



Reflections on AI

Q&A with
Jeannie Marie Paterson

“The liberty to innovate is an important goal of regulation itself”

The **TUM IEAI** had the pleasure of speaking with **Jeannie Marie Paterson**, Professor of Law at the University of Melbourne. Jeannie Paterson is the founding co-director of the Centre for AI and Digital Ethics, an interdisciplinary research, teaching and policy centre at the University of Melbourne involving the Faculties of Engineering and Information Technology, Law, Arts, Medicine, Education, and Science. With Professor Shanton Chang (FEIT) is the co-leader of the Digital Equity research stream at the Melbourne Social equity Institute.

What is the biggest misconception about AI?

A misconception of AI overshadows its capacity, so AI is promoted as neutral, accessible and accurate. There are limitations to all of those things. AI reflects the values of the people who have created it. It is not accessible to people across the world or within particular countries. And it is often not particularly accurate; it is only as good as the way it has been programmed or the data it has been trained on. So all of these misconceptions are problematic because they incline us to have too much faith in AI. They incline governments to be too interested in innovation at the expense of good governance. They give untold power to the tech companies that are promoting the technology.

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

The most important question in AI ethics right now is equity and transparency. I say equity because people are still struggling to benefit from the opportunities that AI technologies present. I was talking to a person in the Philippines not so long ago. They are trying to do something really cool with computer vision, which is using computer vision to look at images from satellites to track the areas that are likely to be most threatened by natural disasters. Those researchers could not get access to the satellite images to do this. They were being asked to pay large amounts of money, just to get the images to train their AI, which they were planning to use to help their communities. Therefore, we cannot think that the benefit of new technologies being shared across the world, or within communities, is beneficial- if we still have limitations like these to getting access to the necessary raw materials. For this reason, AI is also not equitable because it often is used to penalize the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in society. We know it is often biased and unfair, but the benefits of technology are also not being shared equitably and fairly across the world.

What will be the impact of ChatGPT on things such as learning, implicit bias, and misinformation?

ChatGPT is causing huge concern in all sorts of places. This ties in to the point I made earlier: we tend to overestimate the capacities of technology. ChatGPT is not understanding language, it is recognizing patterns in language. It is doing this really well, so it can appear to communicate with us reasonably well, but it is not communicating by understanding our intentions, our wants, or our desires. It finds cues and patterns in the words that we enter and really just replays those back to us, garnished by the context in which those words have been used in other places of its vast database. So it is useful, but not a source of understanding or meaning. It is not the catastrophic impediment for higher education as people may believe nor is not going to displace lawyers or journalists, provided we understand the limitations of what it can do and not oversell on the one hand Chat GPT or, on the other hand, demonize or catastrophize its impact. We need to approach it with a steady eye and understand its limitations and capacities.

Is there a way to ensure that ChatGPT is transparent about its capabilities and limitations? Are there ways to mitigate these risks?

I noticed that there are lots of commercial companies that are offering to provide ways to identify Chat GPT. For example, where it has been used by students to present work or in another context where the authenticity of a piece of work is essential. Now I think that is a losing game, the more we are trying to identify uses of ChatGPT, the more sophisticated those uses will become. I'd be hesitant about commercial products that are trying to limit or identify ChatGPT. I believe that actually, this is the prompt for us all: as educators, lawyers, or researchers to

understand the technology. As well as help our students understand the technology and together think creatively about how the technology can be harnessed for the greater good, without infringing on the types of activities that we may think are important or valuable in society. For example: assessment, education, writing important pieces of information, whether it be journalism or legal documents. It will be an ongoing exercise and there is no one quick fix to this.

What is the role of academia when it comes to the regulation of trustworthy and responsible AI?

The role of academia around trustworthy and responsible AI should be that academia is relatively removed from having a commercial interest in pushing the use of technology. What we often see in this overhyping of AI and other digital technologies is companies trying to promote the commercial value. We have governments very concerned about promoting innovation in their jurisdictions because clearly, they do not want to be left behind in some sort of technological innovation arms race. I think the value of academics is perhaps to keep a steady eye on these trends and be able to speak fearlessly and clearly about the genuine capacities of the technology and the types of accountability mechanisms that should be put around them to make them safe.

We often say that AI is changing or transforming the world, to what extent is it changing us as humans?

It is a little early to say how it is changing us as humans, but I think there are at least two things that I think about in the work I do. One of them is: what does AI do for relationships? We know that humans are

profoundly social beings. They do best when they are interacting and relating with other humans. One of the concerns about AI is that, in fact, it might increasingly become an interface between humans. So instead of talking to other people, we talk to a chatbot, or we talk to a virtual assistant, or we interact through an app or device that is on our screen, and we are removed from ordinary and profoundly meaningful human interaction. This I believe is profoundly problematic in all sorts of ways. It may be that some philosophers have become concerned that we will lose the skill of interacting with and understanding other people.

On the flip side, the governments dehumanize their populations by not providing services through humans, which is quite important when you think of schools, aged care, or nursing homes; Instead increasingly they are trying to triage them with automatic systems which often means people who are most vulnerable in society are further removed and further isolated, and that would be a tragic thing for humanity.

The other issue around AI is that we normalize or are desensitized to surveillance. We are increasingly being watched in various ways, whether it is through our Alexa or other Virtual Assistants at home. Even when surveillanced through facial recognition technology in the streets or in stores, people seem to say: 'Oh well, privacy doesn't matter'. I believe privacy does matter and we shouldn't let the growth of technology and surveillance technology, even if it is used sometimes for good ends, to desensitize us to the perils of undue surveillance.

Meet the Expert



Prof. Jeannie Marie Paterson

Jeannie Marie Paterson's expertise are in the areas of consumer protection, consumer credit and data protection law, as well as the law of emerging digital technologies, AI and robotics. Her research focuses on regulatory design for fair, safe, and accountable consumer products, and technologies. Jeannie's research has been cited by law reform inquiries and by courts, including by the High Court of Australia. She has successfully managed numerous research grants funding and collaborated in research projects in the public and not for profit sectors.

She publishes widely on her fields of research and has considerable expertise in research translation and impact. Jeannie frequently works with news media and university publications to promote recent research, and to provide expert commentary on current news and policy debates. She engages in public and industry presentations about her work in a variety of forums.