization. One of the major ethical concerns is to make use of generative AI for assignments, research papers, and examinations in education. It became difficult to identify the student oriented content from AI generated. It is a great challenge to identify originality, authorship and intellectual effort of an individual. The use of AI for assignments and examinations has sparked ethical debates. Surveys indicate that a significant proportion of students use AI tools, sometimes without institutional permission, raising concerns about cheating, learning outcomes, and evaluation standards. Students may adopt AI generated content as authoritative but it kills critical thinking and interpretative skills.

5. Production of Misinformation

One of the most serious ethical challenges asked by AI is its capacity to produce and disseminate misinformation at large scale. Generative AI systems can create highly convincing text, images, audio, and videos that blur the distinction between authentic and fabricated content. This poses threats to:

- Democratic discourse
- Academic integrity
- Public trust in knowledge systems

In humanities and media studies, this challenge raises epistemological concerns about truth, authorship, and credibility. When AI-generated misinformation circulates rapidly, it undermines the role of critical interpretation and human verification.

6. Creation of Feedback Loops as AI Communicates with AI

The phenomenon of AI feedback loops occurs when AI systems increasingly train on, interact with, or reinforce outputs generated by other AI systems rather than human-originated data. This leads to:

- Degradation of informational quality
- Amplification of existing errors and biases
- Homogenization of language and ideas

From an ethical perspective, such loops threaten the diversity of human expression and cultural knowledge, a core concern of the humanities. Over time, AI-generated content may become self-referential, weakening originality and interpretative plurality.

7. Loss of Jobs and the Question of Economic Displacement

AI-driven automation has intensified concerns about job displacement, particularly in clerical, creative, and knowledge-based professions. While proponents argue that AI will create new forms of employment, the ethical challenge lies in the asymmetry between job loss and job creation.

Key concerns include:

- Displacement without adequate reskilling mechanisms
- Precarization of academic and creative labor
- Devaluation of human intellectual and emotional work

This raises ethical questions about **s**ocial responsibility, dignity of labor, and economic justice, especially relevant

to humanistic critiques of technological progress.

8. Increasing Inequality through Limited Access

AI has the potential to democratize knowledge; however, in practice, unequal access to AI technologies risks deepening existing social and global inequalities. High-quality AI tools often require:

- Financial resources
- Digital literacy
- Institutional infrastructure

As a result, privileged institutions and populations benefit disproportionately, while marginalized communities remain excluded. Ethically, this challenges the ideal of education as a public good and reinforces digital colonialism, where technological power is concentrated in a few regions and corporations.

9. Reinforcement of Biases

Emily M. Bender has argued, 'AI systems—especially large language models do not understand meaning but reproduce patterns from training data'. Consequently, they often reinforce social, cultural, and linguistic biases embedded in that data.

Ethical implications include:

- Marginalization of non-dominant languages and cultures
- Reproduction of gender, caste, and racial stereotypes
- Naturalization of biased outputs as "objective"

When such biased systems are granted epistemic authority, they risk legitimizing injustice under the appearance of technological neutrality.

10. Interconnected Ethical Implications

These ethical challenges are not isolated. Misinformation, bias, feedback loops, and inequality intersect to produce systemic ethical risks. For example:

- Biased AI generating misinformation
- Inequality shaping whose knowledge is represented
- Job loss reinforcing social exclusion

Together, they call for a human-centered, ethically governed approach to AI development and deployment.

Conclusion:

Artificial Intelligence offers significant opportunities for efficiency and access in the humanities but simultaneously presents serious ethical challenges. This paper argues that AI must remain an assistive tool governed by human-centered ethical principles. By critically engaging with AI rather than uncritically adopting it, the humanities can preserve their core values of interpretation, creativity, and moral responsibility while contributing meaningfully to ethical debates in the digital age.

Artificial Intelligence has become an influential force in the humanities, offering unprecedented efficiency, accessibility, and analytical possibilities. However, its integration also presents serious ethical challenges related to authorship, copyright, academic integrity, bias, and human agency. This paper argues that AI must be used as an assistive and ethically governed tool rather than an autonomous intellectual authority. The humanities, with their long tradition of ethical reflection and critical inquiry, are uniquely positioned to guide responsible AI use. Preserving human creativity, interpretive judgment, and moral responsibility is essential to ensuring that AI enhances rather than diminishes the core values of humanistic scholarship. The ethical challenges of AI raise beyond technical limitations to the fundamental questions about truth, labour, equity and knowledge. Addressing the ethical concerns, it requires interdisciplinary engagement, ethical regulation and the critical insights of the humanities to ensure that AI serves for human values rather than undermines them.

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