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The scenario of powerful artificial intelligence turning malevolent is a favourite of science fiction-- and one wonders if Google, Facebook, Amazon, IBM and Microsoft had similar thoughts as they formed the Partnership on Artificial Intelligence to Benefit People and Society, an initiative to allay fears on computer-controlled future dystopias.

As a blog post by Google's DeepMind puts it, its aim is to "advance public understanding of AI and formulate best practices on some of the most important and challenging ethical issues in the field." To do so, the partnership hopes to bring together both academics, non-profits and specialists in policy and ethics to “conduct research, recommend best practices, and publish research under an open license in areas such as ethics, fairness and inclusivity; transparency, privacy, and interoperability; collaboration between people and AI systems; and the trustworthiness, reliability and robustness of the technology.”

"This partnership will provide consumer and industrial users of cognitive systems a vital voice in the advancement of the defining technology of this century," IBM researcher Francesca Rossi adds. "One that will foster collaboration between people and machines to solve some of the world’s most enduring problems-- in a way that is both trustworthy and beneficial."

Of course, all the 5 founding members have famous research projects-- IBM has Watson, Amazon has Alexa, Microsoft has Cortana, Google built the first machine to beat a human player at Go, and Facebook has a long running interest in the field. However the clumsily-named non-profit lacks a couple of notable industry stalwarts, namely the infamously secretive Apple and OpenAI, the research outfit funded by Elon Musk.

Go Partnership on AI to Benefit People and Society