Hi, I'm Tracy Wilcox,

course convenor for Data and Ethics.

Today I want to share with you why this course is different to other courses.

I came to ethics as a scientist like many of you.

I was used to being certain about things and having clear laws that

explained what was going on and predicted what might happen.

But once I was in the workforce and working in an industry where there were

many ethical dilemmas I started to think a little more about ethics,

and why it's different to so many of the scientific endeavours that we're used to.

As you'll see in this course ethics is more than just what we believe.

Ethics is not simply a private matter,

it's very connected with the kind of world we're living in.

Ethics is a way of thinking about issues.

It's best learnt through dialogue, action, and reflection.

There's not always one right answer and we don't have certainty.

But there are better justified answers.

There are answers that give us a good sense of what the right thing to do is.

In this course you'll practice differentiating between

strong and weak arguments and between sound and faulty reasoning.

For those of us who are used to the discourse of science or engineering the arguments

you encounter in this course may at face value look more like opinions and facts.

This is because unlike

the physical sciences in the complex world of social relationships,

ethics, and values facts are contestable and value-laden.

Even those facts that are gleaned scientifically.

I'm not being relativist here.

The scientific method requires us to constantly explore and test what we hold to be real.

Think about the once well-respected science of phrenology,

which was around in the 19th century.

Phrenology held that the size and shape of someone's head was

an indicator of someone's character and their mental abilities.

Phrenology was accepted with certainty by

scientists at the time and it was used to provide

a scientific justification for

the suppose racial and gender superiority of Caucasian males.

We no longer accept that a person's intelligence or

behaviour can be understood in terms of the bumps on their heads.

But let's pause for a minute.

If you look at the ways in which artificial intelligence is used,

say in predictive policing or hiring decisions.

There are some parallels to phrenology.

Another problem with a lot of people's understanding of

ethics is that they think that it doesn't really relate to the real world.

That it's more about high principles.

that don't matter when push comes to shove.

But in fact, there's nothing more practical than ethics.

When you go through this course,

you'll see that when you actually think about real situations,

you get to see that they're a little bit more messy than you may have initially thought.

Many of the values and beliefs we come to take for granted are based on

what's been called the certainty of a mechanical universe.

We can fall into the trap of thinking that the whole is no more than the sum of

its parts and that reality can be explored and improved by understanding those parts,

what we call reductionism.

We're going to be looking at all of these ideas in this course.

I want to take a moment to give you an overview of this course.

As I've said, this course aims to give you

the thinking tools to allow you to take a critical look at the world of

data analytics and reflect on some of

the impacts and consequences of the decisions we make when we acquire,

store, and use data.

The course will enable you to develop a vocabulary

for thinking about and acting on ethical issues.

We start our learning journey by taking a long hard look at how

the societies we live in are increasingly shaped by data analytics practices.

We think about some of the power inequalities that are being set up when data is used.

It's important that we do this because otherwise,

ethics might simply be seen as a nice to have,

an add-on that doesn't really matter.

This couldn't be further from the truth.

We can and should consider what we see from alternative perspectives,

even if this takes us outside our comfort zones.

Your first assessment is a reflective one,

which asks you to examine your own taken for granted thinking.

The next two weeks, will see us exploring and practising

some useful ethical thinking tools which

help us frame and think through an ethical dilemma.

Your second assessment will give you an opportunity to apply those thinking skills.

In weeks 2 and 3 will also do an exercise called news from a better world,
which ask you to think about the kind of world you want to be living in,
and what would need to be done to bring that better world into fruition.
It's a necessary antidote to the negativity that we sometimes encounter.
In week 4, we then turn to the governance and
stewardship systems and structures that support ethical data practice.
Week 5 takes us to the legal and regulatory systems that apply to the data world.
Finally, in week 6,
we come back to what a better data enabled world might look
like and we think about how we can help co-create it.
Your last assessment asks you to put together a privacy impact assessment
so that you come away from the course with some very practical skills.
In this course, you're going to be discussing ideas
and positions as you develop your judgement skills.
Critically reflecting on things you take for granted.
Asking yourself, if we can do it,
should we do it?
There's less certainty, more messiness.
That's why we want you to take the time to use
your journal to reflect on what you've been learning each week.
Ethical thinking requires weighing up different points of view.
We do these best in dialogue with others.
That's why the discussion forums are so important in this course.
The teaching team and I are really excited
about taking you on this learning journey with us.
We hope you'll come away seeing the world with fresh eyes and better equipped
to navigate the issues with which you are faced. Let's go.