

ENGAGE.EU Certificate
Joint Programme in Digital Transformation

Digital Ethics

Course Syllabus

Martin Kornberger

7-8 February 2025 & 13-14 June 2025

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.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the students should be able to...

- ...apply key ethical theories and foundations of ethics in philosophy.
- ...apply ethics in digital spheres.
- ...name moral principles and associated values to be respected in the development, implementation and use of AI systems and other new technologies.
- ...list vocabulary to articulate challenges and dilemmas.
- ...manage challenges and dilemmas.
- ...practice ethics digitally in companies.
- ...describe decision-making in the digital world.

- ...interpret the regulations about data collection and usage.
- ...formulate ethical questions with regard to data collection and new digital technologies.
- ...interpret platform pricing decisions.
- ...analyze pricing and design strategies employed by platforms and the rationale behind them.

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 (max 10 slides) and a podcast (10 min) about one of the three challenges the course focuses on. Details will be announced in the lecture. Due date is our last session on 8 June 2024.

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 15 June 2024. 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.

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.

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/discriminatingystems.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=gdCJYsKIX_Y

Readings for challenge # 2: Ethics of platform organizations

Farrell, H., & Fourcade, M. (2023). The Moral Economy of High-Tech Modern-ism. *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>

Sessions

FIRST SESSION: 7 February 2025, 12 pm – 6 pm

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

Conversation 2: Ethical theories: tools for thinking

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

SECOND SESSION: 8 February 2025, 9 am – 4 pm

Conversation 3: Doing Ethics

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

1.00-4.00pm Self-organized study

THIRD SESSION: 13 June 2025, 12 pm – 6 pm

12.00-2.30pm: Guest case study: Algorithms and HR Decision Making

Sebastian Wieczorek, Vice President Artificial Intelligence Technology and Global Lead of AI Ethics SAP

3.00-4.00pm: Reflection & discussion

4.00-5.30pm: Guest talk by Elise Berlinski, Neoma Business School, France, “QAnon, technology and ethics”

5.30-6.00pm: Reflection & discussion

FOURTH SESSION: 14 June 2025, 9 am – 4 pm

9.00-11.00am: Challenge # 1: AI & decision making – group assignment

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

11.00am-1.00pm: 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

1.00-3.00pm: Challenge # 3: Digital technology and surveillance capitalism – group assignment

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

3.00-4.00pm: Reflection, discussion

- Conclusion, feedback

About the Lecturer

Martin Kornberger is Professor for Ethics in Management at the Vienna University of Economics and Business and a Visiting Professor at the Stockholm School of Economics. After receiving his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Vienna in 2002 he lived and worked in Australia (University of Technology Sydney), Denmark (Copenhagen Business School), France (EM Lyon) and Edinburgh (University of Edinburgh). In his research he explores strategies for collective action, new organizational architectures and their ethics. His latest book is *Strategies for Distributed and Collective Action: Connecting the Dots* (Oxford University Press, 2022).