Marc Anderson Abstract for ‘Where AI Ethics Should Go?’ Event

**Is the Future of AI Ethics Interdisciplinary?**

Some scholars have recently stated that: “We believe that AI ethics will develop such that it will become clear that the field is inherently interdisciplinary.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Other’s have echoed these sentiments in various ways.

My aim is to reflect upon this vision of interdisciplinarity, and ask: *should AI ethics become interdisciplinary, will it become so given the history of similar efforts in other tech disciplines, and what tensions or inherent characteristics of AI as a branch of technology development and of ethics as a branch of philosophy, might prevent interdisciplinarity?* I will concentrate primarily on the potential interdisciplinary relation between AI development and ethics as philosophy, but stray somewhat into other disciplines also.

I will consider the question from the following angles:

1. Has interdisciplinarity succeeded in similar circumstances, e.g. in engineering ethics?
2. The historical progression of philosophy may be characterized as a history of disciplines splitting away from it: e.g. natural sciences, psychology. Is it therefore likely that we will reverse that trend and join a discipline to philosophy/ethics? Or is it more likely, given the past, that a technology focus will split ethics away from philosophy?
3. Will money be a factor? Philosophy as a discipline has proportionately little funding, whereas tech development has much. If the funding of tech ethics has come from Big Tech, is there thus immediately an imbalance in terms of contributors to the ‘vision’ of interdisciplinarity?
4. Is there a mismatch in tempo which prevents interdisciplinarity? E.g. ethics requires patience and reflection and slowing down, whereas AI as a tech development involves speeding up.
5. Is there a mismatch in tenor which prevents interdisciplinarity? Philosophy has its camps, both in ethics and more so in a general sense, the analytic vs continental divide being the most prominent. These camps impose extreme limits upon the ability to get published, etc. This is perhaps difficult for tech development people to understand, but it influences philosophically founded ethics.
6. Arguably, like tech developers generally, AI developers *do* things and then assume they can be made ethical somehow. But introducing ethicists from a philosophical background risks introducing those who may question certain avenues of tech advance *as such*, e.g. Amazon’s business model as a red line, or military uses of AI. Does this twist interdisciplinary aims into mere ‘show’?

I will conclude by offering some reflections on what it may take to bring ethics into interdisciplinary engagement with tech development, e.g. the philosopher will have to learn tech knowledge proportionately to the tech developer learning ethical knowledge.

1. Kazim, E., & Koshiyama, A.S. (2021). A high-level overview of AI ethics. Patterns, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)