



Research Article

AI era and the New Ethics debates

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Abstract

Rapid developments in AI technologies have significantly broadened the scope of ethical debates, bringing the reassessment of classical ethical approaches to the forefront. This study aims to examine emerging ethical debates in the age of artificial intelligence based on the literature and to reveal the historical development of the concept of “new ethics” and the new meanings it has acquired today. The research was conducted using the document analysis method within a qualitative research approach. The study examined recent research published in the fields of AI ethics, digital ethics, cyberbioethics, and contemporary applied ethics, as well as seminal works addressing the historical origins of the concept of new ethics. The findings indicate that ethical debates in the age of AI have acquired new dimensions, including algorithmic justice, data privacy, explainability, accountability, moral agency, and human dignity. It was also determined that the ethical challenges posed by AI cannot be resolved solely through technical regulations; rather, they require an interdisciplinary ethical approach that considers technology, society, and human values together. The review further reveals that the new ethical understanding that emerged after World War II has expanded today to encompass areas such as AI, big data, digital health, and global governance. In conclusion, the age of AI has redefined the scope of ethical thought, transforming the new ethics approach from a merely theoretical debate into a fundamental framework for guiding technological developments.

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Introduction

The rapid proliferation of AI technologies has brought about not only technical and economic transformations but also debates that are reshaping the scope of ethical thought. In recent years, issues such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, accountability, and human oversight have raised questions about the adequacy of classical ethical principles in addressing emerging technologies (Sadiku et al., 2024). Moreover, AI has reopened philosophical debates concerning concepts such as consciousness, moral agency, free will, and human dignity, extending ethical discussions beyond the boundaries of applied fields (Joshi et al., 2025). As a result of these developments, researchers argue that existing ethical approaches need to be reinterpreted and new ethical frameworks developed to address the distinctive challenges arising in the age of AI (Velázquez, 2021; Panadés & Yuguero, 2025).

With the rapid development of AI technologies, complementary areas of debate have emerged in the ethics literature, including algorithmic justice, data privacy, explainability, moral agency, and the development of new ethical frameworks (Sadiku et al., 2024; Velázquez, 2021; Kudriashova, 2024; Panadés & Yuguero, 2025; Joshi et al., 2025).

AI technologies are transforming decision-making processes across numerous domains, ranging from individual life and public administration to healthcare and scientific research. This transformation has reopened debates not only

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about technical and legal regulations but also about the fundamental concepts of ethical thought. Although there is a substantial body of research on AI ethics, much of this literature focuses on specific issues such as algorithmic justice, data privacy, or explainability. In contrast, relatively few studies have addressed the historical development and theoretical coherence of the ethical transformation emerging in the age of AI within the framework of the concept of “new ethics.” This study contributes to this gap in the literature by considering the historical origins of the concept of new ethics together with the new meanings it has acquired in the age of AI. Furthermore, it is theoretically and conceptually significant in demonstrating that AI ethics is not merely a field of technological regulation but an interdisciplinary area of research that reinterprets the relationships among humans, society, and technology.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine, on the basis of the literature, the new ethical debates emerging in the age of AI and to identify the ethical issues around which these debates are structured. Accordingly, the study aims to explain the historical development of the concept of new ethics, evaluate the effects of AI on ethical thought, and analyze contemporary ethical debates concerning algorithmic justice, data privacy, explainability, responsibility, human oversight, moral agency, and human dignity from a holistic perspective. In addition, the study evaluates how AI technologies have broadened the scope of ethical thought and the directions in which the field of new ethics may develop in the future, drawing on theoretical approaches in the literature.

Method

This study is a qualitative investigation aimed at examining the new ethical debates emerging in the age of AI. The document analysis method was employed. Document analysis is a qualitative method based on the systematic selection, evaluation, and interpretation of written materials relevant to the research topic (Bowen, 2009).

The materials examined in the study consisted of 21 sources addressing new ethics, AI ethics, digital ethics, cyberbioethics, moral agency, algorithmic justice, and human oversight. The sources were selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria included direct relevance to the research topic, a theoretical or applied contribution to debates on new ethics, representation of both the historical and contemporary dimensions of the field, and the availability of full texts or reliable bibliographic information. Books, peer-reviewed articles, and theoretical studies published between 1949 and 2025 were included in the review.

The documents were examined through descriptive analysis. During the analysis, the sources were evaluated in terms of the historical origins of the concept of new ethics; ethical issues emerging in the age of AI; algorithmic justice; data privacy and explainability; responsibility and human oversight; moral agency and human dignity; and the expansion of the field of new ethics. The findings were organized under thematic headings based on common concepts and recurring perspectives, and similarities and differences among the studies were interpreted comparatively.

Findings

The analysis of the documents yielded various findings concerning the historical development, major ethical issues, and future directions of new ethical debates in the age of AI. These findings are presented below under thematic headings.

Algorithmic Justice, Bias, and Discrimination

AI systems may reproduce existing inequalities by incorporating social and cultural biases embedded in their training data into decision-making processes. Panadés and Yuguero (2025) state that algorithmic bias, particularly in digital health, may lead to inequitable outcomes among patients and therefore emphasize the need to preserve explainability and patient autonomy. Joshi et al. (2025), noting that the use of AI in areas such as education, healthcare, finance, and defense has reopened debates surrounding justice and human dignity, argue that ethical governance is necessary to ensure that technological decisions are aligned with human values. Algorithmic justice should therefore be evaluated not only in terms of the technical accuracy of systems but also through monitoring their effects on different social groups and preventing discriminatory outcomes.

Data Privacy, Transparency, and Explainability

The large amounts of personal data required for AI systems to operate have made concerns regarding privacy and individual autonomy increasingly visible. Panadés and Yuguero (2025) emphasize that data privacy, cybersecurity, and patient autonomy cannot be considered separately, particularly in digital health applications. In addition, the inability to understand what data AI systems process, how they process such data, and how they arrive at particular outcomes gives rise to the problem of explainability. Sadiku et al. (2024) state that the expansion of contemporary applied ethics into areas such as big data and AI necessitates the reinterpretation of classical ethical concepts under new technological conditions. Data use should therefore be evaluated ethically not only in terms of legal authorization but also with regard to informing individuals, ensuring that decision-making processes are understandable, and enabling systems to be subject to effective oversight.

Responsibility, Accountability, and Human Oversight

As AI systems increasingly assume active roles in decision-making processes, the question of who should be held responsible for erroneous or harmful outcomes has become central to ethical debates. Velázquez (2021) argues that AI technologies should be evaluated not only in terms of technical performance but also with regard to responsibility, accountability, and human-centered ethical principles. Similarly, Joshi et al. (2025) state that the use of AI in critical areas such as healthcare, education, and public administration necessitates the preservation of human oversight and the strengthening of ethical governance mechanisms. Therefore, contemporary ethical approaches recommend that AI systems should not become fully autonomous decision-makers but should instead operate within transparent and accountable decision-making mechanisms in which ultimate responsibility remains with humans.

Moral Agency, Human Dignity, and Autonomy

Kudriashova (2024) argues that AI cannot be regarded as a moral agent in the same sense as a human being because qualities such as virtue, intention, and moral responsibility are associated with conscious subjectivity. Nevertheless, AI systems cannot be regarded as ethically neutral tools, as they may shape human decisions and influence human behavior. Joshi et al. (2025) state that concepts such as free will, human dignity, and moral responsibility need to be reconsidered in the age of AI. Therefore, the central issue is not so much whether AI can be considered a moral agent, but rather the extent to which humans delegate their decision-making authority and how they can preserve their autonomy in this process.

The Emergence of the Concept of New Ethics

The concept of “new ethics” (*new ethic*) was first systematically introduced by Erich Neumann in his work *Tiefenpsychologie und neue Ethik* (*Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*), originally published in German in 1949. In the aftermath of World War II, Neumann argued that the mass destruction, genocides, and ideological conflicts of the period demonstrated the inadequacy of traditional ethical thought in explaining and addressing the problems of the modern world. According to Neumann, the “old ethic” glorified only the positive side of human nature while attempting to repress its darker aspects; this, in turn, fostered psychological processes that encouraged the creation of enemies, scapegoating, and the legitimization of violence at both individual and societal levels. Neumann therefore argued that the fundamental aim of ethics should not be the pursuit of perfection but the achievement of wholeness through the acceptance of both the positive and negative aspects of human nature. Thus, “new ethics” was proposed not merely to redefine moral rules but to develop a more comprehensive ethical understanding capable of responding to the new challenges facing humanity in the modern world.

The AI Age and New Ethics

The increasing involvement of AI technologies in decision-making processes has brought to the forefront the need to develop a new ethical understanding rather than merely applying existing ethical principles to new technologies. Floridi (2023) argues that AI has created, for the first time in human history, a new form of agency that separates the capacity to act from intelligence and therefore requires a new ethical framework that extends beyond traditional ethical approaches. This perspective has contributed to the transformation of AI ethics from a normative field concerned primarily with identifying the “right” principles into an interdisciplinary field encompassing the design, development,

use, and governance of AI. Morley et al. (2019) describe this transformation by noting that AI ethics research has increasingly shifted from the question of “which ethical principles should be adopted?” to “how should these principles be implemented in AI systems?” Similarly, Floridi (2023) states that contemporary AI ethics addresses principles such as justice, explainability, privacy, responsibility, transparency, and trust within an integrated governance framework. In this context, the AI age can be understood not merely as a period characterized by the emergence of new technologies, but as a historical transformation in which the scope of ethical thought is being redefined and the search for a “new ethics” is accelerating.

While Neumann’s post-World War II approach to new ethics offered a framework centered on human moral wholeness, the development of digital technologies has broadened ethical debates through new theoretical perspectives. Floridi (2023) proposes the framework of *Information Ethics*, arguing that ethical debates in the information society should not be limited to human behavior but should also encompass information production, digital environments, and AI systems. This approach maintains that ethical evaluation should extend beyond relationships among humans to include all informational entities within the digital ecosystem. Anderson and Anderson (2011), through their *Machine Ethics* approach, argue that AI systems can be designed not merely as tools that apply ethical principles but as systems capable of performing certain ethical decision-making processes. More recently, debates have increasingly focused on *Responsible AI*, which aims to ensure that AI is developed in accordance with ethical principles; transparency, fairness, explainability, trustworthiness, and human oversight have become core components of this approach (Dignum, 2019). In parallel, *AI Governance* maintains that defining ethical principles at the theoretical level alone is insufficient and that these principles should be made operational through national and international policy documents, institutional governance mechanisms, and technical standards (Floridi, 2023). These developments demonstrate that the concept of new ethics has evolved beyond an approach that merely reinterprets moral principles into a comprehensive theoretical framework aimed at guiding the development and governance of AI technologies and their safe integration into society.

Global Regulatory Approaches to AI Ethics

The implementation of principles concerning AI ethics has entered a new phase through policy documents and legal regulations developed by international organizations. UNESCO’s *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*, adopted in 2021, placed human rights and human dignity at the center of AI governance and identified transparency, fairness, environmental sustainability, and human oversight as fundamental components of a global ethical framework. The Recommendation also provides concrete policy guidance in areas such as data governance, education, healthcare, culture, social well-being, and international cooperation (UNESCO, 2021).

The OECD AI Principles, adopted in 2019 and updated in 2024, promote a trustworthy and human-centered approach to AI. These principles emphasize inclusive growth, human rights, democratic values, transparency, explainability, safety, and accountability. The 2024 update also addresses emerging areas of risk, including generative AI, information integrity, intellectual property, environmental sustainability, and the ability to override, repair, or decommission AI systems when necessary (OECD, 2019, 2024).

The European Union’s Artificial Intelligence Act, adopted in 2024, represents a comprehensive regulatory framework that transforms ethical principles into binding legal obligations. The regulation adopts a risk-based approach to AI systems and introduces requirements concerning transparency, human oversight, safety, data governance, and conformity assessment, particularly for high-risk applications. Thus, global AI ethics is moving from voluntary principles toward regulatory and accountable governance models (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024).

Expansion of the New Ethics Field and Future Prospects

With the development of AI technologies, ethical debate has evolved beyond a field concerned solely with problems arising from new technologies into a broader area of research that redefines relationships among humans, society, the environment, and future generations. Ball (2001), arguing that moral responsibilities toward future generations cannot be fully explained through classical understandings of rights and justice, suggests that technological developments have also expanded the temporal dimension of ethical thought. Similarly, drawing on the example of environmental genomics

and public health, Robert and Smith (2004) state that bioethics should address not only individual decisions but also the management of social and environmental risks. Chekar and Haran (2010) argue that new media, biotechnology, and digital technologies have transformed relationships among humans, the body, and the environment, thereby creating a need for a more comprehensive ethical approach that extends beyond the conventional boundaries of bioethics.

Examining the implications of AI applications particularly in healthcare, Brenna (2021) emphasizes that technological developments will increase rather than eliminate the ethical responsibilities of physicians and that human-centered decision-making processes will remain important. In parallel, Odero et al. (2024) argue that, alongside Western-centered individualistic ethical approaches, alternative ethical perspectives based on the Ubuntu philosophy and emphasizing community, solidarity, and the common good will become increasingly important in AI governance. Taken together, these developments demonstrate that new ethics is not merely a field responding to problems created by AI; rather, it has evolved into an increasingly broad interdisciplinary field of research that reinterprets the relationships among humanity, technology, society, and the future.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that, with the development of AI technologies, ethical debates have evolved beyond a field focused solely on new technical problems into an interdisciplinary framework that reassesses the relationships among humans, society, and technology. Issues such as algorithmic justice, data privacy, explainability, accountability, moral agency, and human dignity demonstrate the need to reinterpret classical ethical principles in addressing the challenges of the AI age (Sadiku et al., 2024; Joshi et al., 2025; Panadés & Yuguero, 2025). The fact that AI can influence human behavior without constituting a moral agent in the same sense as a human being has made debates concerning responsibility and autonomy increasingly important (Kudriashova, 2024; Velázquez, 2021).

Over time, the field of new ethics has expanded to encompass broader issues such as digital health, environmental risks, new media, future generations, and the common good (Ball, 2001; Robert & Smith, 2004; Chekar & Haran, 2010; Odero et al., 2024). In conclusion, future research on new ethics should focus not only on formulating ethical principles but also on developing practical models capable of integrating these principles into the design, governance, and use of AI systems (Floridi, 2023; Morley et al., 2019).

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