



A memorial tribute to Professor Jacques Berleur S.J. and his influence on people working with *AI & Society*

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I learned, earlier this summer 2020, of the sad death of Professor Jacques Berleur, S.J. Jacques was a man whose actions and activity, in Belgium, in Europe, and internationally, had enormous influence on the field of computers and society and especially—at various periods—insights into the roles played by artificial intelligence (AI). I join with many others in paying tribute to Jacques' work and life—especially his immense hospitality. I was personally much indebted to Jacques over the years for his opening up of countless new ideas and organisational doors.

Professor Jacques Berleur S.J.—Jacques (b.1938, d.2020)—was born in Namur (Belgium) on July 22, 1938. He received a 'Civil Engineer' diploma from the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium). In November 1961, he joined the Society of Jesus. At Fourvière in Lyon (France), Jacques followed the theology programme and was ordained a priest on July 26, 1971. He took up his post as Professor of meta-informatics, philosophy and religious sciences at the Facultés Universitaires Notre Dame de la Paix (FUNDP), the Catholic University in Namur. Jacques worked at the university from 1972 to 2003, focusing on the subject of Computing and Society. He held the post of Rector of the FUNDP for a 9-year period from 1984 to 1993. Jacques died on April 26, 2020, at the age of 81, at the Résidence 'Les Lauriers' in Namur. Jacques lived the busy life of an academic, teaching and travelling widely. He published more than 200 papers and books, and was co-Director of the Cellule Interfacultaire de Technology Assessment.

Jacques Berleur was known by many people for his intense involvement with the International Federation of Information Processing (IFIP). He joined IFIP in the 1970s, and continued that engagement until his retirement and for much of the rest of his life. In recognition of this commitment, he received the IFIP Outstanding Service Award (1988) and the IFIP Silver Core (1992). Jacques

was a fervent champion of Working Group 9.2 on Social Accountability and Computing (WG9.2), created in 1977, and was Chair of the working group from 1990 to 1996. He was particularly engaged in the working group's first conferences and its ground-breaking early proceedings, co-creating the notion of Information Society 'landscapes'. During his period as university rector, he established the IFIP WG9.2 Namur Award for individuals and groups making outstanding contributions with international impact of the awareness of the social implications of information technology. In the first instance, the award was given to Professor Joseph Weizenbaum—in his own right, a huge champion of the importance of societal, social and ethical implications of AI. Many other internationally noteworthy and eminent figures later too received the award. Jacques' energy and support particularly lay behind the establishment of the first-ever IFIP summer school, held in 1991 at Brighton University in the United Kingdom. Almost all the leading attendees stayed for the entire week much to the astonishment and pleasure of many of the school's young students, covering topics related to AI, security, privacy, and subjects of even greater diversity.

Jacques invested much of his energy into promoting ethics discussions in professional societies. As a result, one of the abiding interests of IFIP's Technical Committee 9 (TC9) on ICT and Society has been the attention paid to the need for an ethical approach to the work of ICT professionals. The details of this aspect of Jacques' life and work are written up in detail in a further tribute to Jacques which can be visited at: <https://ifiptc9.org/blog/2020/07/07/a-tribute-to-jacques-berleur/>.

Jacques' work was especially remembered on his retirement from the university when he also stepped down from a more pro-active involvement in the IFIP working group and task force with which he had been most engaged. The WG9.2 conference on *Information Society: Governance, Ethics and Social Consequences* was held at the University of Namur in May 2006. The conference proceedings were

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published by Springer in 2007 with the title: *The Information Society: Innovation, Legitimacy, Ethics and Democracy. In honor of Professor Jacques Berleur S.J.*

While this *AI & Society* tribute recalls the many details of Jacques' career and his long involvement with IFIP, he is especially remembered fondly by many of those whose engagement with computers and society, and indeed especially AI, began and/or flourished under his direction and with his encouragement. Jacques' publications, his international engagement—especially in India, Latin America, and South Africa—and his untiring dedication to computing social accountability and ethical conduct in the field of computing will not be forgotten. We are many who will always cherish our fond memories and pleasant reminiscences of Jacques' personal warmth, and his welcoming of guests to his much-loved city of Namur.

1 Selected bibliography

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