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Moral Dilemmas between Reality and Virtual in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

With the continuous innovation of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, 5G, and the progress of computer hardware equipment and network infrastructure, there are more and more moral dilemmas between virtual and the reality perceived by human beings. Taking the classical cave metaphor as an ideological resource, the information dissemination space created by big data can be regarded as a new data cave. The data cave shaped by technological rationality brings some new problems. It breaks the information dominance in the traditional era through technological empowerment, but it is accompanied by the risk of over-concentration of new data power; It not only enlightens the free personality of the audience but also makes the individual fall into a new data control network. Therefore, living in the data cave, it is very necessary to reflect on the over digitization trend of self and society. This paper attempts to sort out the relevance and differences between the virtual world and the real society in the increasingly complex technological ecology, and also try to find the basis and logical starting point to understand the moral dilemmas between them.

Keywords: Moral Dilemma, Digital Ethics, Cave Metaphor, Artificial Intelligence.

1. INTRODUCTION

On August 27, 2021, China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the 48th statistical report on China's Internet development in Beijing. According to the report, by June 2021, the number of Internet users in China had reached 1.011 billion, an increase of 21.75 million over 2020, and the Internet penetration rate had reached 71.6% [1]. One billion users have access to the Internet, forming the world's largest and dynamic digital society.

By June 2021, the proportion of Internet users using mobile phones to surf the Internet in China has reached 99.6%, the proportion of using TV to surf the Internet was 25.6%, the proportion of using desktop computers, notebook computers, and tablet computers to surf the Internet was 34.6%, 30.8%, and 24.9%, respectively [1].

The audience's experience in the digital age, just like the "cave metaphor" proposed by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato in his book the Republic, reflects people's unique experience perception in the era of digital media, "Most of the prisoners in the digital age are educated or even highly educated, but they still like to watch images rather than understand the real world, and even confuse images with reality [2]".

In some digital labor platforms, digital methods implicitly control the labor of workers, and algorithms, big data, and other new technologies may also enhance the monitoring of people, which means 'human digital alienation'. However, reflecting on the "prisoner" risk of the digital society does not mean rejecting digital development. Only by strengthening the technical rationality and digital ethics training of new technology developers and improving the literacy of digital users can we better meet the challenges of the digital society.

1.1. Definition Instructions — 'Cave Metaphor'

The seventh volume of the Republic begins with the story of "cave metaphor": prisoners are tied in a cave by ropes. They can't walk or look back. The only thing they can see is the shadow cast by the fire on the front wall. They choose to believe that the shadow they see is real, even the echo of their voices they thought was from the shadow. When some prisoners broke free from the rope and walked out of the cave, they knew that the shadow they had always believed was an illusion. Of course, this process will not be smooth. "When he comes to the sun, he will feel that Venus is bouncing around in front of him so that he can't see anything that is now called real."

Slowly, he adapted to the outside world and can even look directly at the real sun. When he adapted to the outside world, he did not walk away, but returned to the cave, told other prisoners that the outside world was the real world, and encouraged them to go out of the cave [3].

In this metaphorical story, "cave" is everything we see in front of us, "outside the cave" is the unknown world waiting for us to explore and discover. Like prisoners, we are bound by reality in the cave, and some people choose to be their own "frogs at the bottom of the well", just like the prisoner who pursues freedom, some people bravely go out of the cave, constantly explore the unknown, and finally reach the top of the highest sun - the concept of "goodness" [4]. This arduous process can be regarded as our process from the traditional field to the intelligent era. Each of us continues to improve our soul from ignorance to the known and then to the unknown, and people finally reach the height of goodness. When we get the height up to a new standard, it means we dare to raise our soul, but we should also maintain the original intention of falling our soul, return to the cave and create more brave people [5].

1.2. Research Status

Despite the rapid development of science and technology in the digital age, the number of relevant research is difficult to keep pace with its development. For example, the number of 5G mobile phone users in China has increased by 170 million in the six months from December 2020 to June 2021, but there are only a few hundred pieces of research literature on 5G technical information [1].

Some scholars have discussed more the impact of modernization and technological development on society and people in a digital age. However, this research on digital ethics and cognitive psychology in network life is far from enough which is not deep and wide enough. It is more limited in the problems people had already concerned about such as teenagers' addiction to online games which had certain solutions to deal with. It is difficult to solve the moral dilemma behind them because of lacking relative knowledge.

1.3. Purpose of this Study

Generally speaking, people believe that although relevant research has made some achievements, there are still some deficiencies and shortcomings in the following two aspects, and there is still research space to be further explored. First, the theoretical source can be more open, not only taking ethics or psychology respectively as the theoretical source but also combining different subjects and fields. Second, the research perspective can be further expanded. We should not only clarify the concepts of network environment and technology but

also explore the concept of cyberspace and virtual reality, such as the popular concept "metaverse".

This paper attempts to sort out the relevance and differences between the virtual world and the real society in the increasingly complex technological ecology and find the basis and logical starting point to understand the moral dilemma between them.

2. MORAL DILEMMAS IN DIFFERENT ASPECTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

2.1. Social Robots

Technology has changed people's way of life and communication. With the development of science and technology, social networks are showing a trend of rapid development. Various social networks such as Facebook, QQ, and WeChat have become indispensable communication tools. Because the network social communication is not restricted by time and region, it is more extensive and convenient than traditional social communication. The emergence of network media has fundamentally changed the way of interpersonal communication.

As social robots gradually appear in the daily life and media communication environment in the fields of family, medical treatment, education, and so on, their relationship with people becomes closer and closer. For a long time in the past, humans tended to interact with robots, show sympathy and other emotional reactions to robots, and even give them moral status. Empathy plays an important role in the process of establishing a new intimate relationship between man and machine. Empathy, put forward by Rogers, the founder of humanism, refers to the ability to experience the inner world of others [6]. Firstly, the consultant goes deep into the other's heart to experience his emotion and thinking with the help of the words and deeds of the caller. Secondly, the consultant grasps the relationship between the caller's experience and his experience and personality with the help of knowledge and experience, to better understand the essence of the problem.

Since the 1990s, psychology and other fields have tried to systematically study the interaction between humans and robots [7]. The research shows that social robot interaction has a significant positive impact on the mental health, cognitive ability, and emotional response of the elderly. For example, Japan regards the development of robots as an important part of meeting the challenge of an aging society and the solution to the labor shortage. It focuses on the research and development of family service robots such as nursing patients, housekeeping, accompanying the elderly, and caring for the disabled. The discussion on the new intimate relationship between people and robots has also begun to appear. People usually think that the social

interaction with robots is based on "anthropomorphism", which means, the imaginary projection of human social ability. However, this view is controversial. The discussion of the "man-machine empathy" phenomenon not only needs to consider many aspects. such as spiritual philosophy or phenomenology, neuroscience, simulation theory, and perception technology at the epistemological level, but also involves a series of ethical problems. People need to think about those questions: Is the human empathy system suitable for robot empathy? Do robots have brains and emotions? If they have, how do we perceive and touch their state and experience? What is the moral hazard of introducing emotionally functional robots into our social environment? Sociality and consciousness can be regarded as the necessary conditions for the achievement of empathy. The highly anthropomorphic appearance of the machine and the deep interaction with humans make the social robot have social attributes, but its simulated "consciousness" and calculated "emotion" become the biggest obstacle for people to understand "man-machine empathy" [8].

2.2. AR&VR Games

Since its birth in the 20th century, AR / VR technology has been pushed to the forefront of discussion many times. With the development of computer graphics technology and the popularity of home electronic entertainment devices, AR / VR technology entered an "expansion period" after 2014, starting from the acquisition of Oculus, a VR helmet company on Facebook. As Oculus mainly develops game helmets, a large amount of money poured into game-related industries, and gradually withdrew after being unable to obtain revenue quickly, turning to hardware or commercial software development.

Nowadays, psychologists and computer scientists from University College London (UCL), the University of Barcelona in Spain, and the University of Derby in Britain have proposed a new psychotherapy method that can improve self-compassion, which is based on virtual reality technology. Other researchers used VR games to train the balance ability of Down's children and got good training results. A large number of studies show that the VR technology has great application potential in the field of mental health [9].

The VR educational game is based on the teaching concept of "teaching in fun", takes the education and teaching objectives as the design concept. It also takes VR, AR, and other technologies as the support to show the boring learning content in the form of interactive games, so that the learning process is both educational and entertaining, aiming to achieve the purpose of serving learning together with body, mind, and cognition. Then it can gradually improve students' learning efficiency. Embodied cognition theory advocates the liberation and return of the body in

learning and attaches importance to learners' experiential learning [10]. At present, it has been widely used in the fields of artificial intelligence, psychology, morality, and education. The proposal of specific cognition provides strong theoretical support for the further development of the VR educational game field. The design of educational games should not only consider how to embed educational cognitive content into certain game backgrounds, game environments, game playing methods, and game rules but also consider how to meet the laws of students' body movement system and physiological structure. At present, some educational systems of virtual reality technology have been applied to the specific teaching process at home and abroad. If the two are combined and pay attention to the role of the body, the teaching effect of VR educational games will be greatly optimized.

Virtual reality games inherit the characteristics of immersion, interaction, and imagination of virtual reality technology and the five characteristics of traditional games, such as entertainment, interaction, playability, fairness, and player satisfaction, which have a stronger and direct impact on the formation of teenagers' values [11]. Starting from the overall characteristics of virtual reality games, this paper analyzes their role in the formation of teenagers' values and discusses the utilization value and mode of these roles. During VR games, players interact with each other through a virtual environment, modeling settings, computers, and other devices. At present, there are no clear legal provisions on the ethical and moral problems. It can even be predicted that with the popularity and popularization of VR games, more similar situations will occur and need to be solved urgently. Besides, the security of AR and VR games also faces social challenges. Taking the AR game Pokemon to go as an example, it has caused many traffic accidents in Japan since 2016.

3. SOLUTIONS OF MORAL DILEMMAS FOR PRISONERS' IN THE DIGITAL AGE

3.1. The Reason Why People are Called 'Prisoners' in the Digital Age

Plato's theory intended to distinguish the difference between the educated and the uneducated. The prisoners in the cave are uneducated people. They cannot understand the world and only live in the cave. Plato calls the cave the visible world, the world of images; the world outside the cave represents the knowable world, the rational world. Plato told this story to tell us that images are not equal to reality, but images are very confusing and will confuse people with the real.

If Plato's prisoners are fictional and have been more than 2000 years ago, there are still such prisoners in today's electronic media era, which means, the addicts of current digital images and products. Plato's fable has

become a reality. Although image art has existed since ancient times, the rise of large-scale image culture only appeared after the 20th century. In Plato's era, image culture and even painting art were not developed enough, and people's viewing of images was not very common. Plato's reminder was just to let people understand the world with reason. In today's image age, especially since the 1960s, with the rise of TV culture and the emergence of the Internet, people's viewing of images has become more and more intense, even to the point of addiction. The world has entered the so-called image age. Heidegger even claims that the whole world has been grasped as an image, and people can watch the image of the world without leaving home. Today's media organizations broadcast all kinds of pictures all day, and the media produces all kinds of images for the audience. People's understanding of the world has evolved into the viewing of images, and images have become the only reality in people's eyes. Maybe in the future, some products in artificial intelligence will replace the position of imagines under the rapid development of technology. The data cave in the sense of communication refers to that the communicators take data as the link between people and the world, and evolve it into the basic communication medium in people's daily life practice. Then, self and society are recorded in data, to create a digital social situation and construct a communication ecosystem relying on communication data at the same time.

3.2. Solutions of Moral Dilemmas

3.2.1. Distinguish the boundary between human and artificial intelligence

The external manifestation of this consequence is that big data has broken the "public" in the traditional era and activated the "individual" of information production in the new era. On the one hand, it liberates people from the traditional passive experience in the environment of social interaction. Although people can understand and experience the benefits brought by the huge and broad vision, the knowledge and experience we contact are influenced by different institutions, politics, logic media ideology is accurately mediated, and they inherently have potential and real risks.

The practice of automated things under the usage of artificial intelligence also aggravates the complexity of ethical imputation, because no practitioner can understand every technical detail of the artificial intelligence system or participate in every dialogue, and there are complex interactive relationships among stakeholders. Its purpose is to let today's people get out of the cage of image and return to the real world as soon as possible.

3.2.2. Strengthen privacy protection in virtual

Today's collection of human data involves not only the data that people actively produce or provide on the new media platform but also the data that many people passively provide. Data collection tools are also expanded to various sensors and wearable devices. Their collection of human data goes deep, and human real behavior data and physiological data become the collection objects, many of which are data that people are unwilling to disclose, even involving personal privacy [12].

Most people may choose to share information because the Internet is a symbol of openness and cooperation. While participating in online social networking, people publish personal dynamics, comment on others' dynamics, interact and contact with others on social networks. If we refuse to participate in this communication, it may lead to a "social death". The definition of the right to privacy is still vague. Internet as a public area, many things traditionally defined as privacy can be accepted to spread on the Internet.

In the future, we should have the courage to accept new things and open up our minds to develop the range of the Internet. Besides, to avoid the infringement of users' privacy on the Internet, it is necessary to further improve the relevant laws and regulations on the protection of private security.

4. CONCLUSION

Taking Plato's cave metaphor as a theoretical resource, combined with the current context, it can be found that big data in the digital age, on the one hand, shows the function of a magnifying glass to explore people's subtle inner world, on the other hand, it releases the function of a microscope to gain insight into all corners of the vast society. At any time, it is necessary to insist on the people-oriented development concept. This concept should first highlight the unique value of human beings, that is, human dignity. People have their ideas, endowments, morality, and choices. Therefore, information dissemination should demonstrate human dignity through ideas and values, and guide people to distinguish good and evil and understand right and wrong.

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