

# The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence

Summer 2023

## Professor

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Office hours: pretty much any time on Zoom

## Meeting Details

Days: MTWRF  
Time: 1:00 – 3:00pm  
Place: Zoom  
Course: PHIL 320-01

## Course Description

AI now shapes nearly every facet of our lives. It curates our social media feeds, nudges our shopping habits, matches us on dating apps, guides our commutes, and influences decisions about policing, sentencing, hiring, healthcare, credit, and more. This revolution unfolded so quickly (and quietly) that we’ve barely paused to consider its nature, scope, or consequences. The result? A wave of urgent moral questions: How might AI remake the world for immense good? What about catastrophic harm? How is AI used to capture our attention and steer our behavior? Do we have any obligation to resist? Should governments intervene (ban TikTok?), and if so, how? What happens when AI tools are used for surveillance by employers, militaries, or states? How AI tools expose our biases, and what should we do about it? Will AI trigger mass unemployment? What should be done for the displaced? Finally, what moral burdens fall on the developers of such powerful tools? By the end of the course, you’ll be equipped to wrestle with these questions—sharpening your own views and defending them with reasons and arguments.

## Required Texts

1. Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence*
2. Cathy O’Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction*

All other readings are available on the course Canvas site.

## Course Requirements

- Ethical Theory Quiz 10%
- Participation 10%
- 2-questions 15%
- Midterm Exam 20%
- 4-sentence paper / Proposal 5%
- Paper / Podcast / Video 20%
- Final Exam 20%

## Attendance

Attendance is required for both lectures and recitations. You’re allowed three (3) no-questions-asked “freebie” absences total—across lectures and recitations. No need to email me or your TA (no doctor’s notes, no funeral programs). After that, each additional absence (that isn’t due

to official University business) knocks two points off your participation grade. Your TA tracks attendance, so make sure you're counted. Use your freebies wisely.

### **Grading Scale**

A: 94 – 100    A-: 90 – 93    B+: 87 – 89    B: 84 – 86    B-: 80 – 83    C+: 77 – 79  
C: 74 – 76    C-: 70 – 73    D+: 67 – 69    D: 64 – 66    D-: 60 – 63    F: < 60

### **Office Hours & Accessibility**

I'm happy to meet with you during my office hours to discuss assignments, course material, or philosophy generally. Your TA is, too. I've listed our office hours and locations at the top of page one. Can't make those times? Email us to set up an appointment. Zoom is fine, too.

I'm committed to making the class fully accessible regardless of disabilities. If there's something I can do to make it more accessible, let me know or (if you prefer) have the Disability Resource Center reach out to me on your behalf.

### **Participation**

Participation begins by carefully reading the assigned text before each lecture. You'll then need to contribute to your recitation discussion: ask a question, offer a comment, take a stab at an idea. If you're shy, that's fine. You can earn participation credit later in the semester once you're more comfortable, or by visiting office hours (mine or your TA's), chatting after class, or engaging over email. You don't need to talk constantly in recitation to earn a high participation grade. Quality matters, too. Ideally, you'll aim for both. Sometimes you'll say something that doesn't quite make sense. That's fine. Philosophy is hard. Struggling out loud is part of the process. Make your best effort even if you're unsure. That's how you learn literally anything—trying and failing until you get it.

### **Chatbots: The Policy**

Submitting AI-generated work as your own is academic dishonesty and carries the same penalties as [plagiarism](#). If any part of your assignment is produced by a chatbot (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Grok), you will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities for review of your standing at Purdue.

### **Chatbots: The Policy's Justification**

Imagine a strength coach tells a client, "Do some deadlifts." The client replies, "Sure, but in the real world, we have forklifts to lift heavy stuff. So, shouldn't I be allowed to use one?" The strength coach should respond, "You don't get it. The point of lifting weights isn't to move heavy stuff from A to B. It's to build bodily strength—your capacity to move stuff around without technology. You build strength by lifting weights yourself, not outsourcing it to a machine. So, no forklift. Get to work."

Same for this class. I'm your academic coach. My job is to help you strengthen your thinking, writing, and speaking. The assignments are your mental workouts—strength training for your mind. If you ask me, "Why can't we use AI to complete our assignments? In the real world, we have AI to answer questions!" I'll respond, "You don't get it. The point of the assignments is

not to generate a bunch of text for your TAs to read. It's to improve your thinking, writing, and speaking—your capacity to do these things without technology. You build these capacities by completing the assignments yourself, not outsourcing the work to a machine. So, no AI. Get to work.”

### **Freedom of Expression Policy**

Students are encouraged to exercise their right to free inquiry and expression. Any idea that's relevant to the course content is fair game. You're responsible for learning the course material, but you're not required to agree with it. Your grade will reflect the quality of your academic work, not the positions you take. You may take reasoned exception to, or withhold judgment about, any view presented on matters of conscience or controversy. When you encounter ideas that you find offensive, immoral, or unwise, you are encouraged to engage them with reasons, evidence, and arguments. However, threats, harassment, or behavior disruptive to the learning environment won't be tolerated and will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students.

### **Course Schedule**

|               |         |   |
|---------------|---------|---|
| <b>Week 1</b> | June 21 | What's AI? What's Ethics? What are we doing here?<br>Shafer-Landau, "Consequentialism"  |
|               | June 22 | Shafer-Landau, "Kantian Ethics"   |
|               | June 23 | Bostrom, <i>Superintelligence</i> , Chs. 2, 3   |
| <b>Week 2</b> | June 26 | <a href="#">Can We Build AI Without Losing Control of It?</a><br>Bostrom, <i>Superintelligence</i> , Chs. 4, 6                  |
|               | June 27 | <a href="#">What happens when our computers get smarter than we are?</a><br>Bostrom, <i>Superintelligence</i> , Chs. 7, 8       |
|               | June 28 | Bostrom, <i>Superintelligence</i> , Ch. 9, 13   |
|               | June 29 | Schneider, "How to Catch an AI Zombie: Testing for Consciousness in Machines"   |
|               | June 30 | <a href="#">A.I. Ethics: Should We Grant Them Personhood?</a><br>Liao, "The Moral Status and Rights of Artificial Intelligence" |

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|---------------|---------|---|
| <b>Week 3</b> | July 3  | <a href="#">Sex Robots</a><br>Frank and Nyholm, “Robot sex and consent: Is consent to sex between a robot and a human conceivable, possible, desirable?”      |
|               | July 4  | No Class. Happy Birthday, America!  |
|               | July 5  | Strikwerda, “Legal and Moral Implications of Child Sex Robots”  |
|               | July 6  | No assigned reading. We’ll discuss your paper and review for your exam.   |
|               | July 7  | Midterm Oral Exams  |
| <b>Week 4</b> | July 10 | <a href="#">The era of blind faith in big data must end</a><br>O’Neil, <i>Weapons of Math Destruction</i> , Intro, Ch. 1, Ch. 3                               |
|               | July 11 | <a href="#">How Cops are Using Algorithms to Predict Crimes</a><br>O’Neil, <i>Weapons of Math Destruction</i> , Chs. 4, 5                                     |
|               | July 12 | O’Neil, <i>Weapons of Math Destruction</i> , Chs. 6, 7  |
|               | July 13 | O’Neil, <i>Weapons of Math Destruction</i> , Ch. 10, Conclusion   |
|               | July 14 | Castro & Pham, “Is the Attention Economy Noxious?”  |
| <b>Week 5</b> | July 17 | Castro & Aylsworth, “Is There a Duty to Be a Digital Minimalist?”   |
|               | July 18 | <a href="#">Are We Ready for Driverless Cars?</a><br><a href="#">Moral Machines Questionnaire</a><br>Nyholm, “The Ethics of Algorithms for Self-Driving Cars” |
|               | July 19 | <a href="#">Humans Need Not Apply</a><br>Smids, Nyholm, and Berkers, “Robots in the Workplace: a Threat to—or Opportunity for—Meaningful Work?”               |
|               | July 20 | <a href="#">Will Automation Take all our Jobs Away?</a><br>James, “Planning for Mass Unemployment: Precautionary UBI”   |
|               | July 21 | Sparrow, “Killer Robots”  |
|               | July 24 | Muller, “Autonomous Killer Robots Are Probably Good News”   |
| <b>Week 6</b> | July 24 | Muller, “Autonomous Killer Robots Are Probably Good News”   |
|               | July 25 | No assigned reading. Read, write, and study for your final exam.  |