6. Outside the boxes

Opening Remarks by Cristian Gherhes (Research Fellow, Oxford Brookes University)

Artificial intelligence has been with us for a while and is only becoming more present in our lives. While some believe that AI will usher in a prosperous future for all, others point to numerous ethical concerns and potentially devastating consequences such as socio-economic inequality, algorithmic bias, and job losses. However, we assume that the development, use, and impact of AI is or will be the same across the world, but this is not the case. The rise of AI has spurred a proliferation of domestic AI strategies, with approaches varying significantly. While some countries have detailed national AI strategies, others have no formal AI policy or strategy. Some have chosen to focus on specific sectors while others have set out to tackle socio-economic and environmental challenges.

As a social scientist and economic geographer, I am interested in how social phenomena and their consequences vary across places. This includes how the development, application, and outcomes of AI vary across the world. In writing the opening remarks for this chapter, I want to remind us that context matters when it comes to AI. While the capabilities of AI may be universal, its application and use differ considerably across nations, resulting in a mosaic of approaches to AI ethics.

While there has been a proliferation of AI guidelines and principles developed by myriad organisations worldwide, there are questions about their actual impact. In "Explaining the Principles to Practices Gap in AI", Daniel Schiff and colleagues point to the significant gap in the implementation of AI principles in practice, as many of these remain rather vague. They warn that, without specificity on measuring the impacts of AI, these documents risk becoming promises without action, and propose the implementation of impact assessment frameworks to meaningfully go beyond mere speculation and "ethics-washing".

We have seen AI permeate almost all aspects of human life, and this includes intimate relationships and dating, yet this comes with important ethical implications that need to be addressed. In "Dating Through the Filters", Karim Nader explores the ethical considerations of using collaborative filtering algorithms on dating apps, flagging the problems with using biased data to make recommendations to users of dating apps. As these can result in racial algorithmic bias, Karim concludes that dating apps should perhaps remain outside the scope of algorithmic control. Are we prepared to accept the potential pitfalls of online dating? What is socially acceptable and ethical may look differently across cultures and countries.

Importantly, some places are more advanced in their AI journeys than other. But how did they get there? In my own article, my colleagues and I tell "The Story of AI in Montreal", from AI winter to the AI hype that we see today, showing how the work, ambition, and vision of a few AI researchers became reality for the many and started a global AI revolution. We highlight the importance of human agency in building the thriving AI ecosystem that we see in Montreal, and Canada more broadly. The article demonstrates the importance of collaboration between government, industry, and academia as well as the public and civil society in co-developing AI ecosystems. Critically, we highlight that Montreal's AI ecosystem reflects and upholds the values of the Canadian society, advocating and striving for the ethical and socially responsible development and use of AI.

But are these values present everywhere? And are they followed by all actors of our society? The short answer is not really. In "The Sociology of Race and Digital Society", Tressie McMillan Cottom examines how digital technology is reshaping ethnicity, race, and racism. The author highlights the problems with platform capitalism which, rather than unlocking economic opportunity for all, often fosters exclusion and preys on the vulnerable—we need not look further than the "gig economy". Tressie proposes a series of solutions that can help tackle these issues, suggesting that these need to be embedded at all stages of the machine learning development lifecycle. Indeed, we need to strive to do better so that AI benefits us all.

Further, can we really trust AI to do what is best for us? Mark Ryan questions the concept of trustworthy AI and argues that AI is not something that has the capacity to be trusted. The author of the research summary offers a more positive perspective, suggesting that AI cannot be trusted "yet". Indeed, the answer is not so simple, and here, too, context and culture play a role. A recent MIT-BCG survey tells us that 86% of users in China trust decisions made by AI, only 39% of Americans and 45% of Europeans, respectively, do so—still not convinced that geography matters?

In "One Map to Rule Them All? Google Maps as Digital Technical Object", Scott McQuire argues that it does, just in a different way. Scott focuses on the techno-geographical milieu created by Google Maps which has reshaped the way we experience space, time, and social life through the datafication of our physical world. The article zeroes in on the ethical implications of commercially-driven innovations by tech giants, highlighting data control asymmetries and divergence from public interest as key issues. But while Google Maps seems ubiquitous, it should not have free rein in shaping our social realities.

It was about time we brought the practices of tech giants under scrutiny. On that note, in "Slow AI and The Culture of Speed", John Tomlinson reminds us of the importance of slowing down in a world that has become obsessed with efficiency and productivity. With the digitalisation of society, everything has become available "now", anywhere, anytime. But this can have negative

implications for designing AI, with our obsession with speed having adverse consequences in many instances. In the US, for example, Amazon workers are fired by artificial intelligence algorithms without any human input, which are used, presumably, for the sake of efficiency. The author of the research summary argues that sometimes ethical AI means slow AI and reminds us that ultimately it is us who need to decide on the values that we want expressed and enacted through AI—a statement I could not agree more with.

So, what can we do about all these ethical challenges? In "Algorithmic Impact Assessments – What Impact Do They Have?", the authors advocate for the use of Algorithmic Impact Assessments (AIAs) to identify the potential benefits and harms of algorithmic systems. Besides ensuring a diversity of voices in shaping AIAs, they argue that AIAs need to represent harms as accurately as possible and require adequate accountability mechanisms to ensure that organisations "walk their talk". But how likely is it that AIAs will become established practice everywhere? The answer is again: "it depends"—it depends on where companies are operating and the rules that are in place to enforce these practices.

In "AI Ethics in the Public, Private, and NGO Sectors", the authors explore public, private, and non-governmental approaches to AI ethics and find significant differences across the three sectors. While NGOs show more ethical breadth, the public sector focuses more on economic growth and unemployment, whereas the private sector prioritises client-facing issues and technical fixes. The authors suggest that we may need to challenge our notions of what is desirable and possible in AI ethics practice and policy. An extension here is also examining differences across countries to determine whether context plays a role in these differences.

The development of commercial AI has been closely monitored as of late, especially with the rise of tech giants and AI-enabled solutions across industries. Financial services have particularly come under intense scrutiny time and again over the past few decades. In "Survey of EU Ethical Guidelines for Commercial AI", Jimmy Huang and colleagues evaluate the efficacy of the current EU ethical guidelines for commercial AI in financial services. They identify important gaps and highlight key risks such as the use of inappropriate metadata, discriminatory practices, and opaqueness that can potentially harm users. The ethical guidelines shows that the EU is forward-looking and ready to ensure the ethical development and use of AI solutions. Yet this is not the case everywhere, and where such initiatives are absent, customers still bear the negative consequences.

Finally, while Fei-Fei Li, former chief scientist at Google AI, claims that the benefits of AI "have no borders", institutions, rules, regulations, societies, and cultures are confined by them. Geographical borders, and the people and institutions within them, directly shape how AI is developed and deployed within nations worldwide. AI is therefore not a globally uniform technology, but a global technology with national inflections, whose outcomes can vary from

country to country and from culture to culture. While we celebrate our differences, it is important to ask ourselves what are the common values that we want to embed in our AI systems? While the specifics may vary across nations, we need to strive for agreement and achieve consensus. In this context (pun intended) a key question remains: can we have AI ethics without borders in a world where we seem to be increasingly defined by them?

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