



# Reflections on AI

Q&A with  
Prof. Christoph Lütge

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*“AI is a global challenge, so is AI ethics.”*

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The **TUM IEAI** had the pleasure of talking to **Prof. Dr. Christoph Lütge**, IEAI Director and the Chair of Business Ethics at Technical University of Munich, about AI ethics, the importance of cross-disciplinary research and the activities and plans of the IEAI.

## 1. Why do AI ethics matter?

AI ethics matter not only because it is the right thing to do, so from an ethical standpoint, but also from a social and economic point of view. AI solutions and systems will not work without ethical standards. From the ethical, as well as from the economic and societal side, AI ethics matter.

## 2. What is the biggest misconception about AI?

I think it is wrong to see AI as a tool for all purposes with which you can solve any problem. I believe AI can be valuable in a lot of problems and societal aspects, but at least for a long time to come, AI will be valuable mostly as something that supports human beings in performing certain tasks.

## 3. What is the most important question in AI ethics right now?

This is difficult to say because what is important may depend on where you live. For example, in one region of the world, other questions may be more pressing than in another region. For example, data

privacy problems are more pressing for some rather than others. But, in general, I believe that accountability is a very important aspect. For the moment, it maybe also be the most important in order to move AI forward. If companies have a clear idea about what accountability for AI systems and their results means, then they will be more eager to implement them (AI systems).

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## 4. Who should be in charge or involved in developing ethical frameworks and standards for Artificial Intelligence?

Well, of course a lot of people should be involved. The standard answer is that you need to ask the technical people developing AI, you need to have politics and NGOs involved. I agree with that. However, I think that involving basically everyone is currently a mistake. In Germany, we have the saying “Zu viele Köche verderben den Brei”: too many cooks spoil the broth. Sometimes I feel that is already the case. What I believe is more important now is to involve interdisciplinary teams in the development of AI systems. Interdisciplinary in this context means involving people with technical as well as non-technical skills from ethics, from social sciences and others.

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

I believe ethics and governance is key to implementing AI, especially for companies, but also government institutions. But, in contrast to other things that companies are doing, you cannot produce the ethics purely in-house. This is a misconception that major companies have begun to recognize. External actors need to be involved in the development of AI ethics standards, but also in the AI ethics that flow into the development of concrete systems. So, I think that there is an important role that academia, research institutions as well as other external actors can play here.

## 6. Why is interdisciplinary approach so important when it comes to AI ethics?

Some years ago, AI was thought to be just a branch of computer science. I think that is a fundamental misconception that has been recognized at least by some by now. AI is quite different from other technologies and technological waves that we have seen. Why? I would briefly say the black box character of AI is something that is often perceived as threat for example. There are other aspects such as: you do not necessarily need very technical skills to develop AI, which is quite contrast to other technologies. A third aspect is that in many challenges that companies and others face in implementing AI, the important problems are not so much technical, but rather, in a broad sense, ethical or governance ones. Should we program the system this way rather than that way? We could do both. The technical problems and

the ethical problems are really intertwined, and they cannot be separated anymore. That is why you need to have interdisciplinary teams.

## 7. The IEAI supports and participates in several networks related to AI ethics, such as the Global AI Ethics Consortium (GAIEC) and the Responsible AI Network Africa (RAIN Africa)? What is the role of these networks? What can they offer?

First of all, it is important to see that AI is a global challenge, so is AI ethics. It does not make much sense to work just as a local or even national or regional research institute on these matters. That is why we formed the Global AI Ethics Consortium (GAIEC). It started as a network of institutions dealing with responsible AI in the fight against the COVID-19. However, it will be expanded to include other questions of AI in health, but also beyond that. We are looking for new partners, especially in those regions of the world which may still be underrepresented. The other research Network, RAIN Africa, is one of these initiatives. It is important to reach out to those institutions and research centers that are working in parts of the world, which may not be the first ones on your radar when it comes to AI. But, when you look more closely, it is very interesting to see that there is a lot of work already being done and that people are also looking for guidance when it comes to AI ethics. So, what we like to offer for the RAIN Africa is a platform of collaboration especially for African Universities and their partners.

**8. We often say that AI is changing or transforming the world. To what extent is AI changing us as humans?**

Well I think it would be foolish to say that we, as humans, will go unchanged by the technology. We have learned to adapt to other technological waves as well. So certainly, people tend to speak differently, for example, when they have Alexa or other digital assistants in their home as well as the use of navigation tools with AI built in that change, for example, driving behavior. It is hard to say there is one way in which AI is changing humans, but I think the effects of that will only be noticed over a while. It is too early to say what exactly the extent will be.

**9. The TUM Institute for Ethics in Artificial Intelligence kicked-off in October 2019. As we are coming to our one year anniversary, what are your priorities for the IEAI for the next year?**

During the last year, the IEAI has been consolidated in a large degree. We have now more than 40 researchers working in our projects. We have a highly international team with graduate students and others coming to us from all over the world, which is a very good sign. We have research groups and research clusters in a number of important areas and we will expand these areas and open up new ones. We also are looking for new partnerships with other players. We have recently signed one of these partnerships with the company Celonis. What we are looking for is to strengthen these topics and collaborate with other major institutions now opening around the world, such as the *Oxford University's Institute for Ethics in AI*. We are establishing more and more links with the Global AI Ethics Consortium and

others. In June 2021, we will host The Responsible AI Forum as the major new international conference here in Munich and we would like to invite you all to join us!

**Meet the expert**



*Photo credit: Julian Baumann*

Christoph Lütge is Full Professor of Business Ethics and Director of the IEAI at Technical University of Munich (TUM). He has a background in business informatics and philosophy, having taken his PhD at the Technical University of Braunschweig in 1999 and his habilitation at the University of Munich (LMU) in 2005. He was awarded a Heisenberg Fellowship in 2007. His most recent books are: “The Ethics of Competition” (Elgar, 2019) and “An Introduction to Ethics in Robotics and AI” (Springer, 2020, with coauthors), which is available for download online. Lütge has held visiting positions at Harvard, University of Pittsburgh, University of California (San Diego), Taipei, Kyoto and Venice. He is a member of the Scientific Board of the European AI Ethics initiative AI4People as well as of the German Ethics Commission on Automated and Connected Driving. He has also done consulting work for the Singapore Economic Development Board and the Canadian Transport Commission.