



Universiteit Utrecht

CENTRE FOR
ACCOUNTABILITY
AND LIABILITY LAW

Ucall Conference Announcement & Call For Papers: autonomy, algorithms and accountability

On the 9th and 10th of November 2023 the Utrecht Centre for Accountability and Liability Law (UCALL) will host its annual conference, on the challenges artificial intelligence poses for accountability, liability and law.

Adaptive or self-learning algorithms are increasingly common in our day-to day lives. The ability of algorithms to learn and adapt is essential for automating complex tasks, where human programmers cannot foresee every potential situation the algorithm encounters. The flipside of this self-learning capacity is that the process by which an algorithm comes to a certain output – how it makes “decisions” – can be unknown even by its programmer. Adaptive algorithms become “black boxes”, with a degree of autonomy that sets them apart from simple, programmable algorithms. This ‘autonomy’ challenges core notions of accountability and liability. Notions such as autonomy, attribution, due diligence and causality, which were originally developed with human actors in mind – humans that can explain their decision-making and account for their actions.

The central theme of the 2023 Ucall Annual Conference is how and to what extent such notions should be adapted to autonomously operating algorithms and artificial intelligence. We invite papers from all fields of law where notions of accountability and liability are relevant: international law, European law and domestic law, covering areas such as criminal law, administrative law, contract law, tort law, constitutional law and human rights law, examining the impact of AI, algorithms and machine learning on foundational doctrines of accountability and liability in those respective areas. We welcome thematic papers as well as multidimensional and interdisciplinary contributions.

Specific questions that papers can address, are for example the following: how to allocate and divide responsibility and liability between the designers of autonomously operating AI technology, the producers of goods that utilize such technology, and the end users of those products; how to deal with opacity (i.e., ambiguity about the operation of AI systems and its possible side effects) of ‘black box’ algorithms; and whether the complexity of AI, the expert knowledge required to understand their functioning pose challenges for judges and regulators: how they can be expected to govern/assess the function of technology that they themselves might not fully understand.

Specific or thematic papers can discuss the use of autonomous weapons and how this affects the accountability of superiors, and their duty to prevent or punish acts by subordinates; the existence, scope and content of positive obligations to prevent discriminatory outcomes when adaptive algorithms are employed in public governance systems; the use of AI for crime prevention purposes in criminal justice, and accountability for risk assessments made by or using AI; and the need for evidentiary presumptions and other procedural aids to help weaker parties in AI-related liability proceedings, such as those introduced in the proposed EU ‘AI package’.

How to apply

Please send your paper abstract, with a maximum of 500 words, before **the 20th of June** to UCALL-Studentassistent@uu.nl. The conference will be hosted in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Any questions regarding the conference or this call for papers can be put to the same e-mail address.

The **Utrecht Centre for Accountability and Liability Law (UCALL)** is a group of academic researchers within Utrecht University's School of Law, who have together set out to conduct multidisciplinary research on the boundaries and impossibilities of (own) accountability and liability in the Netherlands, in Europe, and beyond. Read more about [UCALL here](#).

Funding. We ask participants to travel using the most sustainable option, preferably by train. We do however realize that this may sometimes be the more expensive option compared to air travel. Therefore, there is funding available for participants whose travel costs are not (fully) covered by their institutions, to compensate the difference in costs. This funding is limited, and will therefore be made available in case of financial hardship only. If needed, we will make a selection of beneficiaries.