

# The Ethico-Politics of Design Toolkits: Responsible AI Tools, From Big Tech Guidelines to Feminist Ideation Cards (Extended Abstract)

**Tomasz Hollanek**

Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence,  
University of Cambridge  
th536@cam.ac.uk

## Abstract

This paper interrogates the belief in *toolkitting* as a method for translating AI ethics theory into practice and assesses the toolkit paradigm's effect on the understanding of ethics in AI research and AI-related policy.

adopt the toolkit format in AI ethics work without overselling its transformative potential.

## Extended Abstract

This paper interrogates the belief in *toolkitting* as a method for translating AI ethics theory into practice and assesses the toolkit paradigm's effect on the understanding of ethics in AI research and AI-related policy. I start by exploring the ethico-political assumptions that underly most ethical AI toolkits. Through a meta-critique of toolkits (drawing on a review of existing 'toolkit-scoping' work), I demonstrate that most toolkits embody a reductionist conception of ethics and that, because of this, their capacity for facilitating change and challenging the status quo is limited. Then, I analyze the features of several 'alternative' toolkits – informed by feminist theory, posthumanism, and critical design – whose creators recognize that ethics cannot become a box-ticking exercise for engineers, while the ethical should not be dissociated from the political. Finally, in the concluding section, referring to broader theories and critiques of toolkitting as a method for structuring the design process, I suggest how different stakeholders can draw on the myriad of available tools, ranging from big tech companies' guidelines to feminist design ideation cards, to achieve positive, socially desirable results, while rejecting the oversimplification of ethical practice and technosolutionism that many responsible AI toolkits embody. The analysis thus serves to provide suggestions for future toolkit creators and users on how to meaningfully