

Engage.EU Certificate in Digital Transformation

# Digital Ethics

Course Syllabus

Martin Kornberger

15 & 16 January 2027 & 18 – 19 June 2027

## 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 20 2026.

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 30 2026. Please submit essay via email to [eim@wu.ac.at](mailto: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.

## Sessions

**15.1.2027: 12:00 - 18:00**

**12.00-13.00: Course Opening: Introduction Digital Ethics**

- Core concepts of digital ethics
- Relevancy for organizations and society, significance for research and science

**13.15-14.30: Conversation 1: Foundations of ethics**

- Conceptual clarification & definitions
- Frameworks and key ideas

**15.00-16.00: TBC - Practice input**

**16.15-17.15: TBC - Research input**

**17.15-18.00: Concluding reflections**

## 16.1.2027: 09:00 - 16:00

09:00-10:15: Conversation 2: Ethical theories: tools for thinking

- Approaches to ethics and morality
- Dilemmas, questions, problematizations
- Propositions to build (digital) ethical organizations
- Managerial implications

10:30-12:00 TBC - Practice input

12.00-13.00 Lunch break

13.00-16.00 Self-organized study

## 18.6.2027: 12:00 - 18:00

12.00-14.00 TBC - Research input

14.30-15.30 Reflection & discussion

15.45-17.00 AI and Social Media: The QAnon Case Study

17.15-18.00 Reflection & discussion

**19.6.2027: 09:00 - 16:00**

**09.00-10.30 Challenge # 1: AI & decision making – group assignment**

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

**10.45-12.15 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*

**13.30-15.00 Challenge # 3: Digital technology and surveillance capitalism – group assignment**

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

**15.30-16.00 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://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://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.univie.ac.at/team/mark-coeckelbergh/>
- Crawford, K. (2021). *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London

### 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://gettingplural.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](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](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](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](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](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](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 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](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](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-XIMQgE>

- Kwame A. Appiah: Exploring Questions of Ethics and Identity:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yao9zb7PD2I>

## About the Lecturer

### **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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