

Algorithmic Duty of Care

Book Review

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Hello and welcome to another episode of “In Depth” with Academia. It's your host here Richard Price CEO of Academia. I'm super excited because today we're diving into something at the intersection of law, ethics and technology. Now I'll remind you folks, as I always do, that I'm here to present the work neutrally, no endorsements for me - just bringing you fascinating insights to ponder so today we're going to explore an intriguing book titled *Algorithmic Duty of Care* by the remarkable authors Cindy Mason and Curt Hall. Their work raises questions about algorithms and their impact on our lives: Is there a gap in how these algorithms, which are decision-makers in their own right, are serving society and individuals? That's the core question the book addresses.

You see it is significant because algorithms aren't just lines of code. They're like gatekeepers to opportunity, justice, health and pretty much everything. An ancient ideal - the ethic of Love thy Neighbour - it's something that's found in religions and cultures across the world right? Yet while this concept drives human interactions and laws, it hasn't quite made its way into the algorithms that, well, are increasingly making decisions for us. The book argues that embedding this notion, this duty of care, into algorithms, is essential, particularly as these systems hold more power over our daily lives. I mean think about it. That's a mind blowing paradigm shift that Mason and Hall are advocating for.

Let's breakdown how they approach this. First, they delve into the historical and cultural roots of the duty of care connecting the dots between the Magna Carta and our modern digital kingdoms. It's almost poetic how they link historical documents with futuristic tech. The authors explain that, just like doctors and lawyers uphold a duty of care toward patients and clients, this should be true for those developing algorithms, especially as these systems replace human roles in sectors like education judiciary and healthcare. I think the idea here is that we need to hold algorithms, or those who design them, accountable.

Moving along, the book discusses a concept called “algorithmification of the world.” That's a mouthful. But it's pivotal to understanding the urgency here. It's like decisions once made by teachers judges and doctors are now partly or entirely made by algorithms. You might think with human oversight, what could go wrong? But the reality is court cases are unfolding, trying to untangle algorithmic mishaps and lapses in oversight. And these cases take, well, sometimes years, even decades.

It's like, should we trust these systems *without* embedding ethics we're familiar with? Throughout Mason and Halls' work, there's an emphasis on the ongoing global transformation.

From Brussels to Japan new legal frameworks are emerging to govern these technologies. Pretty fascinating stuff. Right? This book essentially is a guide, showing us what the global landscape is shaping up to be, and it reminds us that though change is incremental, it is indeed happening. They mention how laws are evolving, like the AI Bill of Rights, to make sure that the future is balanced and just. There's a whole section exploring present actions across the globe. The authors highlight how various countries are implementing policies to ensure that technology aligns more closely with ethical principles. What strikes me is the notion of smart courts and intelligent agents. I mean the idea that technology could almost autonomously create new laws is just wild. Like if you had told someone a century ago that machines would be capable of not just computing, but shaping policy, who would believe that!??

Right. I kinda got off track just thinking about how sci-fi our reality has become. Anyway back to work. Mason and Hall provide not just a critique but a call for actionable steps. They argue that we as a society need to be active participants in demanding that ethics and compassion be infused in the algorithms that touch our lives.

So what does all this mean for, you know, every day folks like you and me? The book serves as a catalyst for thought. It invites readers to reflect on the power dynamics at play when algorithms go unchecked. Importantly, it nudges policymakers, tech developers and, well, *every one of us*, to consider a future where technology serves humanity and not the other way around. It's thought-provoking to say the least. As I wrap things up, remember academic research is here to offer insights to explore, not absolute truth. Mason and Halls' work isn't just about algorithms. It's about embedding Ancient ethical wisdom into the very fabric of our digital world. That's profound. It asks us to not just consume technology but to mold it to reflect the best of our shared values.

-Richard Price, CEO, Academia