

The issue of whether artificial intelligence is ethical.

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Ethics, the branch of knowledge that confronts moral principles and considers right or wrong, rarely faces new issues for debate. The issues of murder, objective moral standards and controversial stances like Hobbes's ethical egoism, have been ongoingly debated for centuries. However, the explosion of AI in the previous 5 years, has given grounds for new ethical debate. When considering if AI is unethical, we should weigh up whether its negative impact on autonomy, privacy and output of biased information, outweighs its seemingly positive advancements in efficiency and the remodelling of fields such as transportation and healthcare.

Professor of Empirical Ethics, Paula Helm, alongside Professor of Technological Philosophy, Selin Gerlek, make a compelling argument for the failure of AI on all ethical fronts.¹ They advocated for a reconfiguration of AI to ensure that new emerging technology is harm preventing and sincerely advancing the common good, as AI currently has been seen to algorithmically discriminate and is becoming tied to privacy nihilism. The first issue highlighted points to the indisputable amoral condition of AI, as it reveals that datasets lack diversity to the extent of targeting content based on race and gender. Surely this sets us back as humans, as we have developed as a race to know that prejudice is unethical, and that race and sex does not divide us. The latter issue, an expansion of a point made by philosopher Gertz in 'Nihilism and Technology',² sinisterly presents the possibility of AI depriving us of morale and democracy. The promotion of privacy nihilism from AI could encourage communities to stop fighting for their own say, as we may accept that the pervasive digital surveillance by governments is not worth trying to combat. The nature of AI seems to involve an agenda, which raises issues in its ethicality, as by knock on effect this compromises the use of our own freethought as humans.

Despite not being present-day, the work of philosopher, Michel Foucault, can be applied to the modern and rising issue of AI. This connection is presented profoundly in a neoteric PubMed article critiquing the human-centeredness of artificial intelligence.³

¹ Helm, P. and Gerlek, S. Cornell University. (2025). *Empirical AI Ethics: Reconfiguring Ethics towards a Situated, Plural, and Transformative Approach*. Available at: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2509.17727> (Accessed 08 Oct. 2025).

² Gertz, N. University of Twente. (2024). *New updated edition of Nihilism and Technology*. Available at: <https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/phil/news/2024/6/1566695/new-updated-edition-of-nihilism-and-technology-published-by-ut-philosophy-professor-nolen-gertz> (Accessed 08 Oct. 2025).

³ Ryan, M. (2024). PubMed Central. *We're only human after all: a critique of human-centred AI*. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11985563/> (Accessed 10 Oct. 2025)

Foucault believed that knowledge presents itself circuitously and endures epistemic changes. Therefore, the concept within AI of having an abundance of potential answers at one's disposal, would be majorly rejected by him. His philosophical understanding of 'epistme' promoted that humans are subject to analysis of themselves whilst also analysing the things around them. This philosophy is inadvertently subscribed to by many of us, as we follow scientific method, which entitles man to pose a hypothesis and repeatedly test it to form a fact. Thus, to accept AI and its capability of replicating our methodologies, we perhaps disregard the natural gift given to humans to be able to experiment and progress authentically. This undoubtedly reveals an unethical side to using AI.

The journal, BioMed Central, published an interesting article on medical ethics, containing the alternative belief that AI is in fact ethical, as it has been transformative in the sector of healthcare.⁴ The article holds that AI's capability to perceive and understand images and speech, means its problem-solving with heterogeneous data is like that of a brain. AI being that much more accessible and efficient with its methods, has led health workers to support its use and ethicality, as it allows for the opportunity for "detection and early intervention of infectious illness [and] prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease." With this in mind, it could appear selfish to rule out AI usage on the grounds of infringement upon identity and free speech, when there is the chance that it could elevate global health and potentially save lives as the article conveys. This aspect of AI in contemporary society, could persuade one that AI is ethical.

Healthcare is not the only field that AI has been perceived to have improved. There is a strong argument for the ethical use of AI due to the advancements it appears to have made within transportation. In particular, John MacIntyre's leading journal 'AI and Ethics', features an article focussed on the ethical use of AI for automated vehicles, on the grounds of moral frameworks such as augmented utilitarianism and biomedical ethics.⁵ This stance supports AI's implementation in our society, and combines Bentham's utilitarianism with deontology and virtue, which illustrates the positives of AI from a compellingly philosophical perspective. In this article, AI is presented as somewhat ethical: not a threat to safety or at risk of pursuing anything not instructed or unsafe, but instead revolutionary to our transport.⁶ This could be evidenced by reinforcement learning and behaviour prediction models, which are tools being used to ensure automated vehicles can perform all of what we are taught in real driving lessons, from stopping at pedestrian crossings to using indicators correctly, arguably proving that AI can be ethical and achieve a new level of efficiency for us humans.

Ultimately, this growing debate around the ethics of AI is a strict matter of individual priorities. If you are adamant on having a voice and possessing freedom, the threat to autonomy from AI would make it unethical from your perspective. Someone whose

⁴ Murphy, K. Di Ruggiero, E. Upshur, R. Willison, D.J. Malhotra, N. Cai, J.C. Malhotra, N. Lui, V. Gibson, J. (2021). BMC Medical Ethics. *Artificial intelligence for good health: a scoping review of the ethics literature*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-021-00577-8> (Accessed 10 Oct. 2025)

⁵ Gros, C. Martens, M. Aliman, N. Kester, L. Werkhoven, P. Springer Nature. *Ethical frameworks for automated vehicles: a systematic analysis and design from AI and Ethics*. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43681-025-00803-8> (Accessed 12 Oct. 2025)

⁶ Kargar, I. (2024). *Behavior Prediction and Decision-Making in Self-Driving Cars Using Deep Learning — Part 2*. Medium. Available at: <https://kargarisaac.medium.com/behavior-prediction-and-decision-making-in-self-driving-cars-using-deep-learning-part-2-54e41cc33d04> (Accessed 12 Oct. 2025).

priority is efficiency however, finding the quickest and easiest way to know something, may view AI as a simply extremely helpful ethical tool and pathway to knowledge.

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