Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: A.I. Philosophy
November 8, 2023

The Committee will come to order.

We are living through one of the most exciting times in human history – a moment of unprecedented technological change. Artificial intelligence becomes more advanced every day. These tools have the capacity to revolutionize medicine, expand the frontiers of scientific research, ease the burdens of physical work, and create new instruments of art and culture. A.I. has the potential to transform our world for the better.

But these technologies also bring new risks to our democracy, civil liberties, and even our human agency. As we shape and regulate A.I., we cannot be blinded by its potential for good. We must also understand how it will shape us – and prepare for the challenges these tools could bring.

Some of that work will be accomplished with innovative policy. I am proud to have convened prior hearings that explore the safety risks of A.I., federal procurement of these tools, and how to prepare our workforce to properly utilize them.

But as policymakers, we also have to explore the broader ideas surrounding this technology. We have to examine the historical, ethical, and philosophical questions that it raises. Today's hearing – and our panel of witnesses – gives us an opportunity to do just that.

This is not the first time that humans have developed staggering new innovations. Such moments in history have not just made our technologies more advanced. They affected our politics, influenced our culture, and changed the fabric of our society.

The Industrial Revolution provides is one key example that phenomenon. During that era, humans invented new tools that drastically changed our capacity to make things. The means of mass production spread around the world, and allowed us to usher in the modern manufacturing economy.

But that era brought with it new challenges. It led to concerns about monopolies worker safety, unfair wages, and child labor. It produced the weapons that were used to fight two World Wars. In short, it wasn't just about the benefits of new technology.

I'm grateful that our first witnesses – Daron Acemoglu – has studied this phenomenon. He has not only examined the history of technological change – but also the democratic institutions that are needed in response.

In the 20th century, we had trade unions to protect worker's rights and effective government regulation to keep these new industries in check. What tools do we need to meet our moment? What else should we learn from this history?

Artificial intelligence also brings unique challenges. The history of technological change has largely centered on human strength and how we can augment it through the use of new machines.

A.I. will affect physical work. But it is more directly tied to our intellectual and cultural capacities. It has already introduced new ways to ask and answer questions, synthesize information, conduct research, and make art.

Those qualities – the ability to understand ideas and create culture – are the foundation of our humanity. We must work to preserve them as they become influenced by artificial tools.

Perhaps most importantly, A.I.'s influence on those capacities is not neutral. These tools – like the humans who make them – are biased. We must define what values lie at the core of our human experience – and create technological tools that support them.

Our second witness – Shannon Vallor – will be a helpful resource in understanding these ethical questions. She studies the way that new technologies reshape our habits, practices, and moral character.

With her help, we can understand the values embedded in these technologies, and the effect they will have on our human character.

Finally, we will explore A.I. through a constitutional law framework. A.I. poses a risk to our civil liberties. New surveillance tools can be used to target vulnerable communities. Biometric systems like facial recognition can endanger a citizen's right to due process. Advanced technology brings renewed questions about our privacy and personal information. A.I. tools can also pose a grave danger to our democracy and civic institutions.

Our third witness – Margaret Hu – will help us understand these intersections. She researches the risks that A.I. poses to constitutional rights, due process, and civil liberties.

Artificial intelligence has already begun to reshape the fabric of our society. Our response cannot come through piecemeal policy alone, or isolated technological "fixes." It must include a deeper examination of our history, our democracy, and our values – and how we want this technology to shape our future.

We must look to the past and learn the lessons of previous technological revolutions. We must answer the ethical questions that A.I. poses and use these new technologies to build a world where humans can thrive. And we must protect our civil liberties and democratic institutions against the risks that these tools can pose.

This hearing provides an excellent opportunity to focus on this work. I'd like to thank our witnesses for joining us today, and I look forward to hearing your testimony.