

Meeting Summary  
**Digital Ethics**  
14 March 2018

The following is a summary of a discussion held at Chapter House, St Paul's Cathedral under the Chatham House Rule.

There is a risk of oversimplification when we reduce the issue around ethics simply to data. In fact the issue goes way beyond this to a cocktail of issues around technology and especially artificial intelligence (AI.) As a result, we have decided to rename this project Digital Ethics.

We were reminded to emphasize that technology is largely good, though stories about its abuses are what tend to make headlines. Attendees were quite conscious due to previous experience in other fields that how the subject is presented can have a huge impact on public perception.

Participants were also wary of the implication of the use of the word ethics, which frightens many people, particularly in the technology industry, as it sounds like an academic field of study that requires years to understand and master. People in technology can be susceptible to thinking they are the first people to have ever thought of anything, and tend not to look through history for relevant examples. They may also perceive the history of ethics as irrelevant. However, there are examples in other industries and in academia of codes of practice or ethics that can be illustrative of a possible way forward.

There were many points of agreement, some differences of opinion, and many suggestions. These are listed below:

**Agreement:**

- **Responsibility:** In the governance of data, we have somewhat lost sight of responsibility.
  - **Context:** Consistency with societal values is what is key. Societally acceptable and politically feasible actions are what are needed.
  - **Governance:** The state in most cases is not equipped to govern this. This vacuum is creating a chaos of codes. However, it is good to remember that this is historically the case with almost any technological development. It takes time and use to determine the appropriate governance and rules. What do you do before you know the right questions to ask? A need and preference was expressed for a *neutral* convening body. Nuffield in conjunction with others is aiming to be this. It was recommended that in any such body, the majority of members would be lay people not experts, based on experience in relevant comparable bodies.
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- **Understanding:** Few people providing data actually understand how it is being used. There is a significant gap between public awareness and actual use. Doteveryone's research *People*,

*Power and Technology: The 2018 Digital Attitudes Report* suggests people are totally ambivalent. Lots of good and lots of worries. Split between individual benefits and public influence negatives. Easy to use but hard to understand.

- There is also a significant lack of understanding between public lay audience and techies. They don't speak the same language but market research acts as an interface.
  - However, why do big tech companies not use their ability to access customers to find out what they want, as opposed to simply survey them on products they want to produce? The issues around use are caught in another dimension which is not that of consumer-supplier.
  - Demographic differences means that young people know how to shape their profiles on social media and know which tools to use for what purpose and level of privacy.
  - However, technological change is cycling so fast that it is very difficult for consumers to adapt behaviour to use technology wisely and well given pace of change—at least some parts of the user groups.
- **Education:** Not coding and how to use email but more like Public Health England. 89% want clearer T&Cs. Enable users to see who they're dealing with whenever online? Educate people what it means to live in a digital world.
  - **Ownership of data:** Efforts should be made to avoid this, but rather to think about rights over that data.
  - **Disruption:** The business model of technology companies which was about capturing people's attention for the longest time is changing. Attendees believe that these companies will be able to adapt quickly to that change for commercial reasons, but for businesses that want to be disruptive, they are not very good at disrupting themselves.
  - **Privacy** as a social compact.
  - There is an issue of **concentration of power**.

### Some differences of opinion:

- **Context:** Some participants thought that we need to be aware of cultural context and that concepts of privacy differ in different places, but others suggested it is important to be very wary of cultural relativity as an excuse for nation states or companies to not do the right thing. Also, the context of the use of information was also perceived as important in the granting of permission, and that universal vs. context specific permissions made a huge difference in the granting of permission.
- **Codes of Conduct:** There was an important discussion of codes vs. rules vs. policy vs. enforcement. Most attendees wanted positive, constructive codes, but recognized that there needed to be an enforcement mechanism for rogues. Codes were perceived to be meaningful only if enforceable. Codes empower groups and encourage conversations that bring change. Onus on owners to collect ethically and transparently. Rules governing private investment relevant parallel.
- We were encouraged to think of relevant parallels with other **international conventions**.

## Suggestions:

- **Deliberative dialogue:** The use of the deliberative dialogue technique to arrive at agreed norms or codes was suggested. This is a form of discussion aimed at finding the best course of action. Deliberative questions take the form "What should we do?" The purpose is not so much to solve a problem or resolve an issue as to explore the most promising avenues for action.
- Look at **AI data trusts** and **delegated decision making**.

## Conclusions:

- Find a way to help developers ask the right questions.
- Help educate consumers.
- Find a way to encompass common good and societal values.
- Control misuse.
- From ethics of big data to Digital Ethics, though mere mention of word ethics is scary to some.
- The issues around use are caught in another dimension which is not that of consumer-supplier.
- Please don't forget the baked in bias in algorithms and concerns about lack of diversity among the people writing those algorithms.

## Next Steps:

- Share emails to continue the conversation.
- Do a meeting summary for St Paul's Institute website.
- Get a mapping of people and organisations working on this subject. Doteveryone is in the process of doing this and has already found around 500 different organisations.
- Create a resources page on the Institute website [www.stpaulsinstitute.org.uk](http://www.stpaulsinstitute.org.uk)<sup>1</sup>
- TechUK will do another conference the Ethics of Big Data in December 2018 to mark progress.

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<sup>1</sup> A short set of reading and resources is included as an appendix. Please feel free to add others.

## Appendix

### Resources:

#### I. Original Bibliography:

*Data management and use: Governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* A joint report by the British Academy and the Royal Society, 2017 [www.royalsociety.org](http://www.royalsociety.org)

*Helping organisations navigate ethical concerns in their data practices*, Open Data Institute (ODI), 2017 [www.theodi.org](http://www.theodi.org)

Online Ethics Canvas [www.ethicscanvas.org](http://www.ethicscanvas.org)

*Big Data: Law, Regulation and Ethics*, PowerPoint presentation by Professor Karen Yeung available at <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/bigdata/3-Law-Karen-Yeung.pdf>

*The Opportunities and Ethics of Big Data*, Royal Statistics Society, 2015  
<http://www.rss.org.uk/Images/PDF/influencing-change/2016/rss-report-ops-and-ethics-of-big-data-feb-2016.pdf>

IEEE Code of Ethics [www.ieee.org](http://www.ieee.org)

Work in progress: *Convention on Data Ethics*, The Nuffield Foundation and UK.gov data ethics centre

'Fuelled by dreams and powered by imagination': considering digital technologies through the lens of a theology of play,' Stoddart, E. Mar 2015 In : *Practical Theology*. 8, 1, p. 19-40

Written evidence to House of Lords & House of Commons, Joint Committee on Draft Communications Data Bill, Session 2012-13, Stoddart, E. Sep 2012 London : House of Lords & House of Commons

Review: Bennett, Jana Marguerite. 2012. Aquinas on the Web? Doing Theology in an Internet Age. Stoddart, E. 26 Jun 2015 In : *Practical Theology*. 8, 1, p. 63-64

Ethics of Big Data and Social Media - Oral Evidence to Parliamentary Committee on Science and Technology, Macnish, Kevin

*The Ethics of Information* (Oxford University Press, 2013), Floridi, Luciano

Powell, Alison (2016) Hacking in the public interest: authority, legitimacy, means and ends. *New Media and Society*, 18 (4). pp. 600-616.

Couldry, Nick and Powell, Alison (2014) Big data from the bottom up. *Big Data and Society*, 1 (2).

Bright, J. and Margetts, H. (2016) "Big Data and Public Policy: Can It Succeed Where E-Participation Has Failed?", *Policy and Internet*. 8 (3) 218-224.

Margetts, H. and Sutcliffe, D. (2013) "Addressing the policy challenges and opportunities of "big data"", *Policy and Internet*. 5 (2) 139-146.

#### 2. Resources from Roundtable:

*People, Power and Technology: The 2018 Digital Attitudes Report* <http://attitudes.doteveryone.org.uk/>

<https://www.wbs.ac.uk/news/ibm-partnership-to-develop-big-data-ethical-guidelines/>

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomOpinion/Pages/DavidKaye.aspx>

Partnership on AI (full name **Partnership on Artificial Intelligence to Benefit People and Society**) is a technology industry consortium focused on establishing best practices for artificial intelligence systems and to educate the public about AI. Publicly announced September 28, 2016, its founding members are Amazon, Facebook, Google, DeepMind, Microsoft, and IBM, with interim co-chairs Eric Horvitz of Microsoft Research and Mustafa Suleyman of DeepMind. Apple joined the consortium as a founding member in January 2017. In January 2017, Apple head of advanced development for Siri, Tom Gruber, joined the Partnership on AI's board.

OpenAI, a nonprofit dedicated to open research on artificial intelligence, co-chaired by Sam Altman and Elon Musk

<http://www.danah.org/> on Danah Boyd

Luciano Floridi The Fourth Revolution: Hard and Soft Ethics

Caspar Klyngø Danish Tech Ambassador <http://techamb.um.dk/>

[https://edps.europa.eu/about-edps/members-mission/supervisors\\_en](https://edps.europa.eu/about-edps/members-mission/supervisors_en)

<https://www.wired.com/story/why-ai-is-still-waiting-for-its-ethics-transplant/>

CREST <http://www.crest-approved.org/>