AI Ethics Field Guide – Field Guild Summary Final Draft

This project on AI and ethical concerns led us to examine a real-world case involving safety, security, and dual-use risks. In 2018, a woman was killed due to an autonomous Uber test vehicle striking her as she was walking her bicycle across a road in Arizona. At the time, Uber was testing out AI-driven self-driving systems in their vehicles, with a safety driver present, to improve road safety and reduce human error. The driver was distracted; the system detected the woman but repeatedly misclassified her as different objects and delayed braking. The vehicle continued to drive, ultimately hitting her, where she later died in the hospital. This case raises serious concern on how much control we can give AI systems. In safety-critical environments like public roadways, particularly when human lives are at stake, the consequences of failure are irreversible. Implementing systems deemed "safer than humans" into vehicles may seem helpful until the system fails to make proper judgments in real-world situations. This exposes tension between innovation and the ethical duty of care owed to the public. It's challenging to assess whether these systems are proving safer options for drivers or adding risks in ways we haven't prepared for, especially when long-term societal benefits conflict with immediate individual safety. It is difficult to hold someone accountable for accidents involving AI when companies, developers, regulators, and operators are all contributing. This creates a problem of distributed responsibility and moral accountability. This reflects the weaknesses in deploying and regulating these systems, showing the clear lack of proper governance and the urgent need for stronger ethical oversight and precaution.