The Ethics of AI

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Let’s talk about AI.

This is a topic that comes up almost every day because, for many of us, it’s integrated into so many aspects of our lives, from streamlining work processes to helping out with personal tasks.

While AI can make us more efficient and move past creative blockers, AI is not all sunshine and rainbows... and it’s important to use it with a good amount of caution.

This lesson will discuss the ethical considerations related to AI, ensuring you're equipped to use AI both efficiently **and** carefully.

We'll highlight key points to consider, from data privacy to biased algorithms, helping you navigate the complex world of AI through an ethical lens.

So to get started, let's talk about transparency as something to consider when looking at the ethics of AI.

AI transparency is like giving your dinner guests the chance to read the recipe for the meal being served. It's important because it helps everyone understand what goes into the AI "sauce" – how it makes decisions, what data it uses, and why it reaches the conclusions it does. This openness builds trust, gives people the option of whether they want to use the tool, and ensures users feel comfortable and informed about the technology they're interacting with.

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To build transparent AI, it's crucial to start with the ingredients – the data that goes into the AI. Ensuring the data is accurate, diverse, and well-documented allows for a clear understanding of how it influences the AI's decisions.

Plus, sharing easy-to-understand explanations of the AI's decision-making process, perhaps through visual aids or simple summaries, makes the technology accessible to all, not just the tech-savvy people in your life.

Being upfront about both the capabilities and limitations of AI systems ensures users have a realistic understanding of what the technology can do and what it might still be learning to handle better.

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In the workplace, one of the most common uses for AI is content generation, but this also comes with ethical considerations.

While many companies encourage the use of AI to help team members work more efficiently, AI is new, and we don't know all the long-term implications. Because of this, some companies and schools might not allow the use of AI when creating content due to concerns about confidentiality, the protection of proprietary information, or how search engines will rank AI-generated content.

That's why, when we talk about AI and transparency, we have to talk about being transparent with stakeholders when we're using AI to write letters and reports, generate presentations, or create code.

Using AI ethically means being open and transparent about it. For example, employees who use AI to write assignments or official communications should be crystal clear about the AI policy of their organisation before they start their work. If the company allows the use of AI, then great, go for it!

However, if the business doesn't allow the use of AI, that individual is taking a big risk by proceeding, and they may face serious consequences. They can face disciplinary action… or even lose their jobs.

That's why it's so important to get clarity on the expectations and tolerance of using AI, and always be transparent about how you're using it and what you're using it for.

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Next up? Privacy.

Remember the big fuss about Cambridge Analytica? No? Here's a quick recap.

Cambridge Analytica was a consulting company that specialised in using data-science methods to grow political campaigns [1]. In 2018 [2], they were found to have harvested personal data from millions of Facebook users without consent.

The information was used to target individuals with political advertisements, leveraging AI and sophisticated algorithms to influence voter behaviour. The scandal raised significant concerns about privacy, consent, and the ethical use of AI in manipulating public opinion, sparking a global debate on data protection and the responsibilities of tech companies.

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Here's another privacy concern.

Have you ever thought about what happens to the information you give ChatGPT in your prompts? If you ask ChatGPT to write a press release about an upcoming corporate merger, you're essentially sharing confidential, proprietary information with a robot, and once you do, that information becomes part of the public domain. [3]

ChatGPT claims not to directly share your inputs with other users – we asked it as part of the research for this lesson – but the knowledge it gains can influence its overall learning and responses. This means sensitive information entered into the chat could potentially inform future interactions, without sharing the specific details of your data with others. So remember to be cautious with the information you include in your prompts, ensuring any confidential details are protected.

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Now, onto bias.

Have you heard about facial recognition software being less accurate when identifying people with certain skin tones?

That could be caused by the AI models not being trained with a diverse enough set of faces, or it could be caused by an AI model that was trained using biased information.

Depending on how they're trained, AI programs can unintentionally reflect societal biases, especially when it comes to diversity, race, and gender [4]. When AI systems are trained on historical information, they learn everything included in that dataset, including past prejudices.

This issue has popped up in areas like job recruitment, where AI tools have been found to favour candidates whose CVs are similar to other successful employees, or in facial recognition technology, which has shown lower accuracy rates for women and people of colour. [4]

Addressing these biases requires deliberate efforts, like diversifying training data and using ethical guidelines to ensure AI systems serve every group in society fairly.

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And the final AI-related ethical concern we'll discuss today is safety.

Let's think about self-driving cars. Self-driving cars use AI to interpret sensor data, allowing them to make decisions about navigation, avoiding obstacles, and following traffic laws – all in real-time.

Self-driving cars are super cool, but they also need to be super safe. We don't want them making wrong decisions on the road because their AI wasn't properly thought through.

If the AI isn't developed with ethical considerations, such as looking for and recognising pedestrians in all conditions, it could lead to safety risks – like hitting a person crossing the road.

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That’s a lot to take in. So, what can we do to ensure we’re using AI ethically?

The biggest thing is to stay curious and informed, ask lots of questions, and not shy away from the tough discussions.

If you're interested in learning more, there are plenty of resources out there. Check out books like "Weapons of Math Destruction" by Cathy O’Neill, articles from think tanks, and even podcasts on AI ethics. They can all help paint a fuller picture of what ethical AI looks like.

Thanks for joining this chat on ethical AI. Remember, it's up to us to shape the future of AI, making sure it's a force for good.

Let's keep the conversation going and make sure the tech we create and use respects everyone's rights and dignity.

[1] *Cambridge Analytica: Overview, History, Example,* Jason Fernando, Investopedia https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/cambridge-analytica.asp

[2] *History of the Cambridge Analytica Controversy,* Katie Harbath and Collier Fernekes, Bipartisan Policy Cente https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/cambridge-analytica-controversy/#:~:text=Cambridge%20Analytica%20claimed%20to%20be,fully%20shut%20down%20in%202015.

[3] *ChatGPT is a data privacy nightmare. If you’ve ever posted online, you ought to be concerned,* Uri Gal, The Conversation https://theconversation.com/chatgpt-is-a-data-privacy-nightmare-if-youve-ever-posted-online-you-ought-to-be-concerned-199283#:~:text=Another%20privacy%20risk%20involves%20the,it%20in%20the%20public%20domain.

[4] *Unmasking the bias in facial recognition algorithms*, Joy Buolamwini, MIT https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/unmasking-bias-facial-recognition-algorithms#:~:text=Even%20if%20you%20do%20not,still%20favor%20lighter%2Dskinned%20individuals.