

Two 3-year PhD positions in Ethics at the Institute of Ethics, Dublin City University (Ireland)

You are invited to apply for one of 2 PhD positions as part of the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Network, PROTECT** – ‘Protecting Personal Data Amidst Big Data Innovation’ (funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action grant agreement No. 813497).

Contact: Prof. Bert Gordijn, Institute of Ethics, Dublin City University (DCU, Ireland)

Application deadline: June 20th, 2019, 23:59 CET

Position 1: Ethics of the Quantified Self

Emerging tracking and monitoring technologies – supported by smartphones, sensors, social media platforms and cloud computing - allow users to gather all kinds of data on their activities, bodily functions, emotions, diet, spending habits, sleep, and health. To describe this practice Gary Wolf and Kevin Kelly coined the phrase the “quantified self” in 2007. In his TED talk in 2010 Wolf briefly addresses the variety of aims that people might intend to achieve by using self-tracking technologies, e.g. biometric security, public health research, marketing research, self-knowledge and self-improvement. Indeed, many people have an interest in self-tracking for various different reasons; so much so that significant networks of users and makers have developed all around the globe, sharing experiences in blogs, workshops, Meetup talks and the like.

The quantified self has also triggered ethical questions. For example, the seemingly boundless data gathering has provoked worries about data exploitation and privacy. When the individual digital personae, e.g. time series data on a person’s various states, produced by self-tracking technologies are juxtaposed against certain generic digital profiles (e.g. of a healthy or productive person), this might raise concerns around social pressure, exploitation, discrimination and marginalization, especially when the use of these technologies is pushed by employers or insurers. In the context of work-environments, for example, wearable tracking devices can be used to monitor and influence the productivity rates of employees, triggering ethical concerns about interpersonal relations and the proper use of technological power to influence people’s behaviour.

The aim of this PhD is to analyze the ethical challenges of self-tracking technologies in a specified set of contexts (e.g. a work or healthcare environment). Based on this analysis recommendations should be formulated for the ethical development and use of self-quantifying technologies. **The position includes two secondments.**

Position 2: Ethics of Nudging

Nudging was advanced in the political sphere and policy debates in 2008 with the publication of Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein’s *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. In their book Thaler and Sunstein advance the idea of libertarian paternalism whereby policy makers aim to influence people’s behaviour not by blocking certain options, or by notably altering monetary incentives, but by subtly tweaking the ‘architecture’ of their choices, thereby promoting desired behaviour patterns. As important contributors to the world-wide disease burden are associated with lifestyle issues (e.g. tobacco, alcohol, eating habits, sedentary lifestyle, unsafe sex), nudging has found many applications in public health. Nudging has also been applied in other policy areas such as consumer protection, recycling and sustainable behaviours, tax policy and retirement. Beyond the public policy domain, nudging can be used by marketers with the aim to sell more goods or services. It can also be applied in business management to improve productivity, increase safety and enhance wellbeing of employees. In addition to offline environments, nudging is also applied online. Targeted online advertisement, for example, is now a major use case, algorithmically personalising commercial persuasion by using digital personae constructed from social media activity.

However, where nudging technology lacks transparency, through complexity or by design, it might limit the user’s power to know how their behaviour is influenced, thereby violating autonomy and reducing agency. Digital nudging does not only affect online consumer behaviours but also occurs in other

contexts, such as social media and e-health systems. Big-data analytics and artificial intelligence are increasingly used to analyse behaviour patterns thereby facilitating more effective and personalised nudges. This triggers challenges when it comes to enabling more user awareness and scrutiny of nudges. The objective of this PhD is to analyze the circumstances under which nudging as a method of influencing choices is ethically acceptable. This analysis should yield recommendations for a specified range of choice environments. **The position includes three secondments.**

For both positions

You will have significant freedom to make the topic your own and select specific research questions, theories, and methods. We encourage innovation. Depending on your level of experience, we may require you to take some courses taught in our MA in Ethics programme.

The PROTECT consortium and project

PROTECT is an international, interdisciplinary and cross academic-industry training network hosted across Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain and Belgium. It is recruiting 14 Early Stage Researchers (ESR) to undertake research towards PhDs in the disciplines of law, ethics or computer science, with the common goal of Protecting Personal Data Amidst Big Data Innovation. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action (MSCA) grant agreement No. 813497.

Profile for both positions

You have an MA in ethics, philosophy, or a related field. In addition, you have/are:

- excellent philosophical and analytical skills
- interest in practical applications of ethics
- interested in ethical and philosophical aspects of the computer and information sciences
- good English language skills, both in writing and speaking
- good social and communication skills in academic as well as non-academic contexts
- able to work independently and willing to collaborate in multidisciplinary setting with project participants and partners from different countries and diverse backgrounds
- fulfil the definition of an Early-Stage Researcher (ESR) set by the European Commission: At the time of recruitment by the host you are in the first 4 years (full-time equivalent research experience) of your research career and have not yet been awarded a doctoral degree. This is measured from the date when you obtain the degree that formally entitles you to embark on a doctorate (either in the country in which the degree was obtained or in the country in which you are recruited, even if a doctorate was never started or envisaged). So again, you should not have a PhD at the time you apply, and you should not have had more than 4 years of full-time research appointments after the year in which you became eligible to become a PhD student in your home country.

Conditions of mobility of researchers

You are required to undertake physical, transnational mobility (i.e. move from one country to another) when taking up your appointment. You must not have resided or carried out your main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of your host organizations (i.e., Ireland for the 2 advertised positions above) for more than 12 months in the 3 years prior to your recruitment. So potential applicants who have carried out their main activity in Ireland since June 2016 are not eligible. Short stays, such as holidays, are not taken into account. Note that the mobility rule applies to the (first) beneficiary where you are recruited, and not to beneficiaries to which you are sent or seconded.

Our offer

The Horizon 2020 MSCA ITN programme offers an attractive and competitive salary and working conditions. You will receive a living allowance along with a monthly mobility allowance - and where applicable an additional family allowance - as well as funding for research travel, equipment, material and training. You will be supported by a supervisory team drawn from across the PROTECT network. In addition to pursuing individual PhD research, you will benefit from a rich interdisciplinary, international and cross academic-industry training programme. This will consist of secondments to

other academics and industry partners, local university PhD training programmes, and a dedicated PROTECT training programme to develop skills in interdisciplinary research, responsible research and innovation, public engagement and communication, research commercialisation, intellectual property, and winning research funding.

Your application should include the following information and documents:

- Full name
- Nationality
Contact detail
- Summary of activities in the three years prior to May 2019
- Summary of education
- A writing sample (for example, a copy of your MA thesis)
- A summary and table of contents of your MA thesis (if applicable)
- Examples (max 3) demonstrating your prior achievements in research, enquiry or debate, e.g. published papers, standards of policy contributions or MA thesis
- A covering letter explaining why you are interested in the position, what qualifies you.
The letter should also include names and e-mail addresses/telephone numbers of at least 2 persons for references.
- A CV

Applications and requests for further information should be sent to Prof. Bert Gordijn (bert.gordijn@dcu.ie).

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Shortlisted candidates will be interviewed by the end of June.