

Ethical Considerations for AI

Why do we need to consider ethics when we're talking about artificial intelligence?

Artificial Intelligence has some incredible capabilities, which are increasing all the time. We increasingly hand off a great many of our decisions to machine intelligences, often without thinking about it, or even realising that we are doing so.

For example, when we navigate across town, dozens of different algorithms and data points converge to give us answers in real-time, without us ever thinking about how they operate, or what it's all based upon.

As we hand over more aspects of our lives to increasingly complicated machines, it's very important that we retain the ability to gain a meaningful explanation of why an AI-driven system made a certain impression or prediction, where data is coming from and going to, how may it have been audited to reduce or account for potential bias, and who is responsible for the system.

What worries does the public have about artificial intelligence?

Many people have concerns about AI going rogue or trying to take over humanity. These concerns are important and worth addressing in the long term, but are unlikely to present challenges in the foreseeable future.

There is significant naivete in some members of the public with regard to what is possible, and also what is not. Many people are shocked when they learn the capabilities of AI to perform specific tasks, yet also confused and disappointed by its many limitations with more general tasks.

Do ethical AI professionals have the same or different worries than the public about artificial intelligence?

Ethical AI professionals tend to have a stronger awareness of the current state of the art in AI – the limitations of Narrow AI, as well as its great strengths in limited domains.

Ethical AI professionals also hopefully have a better grasp of the less obvious ways that AI can be used in undesirable ways. For example, it may re-perpetuate existing biases, either by accident, or by design. It can potentially be used as a tool for silent exclusion, or even targeted harassment. Meanwhile, algorithms that optimize for engagement in social media are contributing towards stronger polarization within communities.

These concerns present imminent dangers to our society and may lead to further destabilization if we fail to design and implement appropriate procedures and rules to minimise the misuse of AI.

What can the public do to manage our concerns about ethical AI?

I would recommend reading up on the latest developments in the field at websites such as TheRegister.com's Emergent Tech section, to learn more about the challenges of keeping such technologies safe and ethical.

I might then be inclined to address queries and concerns to organizations such as the Partnership for AI, an umbrella group that represents many of the world's largest tech companies.

How can leaders at organizations relying on artificial intelligence address those concerns?

It's very important that organizations who build, maintain, and deploy such systems have excellent ethical rules in place to safeguard the public, as well as themselves, from ethical and legal issues that may arise through their use of these technologies.

It's very important and ethics are built into systems from their inception, as well as during their maintenance over time. Along with this, it's crucial that organizations themselves have good rules for ethical functioning built into them, so as to ensure that the processes which should govern the implementation of AI-drive systems can be guided effectively.