Reflections on AI
Q&A with
Prof. Dr. Joanna Bryson

"I don't think we are ever going to have anonymity again."

The **TUM IEAI** had the pleasure of speaking with Professor Joanna Bryson prior to her Speaker Series session on 14 May 2020 about the topic of *Artificial Intelligence is Necessarily Irresponsible.*
We were able to ask her some brief questions about her lecture, AI ethics, the danger AI poses to data privacy, and its role in managing pandemics such as the current COVID-19 crisis.

1. Why is AI necessarily irresponsible?

It has to do with the definition of responsibility. Responsibility is the social relationship between peers. Machines are artifacts that we build. If we build something into them such that they behave responsibly then we can take that back again. There is no guarantee with a designed artifact of having the kind of relationship that you have with a person.

2. What are the biggest misconceptions about AI?

There are many misconceptions about AI. Part of the problem is that AI itself is about intelligence. People aren't sure what they mean by intelligence, and then of course they are confused as to whether a machine has it or not. A lot of what these people are usually worrying about has nothing to do with intelligence itself or how smart something is. It has to do with responsibility.

3. What is the most interesting or important question in the ethics of AI right now?

The big questions about AI ethics are the big questions of society. I would say the biggest questions of society right now are how we govern and how we coordinate given that we now have AI because it is the way by which we are going to answer the other questions.

4. Who should be in charge or involved in the development of ethical frameworks for AI?

Given that the problems of AI ethics are the problems of the society broadly, then we don't want there to be one answer. We don't want there to be a single authority. We want there to be a coordinated response between a variety of authorities, and we want to make sure that all the people have some kind of stake. Everyone should be involved but in different ways.

5. What is the role of academia, research institutions and centers when it comes to the ethics and governance of AI?

Part of it is education. But, of course, we are also research institutions. It is really interesting, I realize now, that governments think of academia in much the same way they think of journalists, in terms of people that may very well hold them to account. But academia does that from a different perspective, from the perspective of people who are working on ideas and with students and focusing on the future.

So, it is a different set of goals. All of us are bringing different perspectives and helping connect different people into the overall governance of technology.

6. Will the future of AI mean an end to privacy?

I think that is more or less our choice. The way we used to have some privacy is over. I do not think we are ever going to have anonymity again. We have to come up with legal and governance structures to defend our data. The EU is currently leading the world with the GDPR [General Data Protection Regulation].

7. We often say that AI is changing and transforming our world. To what extent is AI changing us as humans?

I don't think it is AI so much as the digital. What it is to be a human is to be an extremely social animal. Suddenly we are socializing with a really different group of people, and so that alters the way we think, our political power and our motivations. AI enables us to do things we could not do before. It is sort of making us super beings. But we are still [human] beings; we are still animals. So, there are some things that will stay the same. But there are many things that are changing.

8. What are the ethical considerations in the use of AI to manage pandemics?

This goes back to the question of privacy again. The biggest thing people are worried about is what we are willing to tolerate during the period of the pandemic, and then how do we ensure that the things that we only tolerate because of the pandemic are not kept, are not enforced and the data is flushed. We need to proactively find ways to track if people are being overregulated.

_____

Meet the speaker

Photo Credit: Wouter van Vooren, September 2019

Joanna Bryson recently joined the Hertie School in Berlin as a Professor of Ethics and Technology. Her research focuses on the impact of technology on human cooperation and AI/ICT governance. From 2002-19 she was on the Computer Science faculty at the University of Bath. She has also worked at the Department of Psychology at Harvard University, and has been affiliated with the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oxford, the School of Social Sciences at the University of Mannheim, and the Princeton Center for Information Technology Policy. During her PhD she observed the confusion generated by anthropomorphized AI, leading to her first AI ethics publication "Just Another Artifact" in 1998. In 2010, she co-authored the first national-level AI ethics policy, the UK's Principles of Robotics. She holds degrees in psychology and artificial intelligence from the University of Chicago (BA), the University of Edinburgh (MSc and MPhil), and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (PhD).