



Contribution ID: 186

Tür: Oral Presentation

Reclaiming the Human Self: The Necessity of Integrating Ethics in Generative AI Development

18 Aralık 2024 Çarşamba 17:30 (30 dakika)

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The rapid advancement of AI technology has significantly changed how we view human-technology interactions. As new generative AI technologies aim to replicate human cognitive functions such as decision-making, projection, memory, comparison, and abstraction, the concept of the self—which unites all these functions—takes on a new dimension. Currently, the discourse guiding the development of these technologies often strips the human self of its ethical nuances and reduces it merely to the computational abilities of the mind. This reductionist approach portrays humans in both cognitive (Chemero, 2023) and cultural (Atari et al., 2023) terms in an overly simplistic manner during the technology development phases. We believe this perspective overlooks the complexity of the human self and poses serious ethical challenges. We argue that integrating ethics that recognize the embodied and culturally embedded nature of the self into the development of generative AI technologies is crucial to addressing this narrow view of the self. Our discussion will explore how the current discourse is shaped by this new understanding of the self and will highlight the features of the “reduced self.” We will then discuss the theories of embodiment and the phenomenology of cognitive science (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 2017) for the integration of the ethical self. We advocate for the role of ethics on two levels to counteract this reductionist view: the first level involves the need for adopting a meta-ethical discussion in the development of AI and all emerging technologies to guide our efforts. The second level requires incorporating ethical considerations into the development and design processes of these technologies. We conclude that ethical interventions that consider the embodied and culturally embedded self are essential to overcoming ethical issues such as discrimination and bias and also provide a strong methodological perspective for the interdisciplinary approach to AI ethics.

Keywords: generative AI, embodiment, ethical self, AI Ethics, technology

Presentation language / Sunum Dili

EN (English)

Disciplines / Disiplinler

Philosophy / Felsefe

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Session Classification: Session 3.1 (Day 1)

Track Classification: Congist'24: Theoretical Foundations