



The Daily Dish

Regulating AI

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When popes speak, people listen. So when Pope Leo XIV published his encyclical "[Magnifica Humanitas](#)," it sure stirred the pot on the issue of regulating artificial intelligence (AI). (I confess, I'm not sure he got the whole magnificent humanity thing exactly right. My view is a bit closer to my friend, who gave me a gift that reads: "Mr. Rogers did not prepare me for the people in my neighborhood." But not everyone is in the 17th and Pennsylvania neighborhood, and I digress.)

To be sure, I know nothing about AI. So what follows are uneducated rantings. But at one end of the spectrum seem to be the concerns of His Holiness and at the other the notion that the Trump Administration got rolled by the pro-Skynet crowd in [pulling back](#) on a proposed [executive order](#). In between are myriad concerns that might spawn an unmanageable regulatory thicket. What, exactly, do people want?

From the narrowly economic perspective, a lot of attention is paid to the potential for AI to replace human workers. But the road to higher productivity and modern standards of living is paved with technologies substituting for labor. It is also paved with those technologies creating new demands for labor. Yes, this might require that labor upgrade its skills, or move about in the economy. But if you want the greater standard of living, you have to pay the price of admission.

Another angle is that AI will somehow create monopolies, hoodwink customers, or otherwise tilt the scales toward economic harm. But if a firm is using AI as a tool in its business, the business - and its human owners - are liable for the consequences of its use. The standard tools of competition policy, workplace safety, consumer protection, and so forth should apply. (This raises the interesting question of whether an AI could ever be an owner; i.e., own property. Hmmm.)

But the central concern appears to be beyond economic transactions - the potential to harm

humanity. Pope Leo has the central point right: AI models are not human. They are advanced computing algorithms created by humans. It would seem wise for humans to put some ethical constraints on their actions.

Maybe we should go back to Isaac Asimov's [Three Laws of Robotics](#) for AI models:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

The problem is that these, too, are focused on the technology. Instead, just as in economic regulation, it seems that any discussion around AI ethics is really a discussion around the ethical use by humans of this new technology. Thinking about that could provide some useful structure to a currently chaotic public debate.