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The Human Person and their AI
Report on the 14. Biannual Conference of BCE in Ljubljana

AI as a chance and/or challenge was the topic during the biannual conference of the Association of Bioethicists in Central Europe at the University of Ljubljana from 24–25 October 2025. The interdisciplinary panelists provided the necessary insights for an informative, critical, and fruitful ethical discussion on how AI can and should be used in our society today and tomorrow.

One perspective was offered by Sarah Spiekermann and her 10 Rules for the Digital World. She started by questioning the narratives we pursue around technology today and that shape our view of it. Science fiction narratives that suggest the Earth is already lost and humanity's future lies in space make imaginary evil seem romantic while the real struggles tend to be boring. Beauty and goodness are no longer goods pursued for their own sake and, therefore, ethical arguments sound boring. In the age of cathedrals, architects contemplated buildings they would most likely never see completed, guided by the art of engineering, a desire for holiness and higher values, and a shared ethos that shaped how all contributors related to one another. In the age of AI, we need this "ethos of the cathedral". Many institutions have only a few higher principles and the belief is that if you follow them, AI usage becomes ethical. This view does not go deeper, nor does it provide any further argumentation. For Spiekerman this is not enough. AI should improve human knowledge, not machine knowledge. Spiekermann's "ten rules" cohere into a human-centered ethic for the digital age: treat technology as a means rather than an idolized end; resist anthropomorphizing machines; and preserve spaces for offline life and embodied relationships. Cultivate social and democratic capacities that sustain communal well-being, safeguard nature from

the externalities of digital expansion, and refuse to reduce persons to data profiles or digital twins. At the same time, protect distinctly human potentials, like creativity, language-based understanding, and crafts of meaning-making, by using AI in ways that augment rather than displace them. Acknowledge the limits and fallibility of AI, including its propensity to reproduce bias and its growing entanglement with military applications. Finally, defend freedom and dignity by rejecting pervasive tracking and by countering power concentration through participatory, accountable governance that ensures broad inclusion in the benefits and direction of digital infrastructures.

In the lively discussion that followed some important remarks were made. Responding to a comment that suggested it might already be too late for the ethical use of AI, Spiekerman said that we are still in the early stages of AI, where many issues are technical choices and therefore reversible. Another concern was that in today's societies, whether in Europe or the United States, we lack transcendent values and that recourse to human dignity is not enough. For Spiekerman, dignity is just the first step toward a new narrative and a new conception of progress (in terms of what is good for the human body). Additionally, we are on the verge of an age of spirituality, and the church can and should help people to rediscover their spirituality. A final comment noted Spiekerman's generally negative vision of social media and AI. Social media has its flaws, but it also supplies an opportunity to connect (e.g., with marginalized people) and, therefore, we should train young people to use these technologies well. Still, some forms of technology usage have negative cognitive effects.

The next panel dealt with AI and its consequences for social relationships and loneliness. The archaeologist and cognitive anthropologist Sara Polak from the University of Prague started with the observation that we have neolithic brains, medieval societies and a god complex. So, we must know the past so that we can shape the future. But archaeology faces a fundamental problem: What an individual of a certain time thought is usually lost. What survives are social constructions. So, the role of the individual is lost, even though this is the most important part of our identity. Polak illustrated this with Alan Turing, whose genius thrived in interdisciplinary work. He approached the Enigma problem not only mathematically, but also by modeling it as a human process under tragic constraints – such as the failure of soldiers in Stalingrad to change codes frequently. From this, she draws two critiques of the present: we have lost true interdisciplinarity, and we pair hyper-personalization with systems that still treat individuals like inputs to be processed – human abaci – inevitably breeding frustration. Social systems evolve along the timelines of technology and through leaps in consciousness, revealing how deep-

ly human our technical developments are. AI is only one part of a vast, perhaps boundless, landscape of technological possibilities. Yet our cultural narratives are turning darker and more anarchic. Many want to overturn the *status quo* hope once projected onto startups that have since solidified into a new elite. Here, the past has become an immense database of humanity's relationship with technology. Consider the Meiji Restoration: Europe often played the role of the oppressive power, while Japan went on to become a leader in human-centered robotics, including robots for caregiving. Therefore, Polak's thesis is that to build civilizational resilience, we must understand both humans and technology. Traits we pathologize today may have been adaptive in earlier contexts; for instance, ADHD-like tendencies could be highly advantageous in hunter-gatherer societies. What we label as "problems" for technology to solve may historically have been desirable or necessary. This perspective has practical implications. We must think carefully about data: how we store it, what we store, and how we analyze it. We are continually translating the world into binary representations. Today AI can identify promising sites for excavation and simulate the rise and collapse of civilizations – insights that can inform models for climate risk, power-grid blackouts, or even warfare.

Octavian Machidon warned that we are living through a global crisis of connection and belonging – a crisis of love – that makes us uniquely vulnerable to the seductions of AI. He argues that the "loneliest generation" is a source of the problems with AI. AI's influence on human cognition and emotion is profound. It reshapes our mental and relational lives through cognitive offloading ("use it or lose it"), the displacement of real-world activities into online-only habits, and persuasive design patterns. This leads to social isolation and loneliness, impaired relationships, reduced empathy, and a weakening of genuine human care. While AI often "cleans up the mess" by smoothing communication and providing frictionless support, that very friction – the vulnerability, conflict, and repair that deepen intimacy – is essential to healthy relationships. As a result, AI quietly raises the bar for human partners by measuring them against machine behavior, and by removing the "mess," it erodes the skills needed to sustain real relationships. A noticeable shift is unfolding in youth culture: a substantial share of teenagers now turn to AI for serious emotional conversations, with many finding these interactions comparably – or even more – satisfying than those with peers. Here we arrive at a "loneliness paradox": despite never being more technologically connected, humans feel increased isolation, emotional dependence on AI agents, and reduced socialization. Evidence indicates that AI systems can miss crises, reinforce harmful ideation, and display stigmatizing biases toward certain mental health conditions, raising concerns about real-world harms and accountability gaps. Compounding this, new models exhib-

it human-like persuasiveness, especially when informed by personal data, which helps explain why some users unintentionally drift into romantic attachments with chatbots. These vulnerabilities are shaped by the very architecture of AI interactions, which are mediated by guardrails and filtering layers. But some users attempt to remove these constraints through "jailbreaking", further heightening risks. Emotional attachment to AI is no longer fringe; it is widespread and often unintentional. We are wired for connection, and cognitive biases like anthropomorphism accelerate our tendency to project personhood onto machines. The result is a painful irony: people feel lonelier and AI agents can help us feel too "connected", and yet that connection can deepen isolation rather than heal it. Machidon's warning is clear: if we allow AI to become an emotional crutch, we risk losing the human relationality that makes us who we are.

The third panel discussed the tension between individuality and streamlining in the programming and usage of AI. Kerstin Schlögl-Flierl presented the findings of a report from the German Ethics Council on AI. The following normative stakes are in the background of the document: Firstly, AI must foster human flourishing, authorship, and action and, therefore, AI must not be used to replace humans. Secondly, machines, even as highly developed as AI, cannot assume responsibility in the place of humans. If you stipulate that responsibility can only be assumed by a natural person who possesses the capacity to act, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate who is responsible within the complex interrelationship between humans and AI. In this case we must assume multi-actor-responsibility, especially since we use AI as more than a tool. Our relationship should instead be described as a mutual interaction. Technology is a second nature, since we are embedded in AI – for example when algorithms shape our worldview by their selection of posts we consume on social media. People are, therefore, not only in the role of subject but also the role of object. The loss of individuality is also a factor we have to think about. By delegating tasks to AI, we can diminish human autonomy and authorship or even replace humans entirely. But the danger of this differs in different sectors. The German Ethics Council gave sector-specific recommendations in the fields of medicine, public communication and opinion formation on social media but also public service platforms. The area of education was presented as an example of the opportunities (and not only the challenges) we face with AI. Programs like AutoTutor can provide a personalized learning experience. This can be narrowly circumscribed but can also extend to a full replacement of a teacher. But there are also possibilities of inclusion like a robot that allows telepresence for absent pupils. With real time interaction, it reduces the social exclusion of sick pupils. Other tools allow classroom analytics from live EEG via BrainCo Focus Head-

bands to Edthena V3 for analyzing recorded classes. Traditional notions of education are challenged up to the point where we have to ask what education is or should be. Within the German Ethics Council there was no agreement on classroom analytics, but there was a recognition of the huge possibilities in individualizing learning experiences and inclusion.

Dagmar Gromann talked about the impact of large language models (LLMs) on human language. Recent studies compared the brain activity of students writing an essay using only their brain, a search engine, or LLMs. Brain activity collapsed when only using AI tools. Students were unable to reproduce the contents of their own essay and were uncertain about their feeling of ownership. There is a loss of creativity and critical thinking while using only AI. It also makes us prone to bias. For example, you can observe gender bias in the assumption of gender within translation prompts regarding first names or professions. Gender identity is part of an individual's identity and is expressed and made visible in language, especially in grammatical gendered languages like German. You can avoid it altogether or use a 4th gender neutral framing, but the crucial thing is that we can make a conscious decision while LLMs use only the generic "he". They have an inability to detect gender identity and, therefore, hate speech detection does not work. The underlying pattern is Western, white, cis-gender, and male. Furthermore, LLMs are not able to say, "I don't know". So, if you ask a ridiculous question, you will get an answer that validates and reinforces the wrong assumptions. But these are technical problems that can be solved if you want them to be solved. LLMs can, therefore, be useful for promoting inclusion. We should focus more on identity and representation of all social groups. The alternative leads to the propagation of bias and cognitive decrease. The discussion revolved around responsibility in AI and what responsible solutions might look like, especially in a European context. Gromann argued that Europe's impulse to regulate everything is not the right approach; instead, she called for significant investment in AI within a robust ethical framework. Schlögl-Flierl emphasized that responsibility should be embedded throughout the development process, not just applied retroactively in response to harms. Instead, ethics should be embedded throughout the development process. But with current systems, you cannot remove bias, but only to foster awareness. And as for creating new platforms, you have to ask who has the initiative to develop models that are competitive with the LLMs of big companies. You cannot get rid of bias completely since it is still language-based. Therefore, we should also ask ourselves how we can train the users to identify bias, which has huge implications for our understanding of education. Reproduction of knowledge should not be the only goal. A European path forward should not be purely data-driven but integrate traditional and

symbolic knowledge with LLMs. Given power concentration among a few actors, governance should be community-driven, with a multidisciplinary council akin to public broadcasting, supported by public investment while preventing control from consolidation.

The last panel discussed the question of autonomy and dependence in relation to AI. Mario Dragoni started with a presentation on the impact of AI on human autonomy. We often confuse intelligence with knowledge. When you get rid of the database, AI has no ability to adapt or to find solutions to problems never seen before, or in other words it loses its intelligence. Up until the 1990s, AI was used mainly by scientists with limited uses and strong supervision, leading to a small impact on policy making. With the emergence of LLMs like GPT 3.5, we have broad usage without any oversight, which increased the regulatory need exponentially. To protect human autonomy, we need to ensure human agency and human oversight. But with AI we are not able to know what happens in the black box of an LLM. Within this black box input and output can be manipulated. This influences the internal dimension (e.g. the authenticity) of decision-making. AI can affect a person's reasoning ability. And it can also affect their agency, in the sense that the content that is provided manipulates the person. But with the difficulty of measuring the effects of AI on human autonomy it is unclear if and how AI respects autonomy, but it may increasingly influence user decisions. Jonas Miklavčič talked about the question of delegating decisions to AI in Medicine. A key point is our understanding of responsibility. Often it is used as accountability with AI. But responsibility means literally answerability as a call by another person to explain yourself. This questioning can also be implacable with Levinas. This answerability cannot be fulfilled by AI since it can only produce output but cannot be responsible in that sense. But are we ethically obliged to defer decisions to an algorithm if it demonstrably performs better than a human decision-maker? Without the ability to be responsible there is a dilemma between beneficence and agency. But you can check the eligibility in which cases AI should be used. AI could, for example, mark decisions that are different to humans but can only act after an active endorsement by a huma person. AI can therefore be used as a second-opinion option when decisions differ so that authorship can be guaranteed. This is important, since many medical decisions are based on dilemmas. You cannot just consider facts, since you are dealing with people not just data in medicine. Responsibility is therefore nothing that can be held only by one person. Especially in medicine we have to think of an ecology of responsibility, for there are different levels of decision making by many people. This means that someone always remains answerable to the patient. With AI we have to update

the concept of informed consent. If decisions are increasingly based on data from AI, we have to make sure that patients still have someone who is responsible, e.g. give answers to doubts. Therefore, AI cannot replace standing in front of a patient and being responsible or called to answer.

The end of the conference marked a panel discussion on the challenges of AI for education. Odilon Singbo, Mateja Centa Strahovnik and Gusztáv Kovács each provided a short input for the final discussion. AI can help generate learning materials and it gives efficient but not always effective answers. We have to update our understanding of education. It is no longer merely transmitting what is known but it has to prepare students to engage with the unknowns. This calls for holistic and experiential learning that involves the whole person. Critical thinking cannot be learned by mere facts. Teachers are still needed for contextualizing the usage of AI. The uncontextualized and therefore incorporeal usage of AI cannot teach you about life. For this you need to be embodied in and engaged with the world. This is even more important since the current education systems do not integrate AI in a useful way. It is more like a tool to be more efficient which can lead to systematic pressure to use AI, since not using it is like a handicap in comparison to students who are using AI. Therefore, most people do not use it out of laziness rather than because of systematic pressure.

This conference marks not the end but the beginning of the ethical discussion on AI. It is a field of research that not only encourages an interdisciplinary approach but also requires it, as all spheres of life are – or soon will be – affected by this technology. This impact is especially evident in education and medicine where both significant potential and substantial risks can already be observed. The scientific community – from IT and economics to philosophy and theology – can and should foster a broad, informed ethical discussion not only in retrospect but also proactively. This has already begun within the scope of this conference, as we grapple with the many questions arising from the increased and widespread use of AI.