

Is the trust problem with AI actually the so-called “Problem-of-Many-Hands”?

The use of AI requires trust. Trust from those who use it, trust from those who program it, and trust from those who (have to) use it. Therefore, trust is one of the elementary requirements of any AI system that is ethically desirable to use and meets legal standards. Be it, for example, the EU AI Act or many other ethical standards on AI. But the question arises, why do we demand trustworthiness for AI and not for many other technologies? And is it even legitimate to demand trustworthiness in AI?

The answer to these questions can only be answered normatively philosophically. The talk will present an answer that elevates the questions to this normative level. The talk posits that we demand trustworthiness in AI because we are confronted with the so-called "The Problem of Many Hands" (PMH) caused by AI. But what is the PMH?

The phenomena that make it impossible or extremely difficult to hold someone reasonably responsible owing to the complexity of the circumstance and the number of actors involved is frequently referred to as PMH. Dennis Thompson, who most likely coined the phrase PMH in an article about public servant accountability, explains it as follows: "Because many different officials contribute in many ways to decisions and policies of government, it is difficult even in principle to identify who is morally responsible for political outcomes" (Thompson 1980: 905; van de Poel et al 2019).

Helen Nissenbaum tackles the issue of many hands in a more recent piece as one of the challenges to assigning accountability in what she refers to as a "computerized society." However, some of the obstacles she mentions are more generally applicable to current engineering and technology. She characterizes the PMH as follows: "Where a mishap is the work of "many hands," it may not be obvious who is to blame because frequently its most salient and immediate causal antecedents do not converge with its locus of decision-making. The conditions for blame, therefore, are not satisfied in a way normally satisfied when a single individual is held blameworthy for a harm" (Nissenbaum 1996: 29; van de Poel et al 2019).

PMH is to be brought into the age of AI. The talk will show to what extent AI inherently carries the PMH. At the same time, an ethical perspective will be presented on how the PMH can be tackled through regulation, standards, and norms.

Nissenbaum H. Accountability in a computerized society. *Science and Engineering Ethics*. 1996;2(1):25-42.

Thompson DF. Moral responsibility and public officials: The problem of many hands. *American Political Science Review*. 1980;74(4):905-916.

van de Poel I, Fahlquist JN, Doorn N, Zwart S, Royakkers L. The problem of many hands: climate change as an example. *Sci Eng Ethics*. 2012 Mar;18(1):49-67.