Q&A with Google's former Design Philosopher, James Williams:

Evolving relationship between technology and ethics e.g because technology allows us to do something [for commercial gain] is it justified?

> No, certainly not -- technology enables us to do many things for commercial gain that cannot be ethically justified. The more new technologies that come into existence, the more potential unethical applications there are -- so I would imagine that this would create new policy/regulation needs, and therefore roles, in such areas. Right now, for example, those needs/roles might be aimed at answering questions like, a) to what degree should algorithmic transparency be expected/enforced in the context of AI development, or b) what degree of privacy risk is tolerable/intolerable in the development & use of IoT technologies.

What new jobs are being created as a result [of this relationship]?

> I'll caveat here by saying that a) I don't have a holistic view into this question, and b) the view I do have is almost entirely western-centric. That said, I've seen new researcher posts emerge on a number of these technology/ethics topics in academia, government, think tank, and civil society organizations in recent years. At the moment there seems to be a particularly strong focus on ethical questions pertaining to 'big data' (which I think is much less important than the degree of attention it has received) and automation/AI (which needs much more attention, as long as it is well-informed attention). More broadly, the ethical focus has tended to be on how technology manages people's information, whereas I believe the coming shift will be to focus on how technologies manage people's attention (cf. the work we're doing on reform of the 'attention economy' in the Time Well Spent campaign).

Who are the leaders in driving change (companies, industries, countries)?

> This is also hard to answer in any general sense. In terms of advancing the discussion on how we ought to align technology and ethics, there are players globally in both industry and academia doing good work. Regionally, I'd say Europe seems to be ahead of others in terms of giving academic & government attention to tech. ethics issues in a way that that actually informs tech implementations. In the US, there are plenty of tech companies who express the right intentions, but have neither the philosophical/ethical expertise nor the structural incentives to take it beyond a sort of tokenistic level of attention. In terms of industries, I think the medical and auto industries are more attuned to, and rigorous about, such ethical questions because there, the questions are often life-and-death ones

(and they're used to having substantial regulation as well).

Is the "time well spent" concept by Tristan Harris gaining traction in the technology industry? Is this the inevitable direction for many large tech companies to take? e.g. in pursuit of the "triple bottom line" principle, People, Planet, Profit?

> There are several levels to the 'time well spent' vision, and we started it in order to address all these levels simultaneously. One level is users -- we aim to give people the knowledge and tools to better protect their attention & align tech. use with their goals. Another level is designers -- how can we help them, given the organizational constraints they work in day-to-day, make products that are more respectful of users' time and attention, and help their lives go well? A third level is company leaders -- how can they set the right incentives in their company, choose a business model that's aligned with users' authentic needs/goals, etc. The next level is the environment in which companies operate -- so things like regulation/policy, user demand (e.g. the 'organic label' for time-well-spent technologies), and other environmental factors that can nudge companies toward more ethical products. And then a final level is the conceptual -- i.e. the language, metaphors, philosophies, ethical frameworks, etc. that we use to talk about our attention and our deeper human needs in the first place.
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> It's certainly not inevitable that industry will move toward the Time Well Spent vision, but we're heartened by a) initial signs about the ways some companies are using our ideas/principles/etc., as well as b) the history of other industries that reformed in response to ethical demand (e.g. pollution & the environmental movement). We've been very pleased by the way the campaign has been resonating with people so far, and we're really excited about what the next few years hold vis-a-vis a more intentional societal discussion about these issues of digital tech. design.

Do you see inherent conflict in the rapid development of AdTech and it's impact on User Free Will?

> I see inherent conflict between most forms of advertising and users' free will. AdTech takes this to another level of sophistication. In principle, AdTech could be an enormous help to people -- that is, if the advertising supported users' intentions, rather than merely trying to steal their attention. But as it stands now, yes, I believe that in terms of both its direct effects on people (i.e. the ads themselves) and its systemic effects (i.e. the way it incentivizes new types of attention-stealing content to be produced), digital advertising is one of the greatest threats to user autonomy that we're dealing with at the moment.