

BOOK REVIEW
INNOVATION WITHOUT GOVERNANCE?
A CRITICAL REVIEW OF MUSTAFA SULEYMAN'S *THE COMING WAVE*

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Abstract

This review assesses Mustafa Suleyman's *The Coming Wave* (2023) based on seven categories: clarity, originality, institutional feasibility, geopolitical realism, policy relevance, inclusion and applicability. In terms of its most significant contributions, *The Coming Wave* has effectively framed AI safety as an institutional and governance challenge rather than simply being a technical problem. However, Suleyman's containment framework remains inadequately developed due to the fact that it does not provide sufficient detail regarding how institutions, geopolitics, and implementations can be put into place so that containment can withstand both domestic and inter-state competition.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; AI governance; Responsible AI; Technology policy; Ethics.

1. Introduction

In his 2023 book *The Coming Wave*, co-authored by Michael Bhaskar, Mustafa Suleyman describes the governance of AI and synthetic biology as unprecedented. Suleyman also states that the forthcoming wave of development will produce tremendous economic and social benefits at the same time that the risks associated with the potential systemic and possibly irreversible damage

from these technologies could become catastrophic. Suleyman argues that in order to avoid or mitigate the latter and enable continued innovation, new ways of containing catastrophe must be found. This review examines whether *The Coming Wave* successfully achieves this goal: the reframing of AI safety as an institutional issue as opposed to just a technical issue appears persuasive, although the proposed containment mechanism lacks sufficient detail to support a successful implementation in the face of competing interests.

2. Strengths of the Book

The main achievement of the book is to redefine AI safety issues as governance problems. Suleyman is arguing a complementary approach: even if we develop a safe, human centered system, there are still many political issues left unresolved by technical means. Therefore, it requires legislation, adjudication, and democratic debates instead of writing new codes. The claim made by the authors that the upcoming “wave” will test the effectiveness of the public institutions is consistent with Goal 16 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015; Suleyman & Bhaskar, 2023, p. 17, 194-229).

3. Critical Evaluation: Governance and Institutional Analysis

While the authors identify the correct categories of interventions to contain the negative consequences of AI (Suleyman & Bhaskar, 2023, pp. 230-283), they do not provide sufficient explanations regarding how those categories would maintain themselves in a competitive environment. While governments might support military uses of AI while supporting safety, businesses might promote ethics while hindering regulations that limit development. Moreover, they mostly avoid comparisons with existing instruments, some of which have struggled with similar challenges. UNESCO (2021) Recommendation, OECD (2019) AI Principles, NIST (2023) AI Risk Management Framework and EU (2024) AI Act all face the same challenges of verification of compliance with standards across jurisdictions and inclusion of non-adopting states in mechanisms of regulation. One of the more intriguing paradoxes presented by the authors is that they argue that institutions are the key issue to resolve in relation to the containment of negative effects of AI when they present the least amount of institutional detail.

4. The Treatment of Developing Countries

Suleyman describes the wave as being created globally and having universal impact (Suleyman & Bhaskar, 2023, pp. 16-17, 270-283), however he barely mentions how countries with limited ability would be able to participate in the institutions required for containment of negative effects of AI. Non-durable cooperation is likely when cooperation is perceived as unequal; SDG 17 assumes fairness in addition to cooperation (UN, 2015), Birhane (2020) demonstrates that externally constructed AI can replicate dependency. In my view, developing countries should be co-designers of global institutions related to AI not simply recipients of policy.

5. The Discussion of Education

In general terms education appears in the book primarily as an example of how AI can decentralize and personalize educational services: adaptive tutoring, personalized curriculum and materials, automated grading, and massive scale re-skilling (Suleyman & Bhaskar, 2023, pp. 203, 269). However, education is used as an illustration rather than as a governance area that has been explored extensively. Most research has looked at technical applications while ignoring pedagogy and ethics; true integration into educational practices require re-designed assessments and critical literacy skills relating to AI (Holmes et al., 2019); it is impossible to replace the relational core of teaching through automation (Selwyn, 2019).

6. Conclusion

While *The Coming Wave* provides a compelling frame for understanding technological acceleration as an institutional challenge as opposed to merely a technical challenge, there remain many unaddressed challenges in establishing a viable containment strategy, especially concerning those who lack representation in existing decision-making processes (i.e., citizens of developing nations and students) whose active engagement is essential to legitimize such containment efforts. As a result, scholars, policymakers and educators should view *The Coming Wave* as an excellent foundation for ongoing discussions and investigations related to issues raised in the book. While *The Coming Wave* does not represent a solution to the containment question it represents a clear articulation of the core dilemma facing the academic community working on this question.

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