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Towards An Anthropocentric AI Governance:

A Brief Review Of The Vatican City Guidelines On Artificial Intelligence

Summary

Artificial Intelligence (AI), it can be said, has come to stay. Thus, humanity must be ready to embrace this technological innovation, which is revolutionizing human experiences. In the quest to leverage the potentials of AI, establishing governance frameworks becomes expedient due to the dangers that AI systems pose to humanity and the ecosystem in general. In the light of this, countries across the world are responding to the need to regulate the development and application of AI. Reviewing the Vatican City Guidelines on AI, this study finds that the present approach to AI governance is mostly underpinned by anthropocentrism. This approach, however, is found to be underwhelming considering the need to pursue a development underpinned by the notion of sustainability which does not necessarily place humanity at the epicenter but admonishes a holistic approach that gives due consideration to the environment. Against the challenge of the anthropocentric AI governance, we recommend a multi-centric approach to AI governance which also gleans from the diverse cultural and global perspectives, and ensures accountability for economic and environmental impact.

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1. Introduction

The current pace of technological advancement and the rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) highlights the pressing need for concrete ethical guidelines in AI regulation to ensure a balance between innovation and societal principles. Interestingly, the Vatican City has entered the conversation on AI governance with its own set of guidelines, taking an anthropocentric approach which focuses on human dignity, social good, and ethical responsibility. From these recommendations as well as other recent AI regulations, this discourse seeks to explore the growing trend in AI governance to find the suitability and adequacy of the popular approach taken so far.

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2. Anthropocentrism in AI Governance

Anthropocentrism is a philosophical viewpoint that centers humans in decision making processes.[1] It is widely believed by experts that AI is a neutral tool, whose nature is neither good nor bad.[2] This potential for unlimited possibilities, from world peace to total chaos brings to the forefront the question of how this tool should be handled, a question which has sparked debates, especially recognizing the potential for AI autonomy and AI personhood. Anthropocentrism in AI entails that humans should be considered the primary focus and beneficiaries of AI technology, essentially placing human interests above all in the design and deployment of AI systems. It calls for AI governance that emphasizes fairness, transparency, accountability, and above all, respect for human rights.

3. A Brief Review of the Vatican City Guidelines on AI

The Vatican City's N. DCCII - Decree of the Pontifical Commission for State of Vatican City recognizes the significant contribution of science and technology to human life, highlighting not only the potential of AI to improve human lives but also the dangers it poses. Thus, the purpose of the Guidelines is captured in Article 1 as follows:

> These guidelines recite general principles aimed at enhancing and promoting the ethical and transparent use of artificial intelligence, in an anthropocentric and trustworthy dimension, with respect for human dignity and the common good[3] (emphasis mine).

The above quotation expressly states the anthropocentric nature of the Guidelines as it is geared towards ensuring that the use of AI is to serve humanity. Consequently, any dealing in AI which derails from the anthropocentric "attitude of identifying AI as a tool solely in the service of humans"[4] should not be condoned.

In furthering a human-centric AI governance system, the Guidelines provide inter alia that "conduct of their activities in the field of experimentation, development, adoption and use of artificial intelligence systems and models"[5] must be congruent with respect for human dignity, protection and confidentiality

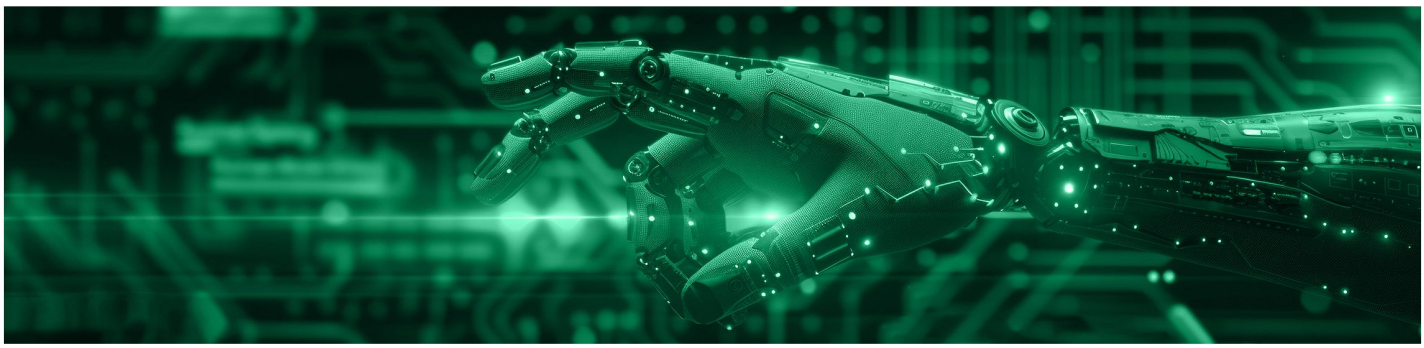
[1] Goralnik L, "Anthropocentrism" [2015] <https://www.academia.edu/13896556/Anthropocentrism?source=swp_share > accessed 4 February 2025.

[2] Francesca Maria Mancioppi, "The anthropocentric view in the bill on AI introduced by the Italian Government" (2024) Media Law 245 < https://www.medialaws.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2-24-Mancioppi.pdf > accessed 2 February 2024.

[3] N. DCCII - Decree of the Pontifical Commission for State of Vatican City bearing "Guidelines on Artificial Intelligence" 2024, art. 1.

[4] Mancioppi (n 2).

[5] Supra note 3, art. 3.



of personal data, non-discrimination of human beings, economic sustainability, and care for creation. Ultimately, the "operational, scientific, and judicial bodies, while respecting the anthropocentric dimension in the use of artificial intelligence systems and models, must ensure the vocation of artificial intelligence to serve humans, preserving respect for autonomy and decision-making power of humans."[6]

The Vatican City Guidelines on AI seem to follow a noticeable paradigm which is gaining prominence in AI regulation. For instance, the EU AI Act[7], arguably the most robust and comprehensive legislation on the field of AI currently, echoes that its purpose is to promote the uptake of human centric and trustworthy artificial intelligence.[8] The Act uses a risk based approach to assess AI systems. It is interesting to note that the risk based approach is based on assessing the level to which a human right violation may occur. Similarly, the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights: Making Automated Systems Work for the American People (framework published by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy in October 2022)[9] is based on five principles (such as safe and effective systems, data privacy, and algorithmic discrimination protection)[10] geared towards the use of AI for improvement of the American life and the development of its community. Another example in this regard is the Texas AI bill, introduced as HB 1709 seeking to rein in harms from AI but has been described as "one of the most aggressive AI regulatory efforts yet seen in the United States, rivaling even California and Europe in its scope".[11] In the same vein, the stance taken by the United States Copyright Office in its recently published report, "Copyright and Artificial Intelligence: Copyrightability" reechoes this human-centric approach to AI. While the Vatican Guidelines on AI vests copyright ownership of AI-generated works within the territory of the State of Vatican City in the Governorate of the State, the US Copyright Office's report supports the copyrightability of AI-generated materials only when there is sufficient human control

[6] Ibid, art 3 (4).

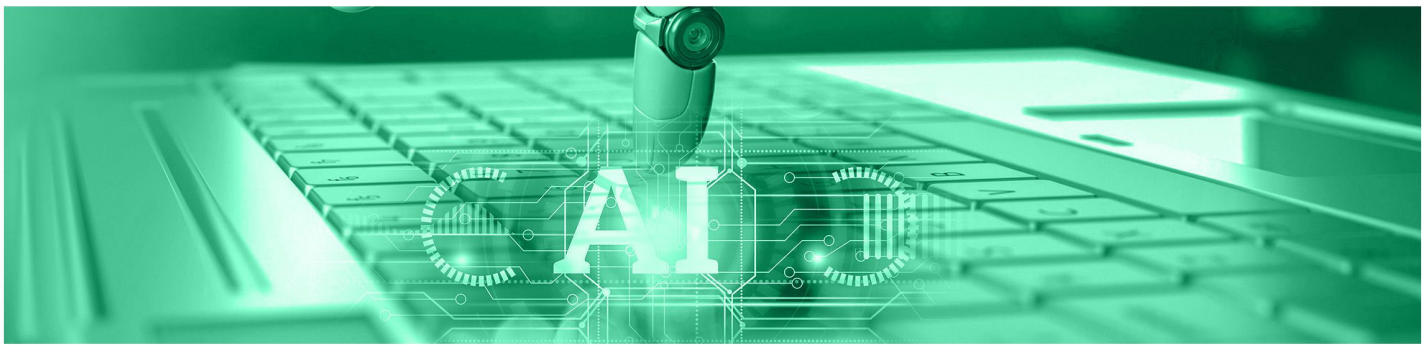
[7] < EU AI ACT 2024.pdf> accessed 04 February 2025.

[8] Ibid

[9] <Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights> accessed 03 February 2025.

[10] Ibid.

[11] James Broughel "Texas' Left Turn On AI Regulation" (Forbes, 27 January 2025) < https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamesbroughel/2025/01/26/texass-left-turn-on-ai-regulation/ > accessed 3 February 2025; Pymnts, "AI Regulations: Texas' Sweeping AI Bill and the Vatican's Policy" (29 January 2025 < https://www.pymnts.com/artificial-intelligence-2/2025/ai-regulations-texas-sweeping-ai-bill-and-the-vaticans-policy/ > accessed 1 February 2024.



over the expressive elements.[12] These positions buttress the prioritization of humanity in the development and use of AI.

4. Is Anthropocentrism the Right Approach?

Clearly, the Vatican City Guidelines on AI puts man at the center, illustrating AI as a human servant or tool. However, the plausibility of this approach has raised doubts among scholars. Some have argued for a more sustainable AI governance which needs to be underpinned by the tripods of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. Meanwhile, anthropocentrism often prioritizes economic and social sustainability in dereliction of environmental sustainability. This focus on "humanity first" has led to the argument against speciesism[13] and what may be considered a deference to Carl Sagan's reflection on the "pale blue dot" which serves as a reminder to us of "our cosmic insignificance, instilling a sense of humility before the universe's vastness".[14] Criticizing the anthropocentric approach to AI governance, Mancioppi observes that:

Putting man at the center has involved setting aside the planet… In fact, man has yet to understand that the planet is alive… which is why ecosystems have been compromised by our selfish logics of individual self-interest. The planet is based on balances that human beings have upset through extreme and excessive consumption of resources. Therefore, an absolutely anthropocentric view of artificial intelligence could well produce negative effects.[15]

This foregoing critique of the anthropocentric approach to AI governance brings to the fore several questions such as how sustainable is anthropocentrism in AI governance? Should other approaches be considered? Which one? An ecocentric, biocentric,[16] or a combination with anthropocentrism?

[12] United States Copyright Office, Copyright and Artificial Intelligence Part 2: Copyrightability (17 January 2025) < https://www.copyright.gov/ai/Copyright-and-Artificial-Intelligence-Part-2-Copyrightability-Report.pdf > accessed 1 February 2025.

[13] Leonie N. Bossert and Thilo Hagendorff, "The ethics of sustainable AI: Why animals (should) matter for a sustainable use of AI" (Wiley Online Library, 2023) < https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/sd.2596 >

[14] Marco Neves, "Unlock AI: Shape the Future - The Arrogance of Anthropocentrism: A (brief) Reflection on Evolution, Intelligence, and the Future of Humanity" (LinkedIn, 24 December 2024) < https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/unlock-aishape-future-arrogance-anthropocentrism-brief-marco-neves-alvbf/ > accessed 2 February 2024.

[15] Mancioppi (n 2)

[16] Marcin Korecki, "Biospheric AI" (1 February 2024) < https://arxiv.org/pdf/2401.17805 > accessed 4 February 2024.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Adoption of a Multi-Centric Approach:

AI governance should balance human-centered values with environmental and ecological concerns. This approach would combine anthropocentrism, with ecocentrism, which considers the impact of AI on ecosystems and the planet's sustainability. For example, AI technologies should not only focus on human welfare but also ensure minimal environmental harm and reducing energy consumption. Considering the tripods of sustainable development, a multi-centric approach will ensure that guardrails are put in place to ensure the governance of AI is geared towards sustainability which encompasses environmental, social and economic element.

5.2. Incorporate Guidelines from Different Cultural and Global Perspectives:

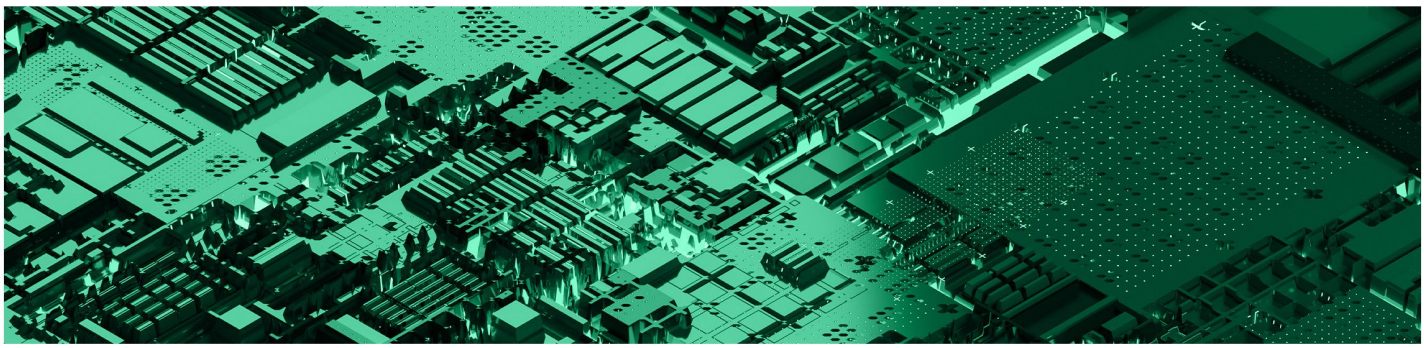
AI governance should take into consideration different cultural viewpoints. The Vatican City AI Guidelines for example emphasize the importance of human dignity and the common good, but a balanced system should also draw from other global ethical principles to ensure that AI systems reflect a more globally balanced approach to human and non-human concerns. This will ensure the development of and deployment of sustainable AI systems which are inclusive.

5.3. Ensure Accountability for Both Economic and Environmental Impact:

While many current AI governance frameworks, like the Vatican's, focus on economic sustainability, AI systems must also be held accountable for their long-term environmental impact. Mechanisms should be implemented to keep Artificial Intelligence technologies accountable not only for their economic benefits but also for their ecological impact. This can be achieved by collaborative efforts between governments, private tech companies, and civil society. By sharing responsibility, stakeholders can develop standards that prioritize both human welfare and environmental sustainability.

6. Conclusion

As AI increasingly becomes a ubiquitous part of our daily interactions, humans will be at the receiving end of any undesirable traits or adverse impacts. This has been recognized by key actors and it has developed into a trend where the focal point of emerging AI governance principles is on using AI as a tool that protects and enhances the human



existence first. The Vatican City AI guidelines is one amongst established frameworks that adopt this anthropocentric view in its provisions. The EU AI Act, the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights, the Texas AI Bill are all examples of frameworks that share this philosophy as well. However, there are still debates on whether this approach is the most effective strategy towards the regulation of AI. Balanced discussions are necessary to ensure that AI is successfully integrated in ways that maintain the scales of innovation and exploitation.