

# Topic 5: Ethics Theories, Concepts and AI



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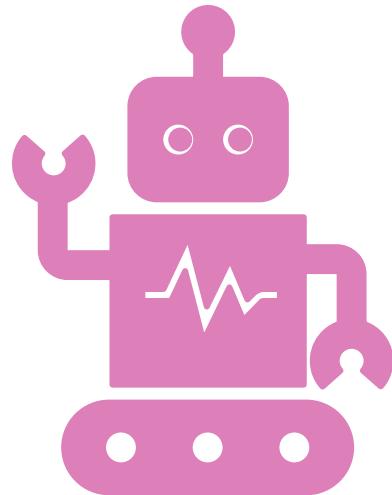


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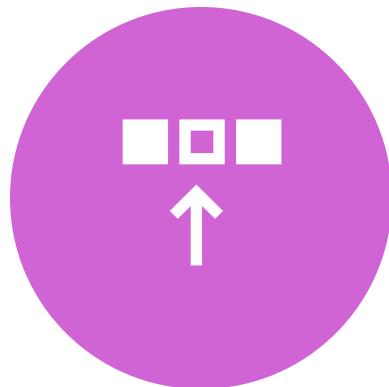
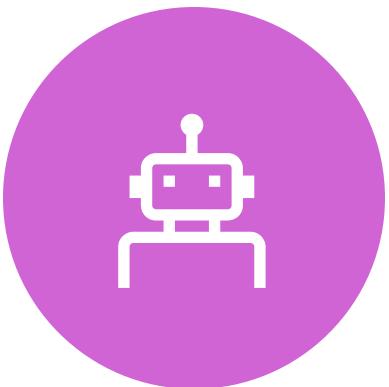


# Topic 5: Ethics Theories, Concepts and Their Relation to AI

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# This week's focus is on the following core learning objectives

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UNDERSTAND ETHICAL THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

UNDERSTAND ISSUES SURROUNDING AI TECHNOLOGIES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING AN ETHICAL PROGRAM FOR AI TECHNOLOGIES

RECOGNISE THE ROLES THE THEORIES PLAY IN AI DEVELOPMENT AND DEPLOYMENT



Technology **doesn't** have inherent values



It's **up to the people** who create and use it to consciously embed ethical principles in it

## 5.1 Introduction



## 5.2 What is ethics?

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Ehics is a system of moral principles that control or influence a person's behaviour, such as professional/work ethics, business ethics, medical ethics, code of ethics.

# Approaches people might take when they talk about ethics

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They can base their ethical compass on religions, customs, families, and friends

They can apply rules and precepts, developed according to reason

They can reject the “rule-based” approach but try to develop their moral character such that they are better equipped to resolve ethical dilemmas

# Questions to consider when thinking about ethics

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What is a **good life**?

Do we have **any obligations** to each other?

Is compassion a **virtue**?

Is abortion **ethically permissible**?

What is **privacy** and do people have a **right** to it?

What is **discrimination** and what **makes** it bad?

Do people have **equal moral worth**?

Do individuals have an **obligation** to engage in **self-improvement**?

Is it ever **ethically permissible** to lie?

Do corporations have **obligations** to **their employees**?



# Questions to consider when thinking about ethics and AI

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Is social media unreasonably incentivising or manipulating its users into clicking on ads?

Is it ethically permissible to use black-box algorithms to diagnose illnesses?



# How moral systems guide our behaviors: well-known ethical theories and their arguments

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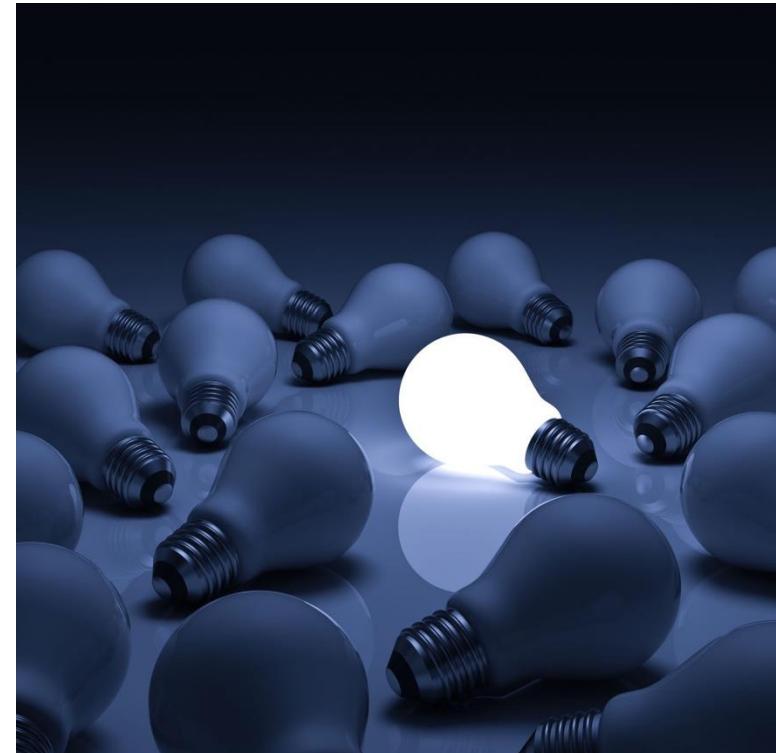
# 5.3 Ethical theories- Religion/Divine Command Theory

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Derived from Religion with the idea that “Good actions are aligned with the will of God”.

These are arguments that we owe our allegiance to our creator, and that “God” is all good and all-knowing and is the ultimate authority.

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” – the “golden rule”.



# Arguments against the Divine Command Theory

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There are **many holy books**, and they sometimes disagree.

Interpretation of scripture **not straightforward** and some moral problems are **not** addressed in scripture.

Appeals to God in a secular society have **little effect**.

Equivalence **fallacy**.

Based on faith and obedience **not reason**.



# Read and discuss

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“TikTok can track users’ every tap as they visit other sites through iOS app, new research shows”

Is the rationale and arguments of Religion/Divine Command Theory helpful for identifying and justifying the ethical issues of Tik Tok?

# Ethical theories - Enlightenment theories

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**Period of Enlightenment :** Cultural and intellectual movement in Western Europe; Emphasized **reason, analysis, and individualism** over traditional authority

**Historical Context:** Emerged after Europe's 30-year religious war; Culminated with the French Revolution; Concurrent with the industrial revolution and advancements in physics; Increased availability of reading material such as encyclopedias

**Enlightenment Critique:** Criticized reliance on tradition and custom; **Advocated for reasoned methods to determine actions;** Explicit belief in human capacity for **rationality** and **deduction**

**Role of Reason:** Rejecting blind adherence to scriptural instruction or tradition; **Argued for using reason to deduce what is right or best;** **Reasoning based** on first principles

# 5.5 Enlightenment - Deontological ethics

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**Action's Rightness:** Acting from duty is crucial for right action

**Importance of Motivation:** Rightness or wrongness determined by intention, NOT consequences

**Challenge of Rule Application:** Rules may not always align with moral intuition;  
Example: Stealing to feed a starving person – is it theft or compassion?

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# 5.6 Enlightenment - Consequentialist theory (i.e., Utilitarianism)

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Consequences determine the morality of actions



Rightness is based on increasing total happiness, while wrongness decreases it



Focus is on outcomes rather than motives



# Rule Utilitarianism vs. Act Utilitarianism



# Rule Utilitarianism

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- Applies the utility principle to **universal moral rules**
- Example: "If releasing a helpful worm improves computer security, it should be done."
- Challenges: **Unintended consequences** may arise from universal application

# Act Utilitarianism

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Considers the **specific act and its consequences**



Is only concerned with the **act**, and **pros**, and **cons**, of e.g.  
‘releasing the specific worm only’



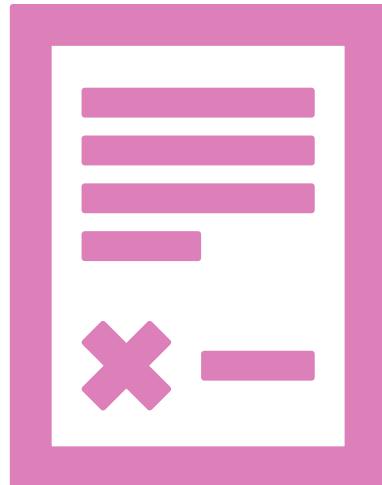
Evaluation is based **solely on the act's pros and cons**

# Questions to discuss

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“TikTok can track users’ every tap as they visit other sites through iOS app, new research shows” and answer the following questions

Are the rationale and arguments of Deontological and/or Consequentialist theories helpful for identifying and justifying the ethical issues of Tik Tok?



# 5.7. Enlightenment - Social Contract Theory

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# Morally significant rights

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**Negative rights** associated with being left alone that others in society must uphold



**Positive rights** which others must actively uphold

# Social Contract Theory

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framed in the language of rights

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assumes that people act in their self interest in the absence of common agreement

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aims to provide clear ethical analysis of important moral issues; and argues for the use of Law to enforce ethical behavior, as well as allows for civil disobedience against an unethical law

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rights are best determined if the rule-makers imagine themselves in disadvantaged positions such as poor, ethnic minority, low paid worker, unemployed, female in male dominant society, etc.



# Critique of Social Contract Theory

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- There will be some actions that may be characterised differently from different perspectives.
- There can be a conflict of rights problem – how is this to be resolved?
- Unjust for people if others cannot uphold their side of the contract.

# Questions to discuss

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“TikTok can track users’ every tap as they visit other sites through iOS app, new research shows”

Is the rationale and arguments of Social Contract Theory helpful for identifying and justifying the ethical issues of Tik Tok?

# 5.8 Enlightenment - Virtue Ethics

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Human should **focus on doing good** to reduce the problem of impartiality. Virtue is formed by making deliberate choices to engage in virtuous acts.

In time, the virtue underlying the acts becomes **part of one's character** and deriving pleasure from the acts is a sign you have acquired the virtue.

A person with many **moral virtues has a strong character**. An action is right if, and only if, it is **what an agent with a virtuous character would do when facing a moral problem**.

What makes a person virtuous have characteristics of productivity, bravery, courage, loyalty, honesty, moderation, generosity, tolerance, and fairness.





# The strengths of Virtue Ethics

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- encourages people to **focus on doing good** to reduce the problem of impartiality and allows them to be partial towards children and family
- understands that **moral development** and **moral decision making** occur **over time**
- recognises the **important role of emotions** - virtuous people who do the right thing at the right time for the right reasons feel satisfied doing good and upset when faced with difficult decisions



# Weaknesses of Virtue Ethics

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- Different people may have quite **different conceptions of the virtues** that help ‘human flourishing’
- As a society we **cannot agree on which character traits are virtuous**, or what a virtuous person would do in a situation
- Virtues develop from **upbringing, education and community**
- Virtue ethics **cannot be used to guide government policy** since it focuses on the agent
- It **undermines attempts to hold people responsible** for bad actions
- We are **not born virtuous**

# Questions to discuss

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Is the rationale and arguments of Virtue Ethics helpful for identifying and justifying the ethical issues of Tik Tok?

# 5.9 How should we think about AI ethics?

- Many companies **want to be on the cutting edge of emerging technologies** to stay competitive
- AI technologies are often being developed at such **breakneck speeds** that **few companies** are **pausing** to consider the **ethical implications**
- With unprecedented opportunities, the promise of emerging technologies comes with the **potential for their misuse**
- **Reputational Risks:** Damage to the organization's reputation; Loss of trust from clients and customers
- **Regulatory Risks:** Non-compliance with regulations; Potential fines and legal repercussions
- **Legal Risks:** Exposure to lawsuits and legal fees; Potential financial losses amounting to hundreds of millions
- **Difficulty of Regaining Trust:** Client and customer trust is difficult to regain once lost; Implies a significant investment of time and effort

# Companies...

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offering emerging technology products and services should keep ethical considerations top of mind if they want to ensure near- and long-term value



ignoring or downplaying the ethical issues associated with emerging technology risk multiple forms of damage



face reputational damage, legal damage, and employee churn



Amazon scrapped secret AI recruiting tool that showed bias against women; Robodebt failed tests of lawfulness, impartiality, integrity, and trust



When an AI ethical risk occurs, it doesn't affect only one person, it affects many people on whom it is deployed such as job applicants, Australian welfare system recipients

Deloitte (2022)

# Ethics: Objective versus Subjective Views

BLACKMAN (2022)

Subjective	Objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Fail to differentiate between their <b>beliefs about ethics</b> – what they believe to be ethically right or wrong, good, or bad, etc.- and ethics itself.</li><li>Misguided claims about <b>subjectivity of ethics</b> when they are really making claims about variance of people's <b>beliefs</b>.</li><li>Disagreements on ethics often lead to the assertion, "<i>your ethics is different from my ethics</i>," which can imply differing views on what is ethically right or wrong.</li><li>Ethical beliefs <b>change or evolve over time</b> but that doesn't mean that what is right and wrong changes over time.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Utilizing structured, <b>rules-based</b> approaches in ethical decision-making.</li><li>Leveraging tools like <b>AI ethical risk programs</b> to address ethical and technical challenges in AI.</li><li>Establishing <b>robust structures, policies, and frameworks</b> for ethical technology assessment enables swift and decisive action while aligning with organizational goals.</li><li><b>It is dangerous to view ethics as completely subjective because if it is subjective, then there is no responsible ethical inquiry because no one can possibly be incorrect in their conclusions and so much for Responsible AI.</b></li></ul>



# Summary

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Technology doesn't have inherent values; it's up to the people who create and use it to consciously embed ethical principles in it



Trustworthy and ethical technology must become the responsibility of those who make, deploy and use it



The only way to succeed is to place ethics at the centre of technology development, development and use

We will discuss  
this topic further  
in this week's  
seminars.

THANK YOU!

