

Technology, Users and Uses: Ethics and Human Interaction through *Technology and AI*

by Joan Casas-Roma, Jordi Conesa and Santi Caballé (eds.) (2023) Bradford, Ethics International Press, 376 pp.

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What happens when ethics escapes the philosophy seminar and takes root in circuits, protocols, classrooms, and kitchens? *Technology, Users and Uses: Ethics and Human Interaction Through Technology and AI* invites us to look closely at these encounters, where ethical ideas are not simply declared but built, coded, and lived. Edited by Dr Joan Casas-Roma, Dr Jordi Conesa, and Dr Santi Caballé – scholars whose work spans AI and technology ethics, computational modelling of moral systems, and the governance of learning technologies – the volume is framed as an “out-of-the-box” exploration of how ethics unfolds not only in how technologies *work* but in how they are *used*. This framing reflects the editors’ own interdisciplinary vantage points, which blend philosophical reflection, computing expertise, and a sensitivity to the ways technologies reshape relationships and social orders at multiple scales.

The editors frame the collection as a conversation about ethics in the age of AI, but it is less a single conversation than a polyphony. Across its chapters, ethics appears not as a fixed rulebook but as something made and remade in relationships between people, technologies, and institutions. In Section 1, *Ethics and Technology*, Joshua Alexander González-Martín (Chapter 1, p. 1) revisits the question of who bears ethical responsibility in technological design, arguing that responsibility is distributed among engineers, users, and other agents who shape socio-technical systems. Belliger and Krieger (Chapter 2, p. 33) challenge the long-standing thesis that technology is morally neutral and purely a means to an end. Drawing on the idea that technological development and design are socially constructed – shaped by exchanges among institutions, designers, and users – they argue that moral issues arise not only from misuse but also from the very functions for which artifacts are designed. Grimshaw’s (Chapter 3, p. 66) contribution takes aim at the dominant imaginaries of intelligence – Western, secular, male – and asks what it would mean to design AI systems around alternative cultural understandings. These early chapters signal a recurring argument: ethics is always situated, and to treat it otherwise is to import unexamined biases into code and infrastructure.

Ethics, as these early chapters show, is shaped by context and culture – a theme that deepens in the next section. Cultural plurality is one of the book’s strongest currents. In Section 2, *Technologies and Thought*, Oldfield’s chapter (Chapter 4, p. 99) situates anthropomorphism within a broader critique of how AI-based systems are deployed without sufficient understanding of their societal impacts. She surveys failures in healthcare diagnostics, educational assessment, criminal justice, recruitment, and consumer applications to show how human-like cues in technology can mislead users, obscure risks, and even encourage self-dehumanization. Hutcheon (Chapter 5, p. 135) examines domestic AI systems – smart home hardware combined with digital assistant software – through Ivan Illich’s concepts of radical monopoly and conviviality; she shows how black-boxed design in these systems undermines users’ sense of ownership and control by discouraging repair or modification, fostering learned helplessness, and narrowing the range of meaningful technological choices available in everyday life. Together, these chapters remind us that ethics is not only about avoiding harm but about cultivating forms of life worth living with technology. This emphasis aligns with participatory design traditions familiar to STS, as well as Lucy Suchman’s (2007) critique of “one-size-fits-all” human-machine interaction. The volume also stretches the moral circle to include non-human agents. Ricci (Chapter 6, p. 161) engages deeply with Luciano Floridi’s concept of the “infosphere” as a moral space where the virtual and the real merge, demanding an ontocentric ethics that encompasses both natural and human-made entities. Zandbergen (Chapter 7, p. 182) complicates this ethical expansion by juxtaposing antinatalism – the belief that bringing new human life into the world is morally questionable – with transhumanism, the movement seeking to transcend biological limits through technology. Through this contrast, he diagnoses a form of twenty-first-century neo-nihilism, a worldview in which humanity oscillates between refusing the continuation of human life (the antinatalist impulse) and seeking to engineer itself beyond the human condition (the transhumanist dream). Stelios (Chapter 8, p. 204) confronts the challenge of “artificial morality”: how, if at all, machines can be equipped to reason morally, and what risks arise when cultural partialities are embedded in their decision-making. Collectively, the chapters in Section 2 expose how technical design choices, cultural assumptions, and philosophical visions intersect to shape not only the operation of AI systems, but also the moral, social, and existential horizons within which humans and intelligent machines will coexist.

Where the theoretical chapters sketch conceptual landscapes, the case studies operate as “ethical experiments”. From Section 3, *Use Cases of Technology*, Jiménez-Alonso and Brescó de Luna (Chapter 9, p. 235) take us into the intimate world of griefbots – AI chat systems trained on the data of the deceased – where questions of authenticity, consent, and the commodification of mourning collide. Spaid (Chapter 10, p. 259) interrogates the promised “editorial turn” of AI text generators, showing how machine authorship redistributes labour from writing to curation and verification while risking epistemic opacity, stylistic homogenization, and diffused accountability – an incisive STS lens on authorship as infrastructure. DeFalco and colleagues (Chapter 11, p. 288) extend the book’s commitment to situated ethics into the domain of adaptive learning technologies. Rather than treating neurodiversity as a matter of accommodation, they reimagine it as a design principle that exposes the normative assumptions embedded in “average learner” models. Their argument that inclusion requires structural – not merely technical – change resonates with the volume’s

broadier insistence that ethics must be built into systems from the start. Arnold's (Chapter 12, p. 288) treatment of cryonics shifts the temporal horizon to decades or centuries, exploring legal ambiguities and social inequalities that would accompany the revival of preserved bodies. Camilleri (Chapter 13, p. 336) returns us to the near future of classrooms, arguing for the formalization of an ethical objective in teacher preparation for machine autonomy, where adoption, adaptation, and enactment cycles ensure that teachers integrate AI's benefits while guarding against bias and preserving equity, judgement, and care at the heart of learning. Paolillo's (Chapter 14, p. 364) account of social media in Sri Lanka's political crisis offers a sharp lesson in "digital colonialism", showing how platform moderation policies imported from the global North can fuel unrest in very different media ecologies.

One of the collection's most significant contributions is its refusal to remain within the narrow frame of mainstream AI ethics – often reduced to bias, transparency, and accountability (Jobin et al. 2019). By presenting ethics as an ongoing, situated practice rather than a static principle, the book offers a conceptual and methodological roadmap for tracing how values are enacted, contested, and reconfigured as technologies travel between design, governance, and everyday use. A key strength lies in the book's multi-scalar approach. The juxtaposition of philosophical frameworks with grounded empirical cases allows researchers to see how abstract normative commitments – such as virtue ethics in the infosphere (Floridi 2013), where moral reasoning is examined not as a top-down imposition but as an emergent property of sociotechnical assemblages. For researchers, the book's structure is instructive: pairing conceptual provocations with diverse case contexts can illuminate how similar ethical tensions – around autonomy, trust, or inclusion – are negotiated differently across sectors and cultures.

The collection also makes an important methodological intervention by foregrounding the role of "users" as active ethical agents. In many chapters, users are not passive recipients of technology but participants who repair devices, repurpose systems, and resist harmful applications. This offers fertile ground for new comparative projects. Scholars could, for example, follow how adaptive instructional systems are localized for neurodiverse learners in one context, while domestic AI is reconfigured for communal governance in another. Such comparative STS research would deepen understanding of how ethics is co-produced not only by designers and policymakers but also by the everyday negotiations of diverse user communities. For those working at the intersection of AI governance, design ethics, and cross-cultural technology adoption, *Technology, Users and Uses* provides both a shared vocabulary and a set of empirical prompts to pursue ethics as an evolving social achievement. It encourages methodological pluralism – combining ethnography, participatory design, speculative scenarios, and critical technical practice (Agre 1997) – to capture the full arc of ethical formation. By showing ethics in motion, the book models a research agenda that is both responsive to technological change and anchored in the lived realities of those who use, shape, and contest these systems.

In the end, *Technology, Users and Uses* is less an instruction manual for ethical technology than a set of invitations – to investigate, to intervene, to imagine otherwise. It asks STS to keep ethics in motion, to resist its reduction to compliance checklists, and to attend instead to the messy, contested work through which people and technologies come to matter to one another. That work, as this volume shows, happens everywhere: in the network, in the household, in the classroom, in the law, and in the street.

References

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