

# DATA, DISCOURSE & DEMOCRACY WORKSHOP SERIES

African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science

WORKSHOP:

**Democratizing AI: Addressing the Political Power Imbalance in AI**

**Professor Annette Zimmermann**

**25 September 9:00-10:30 CT/ 16:00-17:30 SAST**

ZOOM LINK: <https://zoom.us/j/92297618525>

The most recent wave of generative AI deployment has rapidly accelerated its pace over the past months. One politically and philosophically interesting feature of the current AI deployment dynamic has been that even tech industry practitioners, who used to be overtly hostile to any policy intervention aiming to curtail and possibly decelerate deployment, now champion various proposals for regulating AI. ‘Moving fast and breaking things’ is no longer the only game in town. However, this apparent shift in industry attitudes about the appropriate scale and pace of deployment does not negate the fact that the brute *ability* to choose how and when to deploy cutting-edge AI still lies primarily with a relatively small number of corporate actors benefitting from a significant concentration of wealth and power. Importantly, this creates a deployment dynamic in which technology companies get to dictate the nature and scope of AI deployment first, thus insulating them from meaningful democratic control, and putting citizens and governments in a position of merely being able to react *ex post* to industry decisions to deploy. In this talk, I defend the view that the question of which AI tools get deployed when and how is a fundamentally political problem on which longer-standing conceptual and normative resources in political philosophy can usefully shed light. In order to identify suitable solutions to this problem that align with core democratic values, democratic constituencies must regain control over decisions affecting deployment pace and scale. This talk critically evaluates competing possible strategies for achieving that goal.



Annette Zimmermann is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) and a Technology & Human Rights Fellow at [Harvard University](#). Before that, Annette was a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) at the [University of York](#) and a postdoctoral fellow at [Princeton University](#). She is a political philosopher working on the ethics and politics of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data. She has authored and co-authored papers such as “[Stop Building Bad AI](#)”, “[If You Can Do Things with Words, You Can Do Things with Algorithms.](#)” and [The political philosophy of data and AI](#). Her work has been published in journals such as *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, and *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. Moreover, she has consulted on policy for the OECD, the Australian Human Rights Commission, the UK Parliament, UNESCO, and the German Aerospace Center & Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy.



**Inquiries:** [pbenton@uj.ac.za](mailto:pbenton@uj.ac.za)

**ACEPS:** <https://www.uj.ac.za/aceps>

**Organiser:** Paige Benton

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