BS"D

Inaugural convening of Aurora at the Vatican

Education & Moral Innovation – Panel Presentation

Nov. 20, 2025

Rabbi Dr. Mois Navon

Let me begin by thanking Shruti Mehrotra for inviting me to take part in this most important discussion on education in the age of AI. The truth is that this discussion is not only important, it is critical. AI technologies are not merely bringing us the latest tools to "relieve the estate of man" – as Francis Bacon, father of the scientific revolution, once put it – they are challenging us in ways never before conceived. They are challenging the way we work and worship, the way we live and love; they are challenging the way we think. How are we to respond?

Interestingly, Francis Bacon, though he could never have imagined the challenges that AI would come to pose, nevertheless provided us with a key to approach them. When he urged us to develop science and technology to "relieve the estate of man" he stated, in the same breath, that such developments must have as their telos "the glory of God."[1] That is, even as we pursue technologies that make life easier, healthier, and more productive, they must be guided ethically.

And though he spoke from Christian conviction, his approach to scientific and technological innovation aligns with Jewish conviction, as we Jews conclude our daily prayers with the mission statement: *letaken olam bemalchut shadai* – to fix the world in the name of God. That Judasim and Christianity align in this approach to technology should really come as no surprise, as it is found at the very beginning of Scripture in the stories of Noah and the Tower of Babel.

Noah, as we are all familiar, was chosen to start the world over because "he found favor in the eyes of God" (Gen. 6:8). What was it about Noah that earned him such favor? The next verse tells us that he was righteous (*tzadik v'tamim*), but there is something special

[1] https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Francis_Bacon#:~:text=for%20the%20glory,I%2C%20v%2C%2011

about Noah's righteousness. The Bible tells us that he was named Noah – meaning "comfort" – because:

> "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed" (Gen. 5:29).

But what exactly did Noah do to relieve the estate of man? The commentaries (e.g., Rashi, Radak ad loc.) explain that it was in his inventing the plow. Before Noah, people spent their days digging the earth with their bare hands just to scratch out a meager subsistence! The plow changed all that. In fact, it changed everything. Science historian James Burke explains that the plow is the very trigger of modern civilization.[2] It is with this that all other technological developments followed, as people were now free to apply themselves to other pursuits. James Burke goes on to explain that if our civilization were to be destroyed, God forbid, the very first thing the survivors would need to do in order to rebuild civilization is figure out how to make a plow! To restart civilization, you need someone who knows how to make a plow. We could say, then, that God chose Noah because he was an engineer! His righteousness expressed itself in his ability to develop technology to "relieve the estate of man" (Ibn Ezra, Gen. 6:9). Tellingly, not only is God *not* mad at Noah for undoing the curse, He chooses Noah precisely because of it.

But technology in and of itself will not bring civilization to its halcyon completion – as can be learned from the story of the Tower of Babel. The story begins with two parallel declarations:

- "Come, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly …" (Gen. 11:3)
- "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4).

[2] James Burke, 'Connections Episode 1: The Trigger Effect', *BBC* (1978). https://archive.org/details/james-burke-connections_s01e01.

It is only after the second declaration that God comes down to see what humanity is up to (Gen. 11:5). The reason is that the first declaration is about developing technology – an endeavor, as seen with Noah, that God values. It is only when humanity missuses technology – in this case, for self-aggrandizement – that God is troubled. And thus, we arrive at Bacon's directive: technology must be developed to "relieve the estate of man" for "the glory of God."[3]

And this brings us to our meeting today: it is essential that we educate the world to recognize the imperative of developing and deploying technology ethically – or, in the idiom of believers, for "the glory of God." We cannot afford to allow engineers to design the future without accounting for the ethical implications of their work. Nor can we allow technology users themselves to remain unaware of the ethical implications of the tools they wield.

We have seen the veracity of this claim when chatbots have counseled users to commit suicide – an engineering failure. And we have seen the veracity of this claim when users have turned their chatbots into their personal lovers – a human misuse.

To this end, I have designed a university course in which I teach ethics to engineers. In addition, I teach it to laypeople – one lecture at a time. My course is rooted in my faith – that we are here to fix the world in the name of God (*letaken olam bemalchut shadai*). It is a course that seeks to understand the full range of ethical approaches – secular and religious. Most fundamentally, however, it is a course that is grounded in the belief that Scripture provides an objective moral framework and that tradition provides moral paradigms that can and must be applied to our modern technological dilemmas.

In conclusion, I join this panel in the hopes to both contribute from my tradition as well learn from other traditions, in order to coordinate efforts in our shared belief that technology must be developed and deployed to relieve the estate of man for the glory of God.

[3] For an elaboration on this approach, see my entry in the St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology: https://www.saet.ac.uk/Judaism/AJewishTheologicalPerspectiveonTechnologyOrthodox