

POLI 28: Ethics and Society

Fall 2021
Mon/Wed 3.00-3.50 pm

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Course description

This course examines the ethical and political questions that arise from the use of machine learning algorithms in a broad range of social and policy areas. Through case studies in criminal justice, the workplace, social media, care, sex, warfare, traffic and art we will reflect on the concepts of fairness, equality, freedom, democracy, power, privacy, property, moral responsibility, rights, and the public sphere and explore their changing meanings in a technological society. We will pay special attention to the relationship between individual ethics, political action and public policy.

Texts

All course materials can be accessed through the UCSD library's online databases or easily accessible popular media. To learn more about how to use the library's resources, see the Library Resources tab on Canvas as well as lib.ucsd.edu/get-started.

Assessment

Grades will be determined based on participation (20%), weekly assignments (10%), a midterm exam (20%), a 5-page paper (20%) and a final exam (30%).

The weekly assignments consist of two discussion questions to be posted on the Canvas discussion board. They will be graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis.

Attendance and participation

The course involves lively discussion. Attendance in lectures and discussion sections, active participation in discussions, and engagement with the readings are expected from all students and form part of the grade for the course. The course does not have a remote option.

Academic integrity

Any written work you submit for evaluation should be the result of your own research and writing. You must adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you receive any help with your writing, you must clearly acknowledge this assistance. If you are unsure about what constitutes academic integrity, you can find information at the following link: <https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/>

Course outline

Sep 27. Introduction: Ethics in a technological society

Sep 29. The ethics of statistical discrimination: Hiring and admissions

Is it ethical to use predictive algorithms in hiring and admissions decisions? What if these algorithms turn out to rely on group-characteristics such as race, ethnicity and gender?

- Jeffrey Dastin, "Amazon scraps secret AI recruiting tool that showed bias against women," *Reuters*.
- Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen. "Nothing personal: On statistical discrimination." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (2007): 385-403.

Oct 4. The ethics of statistical discrimination: Criminal justice

Is it ethical to use predictive algorithms in policing and criminal sentencing decisions? What if these algorithms rely on racial profiling?

- Matt Stroud, "Heat Listed," *The Verge*.
- Mathias Risse and Richard Zeckhauser. "Racial Profiling." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2004): 131-170.

Oct 6. Fairness

What are some different conceptions of fairness and how can they be deployed in thinking about the ethics of algorithmic decisions?

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 1-21.
- David Miller, *Principles of Social Justice*, Ch 8.

Oct 11/13. The ethics of social media

Should social media companies remove post or profiles on the basis of their content? Should individual users marginalize and exclude those whose posts they find offensive? Are the ethical norms appropriate to the democratic public sphere applicable to social media platforms?

- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Ch. 2
- Jon Ronson, "How One Stupid Tweet Blew Up Justine Saaco's Life." *New York Times Magazine*.
- Brianna Sacks and Katie Notopoulos, "Harvard Revoked Admissions Offers to At Least 10 Students After They Posted Offensive Memes," *BuzzFeed News*.

- Karen Hao, "How Facebook Got Addicted to Spreading Misinformation," *MIT Technology Review*.
- Marion Fourcade and Fleur Johns, "Loops, ladders and links: The recursivity of social and machine learning." *Theory and Society* 49, no. 5 (2020): 803-832.

Oct 18/20. The ethics of big data

Is it ethical for private corporations to own and share information provided by individual users as long as individuals consent? Who should own our data? Whose responsibility is it to address ethical issues that arise in the gathering and use of data?

- Benedict Rumbold and James Wilson. "Privacy rights and public information." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 27, no. 1 (2019): 3-25.
- Spiekermann, Kai et al. "Big data justice: A case for regulating the global information commons." *The Journal of Politics* 83, no. 2 (2021): 577-588.
- Antonio Garcia Martinez, "No, Data is Not the New Oil." *Wired*, Feb 2, 2019.

Oct 25. Surveillance and state power: Beyond ethics?

What new forms and concentrations of power do algorithmic systems create? Could the effects of power be countered by an appeal to ethics and responsibility?

- Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 195-217 (first half of "Panopticism")
- Bernard Harcourt, *Exposed: Desire and Discipline in the Digital Age*, Ch. 2
- Shoshana Zuboff, "Big other: Surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization." *Journal of Information Technology* 30, no. 1 (2015): 75-89.

Oct 27. Midterm

Nov 1/3. The ethics of automation: Work

What are the consequences of automation for the future of work and employment? Can a universal basic income mitigate those?

- Cynthia Estlund, "What should we do after work: Automation and employment." *Yale Law Journal* 128 (2018), pp. 254; 283-300 (Section 2)
- Nathan Heller, "Who really stands to win from UBI," *The New Yorker*
- Alex Gourevitch, "Limits of a basic income: Means and ends of workplace democracy." *Basic Income Studies* 11, no. 1 (2016): 17-28.

Nov 8/10. The ethics of automation: Sex and care

Is it ethical to rely on robots with care work? With sex work? How does doing so affect the nature of the work and its emotional impact on those involved?

- Amanda Sharkey and Noel Sharkey, "Granny and the robots: Ethical issues in robot care for the elderly." *Ethics and Information Technology* 14, no. 1 (2012): 27-40.
- David Levy, "The Ethics of Robot Prostitutes," in *Robot Ethics*, Lin et al. eds., pp. 223-231.
- Kathleen Richardson, "The asymmetrical 'relationship' parallels between prostitution and the development of sex robots." *Acm Sigcas Computers and Society* 45, no. 3 (2016): 290-293.

Nov 15/17. The ethics of automation: Self-driving cars and killer robots

Should self-driving cars and killer robots be banned? Or might they hold the potential to improve traffic and the conduct of warfare, respectively?

- Karen Hao, "Should a self-driving car kill the baby or the grandma?" *MIT Technology Review*.
- Andreas Wolkenstein, "What has the Trolley Dilemma ever done for us (and what will it do in the future)? On some recent debates about the ethics of self-driving cars." *Ethics and Information Technology* 20, no. 3 (2018): 163-173.
- Robert Sparrow. "Killer robots." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (2007): 62-77.

Nov 22/24. Robots and us

Nov 24. Paper due

Do robots have rights? How should we think of our relationship to them? How does our reliance on and interaction with robots affect our humanity and self-understanding?

- Joanna Bryson, "Robots should be slaves." *Close Engagements with Artificial Companions: Key social, psychological, ethical and design issues* 8 (2010): 63-74.
- Massimiliano Cappuccio et al. "Sympathy for Dolores: Moral consideration for robots based on virtue and recognition." *Philosophy & Technology* 33, no. 1 (2020): 9-31.
- Newton Casey "Speak, Memory," *The Verge*.

Nov 29. From ethics to aesthetics: Algorithmic taste-making

Machine learning algorithms are changing tastes in music, TV, books and art. What are the ethical implications of this shift? Are tastes and aesthetic values even subject to ethical evaluation?

- Thomas Hodgson, "Spotify and the democratization of music." *Popular Music* (2021): 1-17.
- Kieran Healy, "Digital technology and cultural goods." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 4 (2002): 478-500.
- Ed Finn, "Art by Algorithm," *Aeon*.

Dec 1. Conclusion