Engage.EU Certificate in Digital Transformation

Digital Ethics

Course Syllabus

Martin Kornberger

16 & 17 January 2026   & 19 – 20 June 2026

Course Abstract

Digital Ethics reflects on and intervenes in the zone where technological innovation, economic organization and moral responsibility overlap. At the interface between these domains emerge new questions, challenges and dilemmas of ethics: how does decision making change when AI-powered machines frame and structure the decision-making process? Who is accountable for actions when technology mediates decisions and enhances capacity to act such as in drone warfare? In how far are digitally mediated platform organizations responsible for actions of its users? How do trust and transparency ensure or undermine the legitimacy of digitalization? And how do we negotiate boundaries between surveillance and freedom in data-driven public and private systems? In this course we will focus on these concerns through (1) developing a vocabulary that allows to articulate challenges and dilemmas and through (2) enhancing our repertoire to act on these challenges and dilemmas. The course acts as bridge between ethics, technology and economy, providing tools for thinking about and working with digital ethics.

Course Objectives

- The course teaches students knowledge of the most recent research in the field of ethics and digitalization.

- Students will learn to critically discuss and decide on issues of digital ethics.

- The course provides students with the relevant knowledge, perspectives, and practical skills needed to lead responsibly in the digital age.

- System thinking competence: Ability to holistically analyse complex systems and identify, formulate and analyse sustainability problems

- Futures-thinking competence: Ability to anticipate futures states and dynamics of complex systems and sustainability problems and create visions of futures related to sustainability issues and sustainability problem-solving frameworks

- Value thinking competence: Ability to comprehend how complex systems evolved, function and might further develop, recognize the normative nature of "sustainability" and provide normative orientation related to sustainability issues

- Think critically about the conditions and consequences of digitalization for business and society.

Evaluation and Grading

Participants' grade will be composed of
- 40% Group assignment/presentation (team grade)
- 40% Reflection essay (individual grade)
- 20% Active participation and presence during class

Group assignment (40%)

The group assignment will consist of a presentation and a podcast (10 min) about one of the challenges the course focuses on. Three topics are already defined: a fourth topic (carte blanche) can be defined by one of the groups. Details will be announced in the lecture. Due date is our last session on June 14 2025.

The evaluation of teamwork is based on the following criteria:
- Argumentation: The essential information in the case is used to answer the questions.
- Analysis and conclusions: Convincing analysis and conclusions supported by facts and logical argumentation.
- Link to the course: Use of appropriate data management concepts and procedures discussed in the course.
- Presentation: Well-structured discussion with a clear flow and effective answers to the above questions.

Written essay (40%)

Students will write an individual reflection essay on the contents taught in the course. Details will be announced in the lecture. Due date is June 21 2025. Please submit essay via email to eim@wu.ac.at

Active participation and presence in class (20%)

Students' active participation in each session will be expected and forms part of the grade.

16.1.2026: 12:00 - 18:00

Course Opening: Introduction Digital Ethics

- Core concepts of digital ethics

- Relevancy for organizations and society, significance for research and science

Conversation 1: Foundations of ethics

- Conceptual clarification & definitions

- Frameworks and key ideas

1-3.30pm: TBC - Guest input Dr. Bettina Laugwitz, Director – Global lead of AI Ethics at SAP

4-5.30pm: TBC - Guest talk Prof Elise Berlinski, Neoma Business School, France

5.30-6pm: Concluding reflections

17.1.2026: 09:00 - 16:00

Conversation 2: Ethical theories: tools for thinking

- Approaches to ethics and morality
- Dilemmas, questions, problematizations
- Application of theories to digital context

Conversation 3: Doing Ethics

- Propositions to build (digital) ethical organizations
- Ethics in practice
- Managerial implications

12.00-1.00pm Lunch break

1.00-4.00pm Self-organized study

19.6.2026: 12:00 - 18:00

12.00-2.00pm TBC - Guest case study

2.30-3.30pm Reflection & discussion

3.45-5.00pm AI and Social Media: The QAnon Case Study

5.15-6.00pm Reflection & discussion

09.00-10.15am Challenge # 1: AI & decision making – group assignment

- Group presentations
- Problematizing decision making and algorithms
- Work in break out rooms
- Presentation and discussion

10.30am-11.45am Challenge # 2: Ethics of platform organizations – group assignment

- Group presentations
- Problematizing digitally enhanced organizational forms and responsibility of organizational actors
- Work in break out rooms
- Presentation and discussion

Lunch break

12.45-2.00pm Challenge # 3: Digital technology and surveillance capitalism – group assignment

- Group presentations
- Problematizing technology and power
- Work in break out rooms
- Presentation and discussion

2.15-3.30pm Challenge # 4: Carte Blanche – group assignment

- Group presentations
- Problematizing technology and power
- Work in break out rooms
- Presentation and discussion

3.30-4.00pm   Reflection, discussion
- Conclusion, feedback

Readings

Websites featuring interesting content, debates and further links:

https://www.moralmachine.net/

https://www.techuk.org/shaping-policy/digital-ethics.html

https://edps.europa.eu/data-protection/our-work/ethics_en

https://dataethics.eu/eus-digital-ai-and-data-strategy/

http://www.oxford-aiethics.ox.ac.uk/

https://www.ted.com/playlists/329/new_tech_new_morals

https://ethicsandtechnology.eu/research-static/

https://hai.stanford.edu/

https://mintlab.site/

https://ethics.harvard.edu/

https://uchv.princeton.edu/

https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/search?q=Artificial+intelligence

https://cyber.harvard.edu/

https://humancompatible.ai/

Bootcamp reading for curious minds

- Coeckelbergh, M. (2020). *AI Ethics*. MIT Press. See also https://philtech.uni-vie.ac.at/team/mark-coeckelbergh/

Readings for Conversation

- Allen, Danielle, Eli Frankel, Woojin Lim, Divya Siddarth, Joshua Simons, and E. Glen Weyl. "Ethics of Decentralized Social Technologies: Lessons from the Web3 Wave." Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics, Harvard University, March 20, 2023. https://gettingplurality.org/2023/03/18/ethics-of-decentralized-social-technologies-lessons-from-the-web3-wave/
- Ochigame, Rodrigo, 2019, The Invention of "Ethical AI". How Big Tech Manipulates Academia to Avoid Regulation. Available at the https://theintercept.com/2019/12/20/mit-ethical-ai-artificial-intelligence/
- Reid Blackman and Beena Ammanath, 2022, Ethics and AI: 3 Conversations Companies Need to Have, Harvard Business Review, see https://hbr.org/2022/03/ethics-and-ai-3-conversations-companies-need-to-be-having

- Thomas M. Powers and Jean-Gabriel Ganascia, 2020, The Ethics of the Ethics of AI, in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of AI* Edited by Markus D. Dubber, Frank Pasquale, and Sunit Das, available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jean-Gabriel-Ganascia/publication/348977714_The_Ethics_of_the_Ethics_of_AI/links/61cdc14ed4500608167a6fce/The-Ethics-of-the-Ethics-of-AI.pdf
- Winner, Langdon. Do artifacts have politics?. Daedalus Vol. 109, No. 1, Modern Technology: Problem or Opportunity? (Winter, 1980), pp. 121-136. https://faculty.cc.gatech.edu/~beki/cs4001/Winner.pdf

Video and podcast content for conversations & introduction to ethics:

- "Justice: What's The Right Thing To Do? Episode 01 The Moral Side of Murder" https://youtu.be/kBdfcR-8hEY

- TED Talk "How ethics can help you make better decisions": https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_schur_how_ethics_can_help_you_make_better_decisions

- On Aristotle's virtue ethics: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSLsUO6uK4M

- On utilitarianism: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIK3T6MRs2k

- On Kantian ethics: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOoJ9Cq3oKM

- Mark Coeckelbergh on his book AI Ethics https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_KyeqjEG6Y

- Jennifer Strong https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/in-machines-we-trust/id1523584878 Episode Encore: When an Algorithm Gets It Wrong

- Cathy O'Neil on big data https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2u_eHHzRto

Readings for challenge # 1: AI & decision making

- AI Now Institute 2019, DISCRIMINATING SYSTEMS Gender, Race, and Power in AI available at https://ainowinstitute.org/discriminatingsystems.pdf
- Ananny, M. (2016). Toward an ethics of algorithms: Convening, observation, probability, and timeliness. Science, Technology, & Human Values, 41(1), 93-117.
- Burrell, J. (2016). How the machine 'thinks': Understanding opacity in machine learning algorithms. Big Data & Society, 3(1), 2053951715622512.
- Elish, M. C. (2019). Moral crumple zones: Cautionary tales in human-robot interaction (pre-print). Engaging Science, Technology, and Society (pre-print).
- EU Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/ethics-guidelines-trustworthy-ai
- Mittelstadt, B. D., Allo, P., Taddeo, M., Wachter, S., & Floridi, L. (2016). The ethics of algorithms: Mapping the debate. Big Data & Society, 3(2), 2053951716679679.
- Véliz, C. (2021). Moral zombies: why algorithms are not moral agents. AI & SOCIETY, 36(2), 487-497.

Video content for challenge # 1: AI & decision making

- Nick Bostrom, https://www.ted.com/talks/nick_bostrom_what_happens_when_our_computers_get_smarter_than_we_are?referrer=playlist-new_tech_new_morals&autoplay=true

- Cathy O'Neil, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdCJYsKlX_Y

Readings for challenge # 2: Ethics of platform organizations

- Farrell, H., & Fourcade, M. (2023). The Moral Economy of High-Tech Modernism. Dædalus, 152(1), 225-235., accessible at https://www.amacad.org/publication/moral-economy-high-tech-modernism
- Fourcade, M., and K. Healy. 2013. "Classification situations: Life-chances in the neoliberal era." Accounting, Organizations and Society 38 (8): pp. 559-572.
- Kornberger, M., Pflueger, D., & Mouritsen, J. (2017). Evaluative infrastructures: Accounting for platform organization. Accounting, Organizations and Society, 60, 79-95.
- Prey, R. 2020. "Locating power in platformization: Music streaming playlists and curatorial power." Social Media + Society 6 (2): 1-11. doi: 10.1177/2056305120933291.
- Seaver, N. (2019). Captivating algorithms: Recommender systems as traps. Journal of Material Culture, 24(4), 421-436.
- Stark, D., & Pais, I. (2020). Algorithmic management in the platform economy. Sociologica, 14(3), 47-72. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/12221 .

Video / podcast content for challenge # 2: Ethics of platform organizations

- https://www.ted.com/talks/trebor_scholz_stuck_in_the_gig_economy_try_platform_co_ops_instead
- Series "The Playlist" on Netflix: https://www.netflix.com/at/title/81186296
- Series of podcasts on platforms: https://boundaryless.io/resources/podcast/

Readings for challenge # 3: Digital technology and surveillance capitalism

- Chayka, K., 2022, The Age of Algorithmic Anxiety, in New Yorker, available at https://www.newyorker.com/culture/infinite-scroll/the-age-of-algorithmic-anxiety
- Creemers, Rogier (2018): "China's social credit system: an evolving practice of control." https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3175792
- Doctorow, Cory (2020): How to Destroy Surveillance Capitalism. https://onezero.medium.com/how-to-destroy-surveillance-capitalism-8135e6744d59
- Liang, Fan, et al. (2018): "Constructing a data-driven society: China's social credit system as a state surveillance infrastructure." Policy & Internet 10/4: 415-453. https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.183
- Zuboff, S. (2019, January). Surveillance capitalism and the challenge of collective action. In New labor forum (Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 10-29). Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Zuboff, S., Möllers, N., Wood, D. M., & Lyon, D. (2019). Surveillance Capitalism: An Interview with Shoshana Zuboff. Surveillance & Society, 17(1/2), 257-266.

Videos / podcasts for challenge # 3: Digital technology and surveillance capitalism

- Shoshana Zuboff on 'surveillance capitalism', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QL4bz3QXWEo and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AvtUrHxg8A
- Nick Couldry on Data colonialism https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tcK-XIMQqE
- Kwame A. Appiah: Exploring Questions of Ethics and Identity: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yao9zb7PD2I

Martin Kornberger

Martin Kornberger is the inaugural Professor for Ethics at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, a visiting professor at Norwegian School of Economics and an adjunct professor at University of New South Wales, Sydney. Prior to joining the WU Wien in 2022 he worked and lived in Australia (University of Technology Sydney), Denmark (Copenhagen Business School), France (EM Lyon) and Edinburgh (University of Edinburgh). He has published over a 100 papers and a dozen books that explore question of ethics, organization and strategy – in short: ETHOS. His latest book is *Strategies for Distributed and Collective Action: Connecting the Dots* (Oxford University Press, 2022). Most recently, he has been ranked among the world's top 2% researchers across all disciplines and fields. He is an engaged researcher who works with global corporations such as the retailer H&M, investment firm EQT, energy giant Equinor, insurance firm Generali as well as public sector organizations (e.g. City of Vienna, Deutsche Bahn, ÖBB) and family businesses.

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