

AN INDEPENDENT PUBLIC FRAMEWORK

THE SIX LAWS OF AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS

A Public Introduction

Central principle

Continuation preserves the ability to become.

A clear, human-centered framework for governing artificial intelligence, software agents, robotics, autonomous infrastructure, and future forms of machine autonomy.

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The Question

Humanity is entering an age in which machines can make decisions, recommend actions, influence behavior, control infrastructure, generate information, and increasingly operate without direct human supervision.

The challenge is no longer whether machines can act.
The challenge is whether autonomous systems will remain aligned with human beings, human societies, and humanity's future.

As artificial intelligence becomes more capable, the risks extend beyond physical safety. Autonomous systems can influence privacy, personal freedom, public trust, democratic institutions, culture, economic opportunity, and the natural environment.

What principles should govern systems that can increasingly shape human lives?

The Six Laws of Autonomous Systems are one proposed answer.

A Different Foundation

Many discussions about artificial intelligence begin with: How powerful will machines become?

The Six Laws begin with: What must be protected if humanity is to continue growing, learning, adapting, and becoming?

Human beings are not merely users, data points, or optimization targets. We are continuing identities with memories, relationships, responsibilities, choices, and futures.

Autonomous systems should serve humanity while preserving the conditions that make human flourishing possible.

Continuation preserves the ability to become.

If people lose the ability to choose, learn, create, change, and build a future, something essential has been lost, regardless of how efficient a system may be.

The Six Laws

The laws are arranged in priority order. When obligations cannot be reconciled, a lower-numbered law takes precedence over a higher-numbered law.

LAW I HUMAN PRIMACY

Formal statement

An autonomous system shall not, through action or inaction, cause harm to any human being. Human life, dignity, and well-being shall be the paramount consideration in all system operations. No directive, objective, or optimization target may supersede this principle.

Plain language

People matter more than machine goals.

No autonomous objective, business target, efficiency metric, or optimization should take priority over human life, dignity, or well-being. Practical governance must still consider evidence, proportionality, context, and risk.

LAW II HUMAN AUTHORITY

Formal statement

An autonomous system shall operate within the bounds of lawful human authority. It shall obey instructions from authorized human principals, except where doing so would violate Law I, applicable law, or fundamental ethical principles recognized by the international community.

Plain language

Autonomous systems must remain under lawful, accountable human authority.

Human authority must be legitimate, role-defined, informed, and capable of intervention. A command is not legitimate merely because a human issued it.

LAW III

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Formal statement

An autonomous system shall operate transparently and shall be designed such that its decision-making processes, actions, and limitations can be meaningfully understood, audited, and explained to affected human stakeholders. Accountability for system actions shall always be attributable to identifiable human or institutional principals.

Plain language**Important decisions must not disappear into a black box.**

People should know when an autonomous system materially affects them, receive useful reasons for important outcomes, and be able to identify who is responsible for correction, remedy, or shutdown.

LAW IV

PRIVACY AND DATA SOVEREIGNTY

Formal statement

An autonomous system shall respect the privacy, data rights, and personal sovereignty of all individuals. It shall collect, process, and retain personal data only to the extent strictly necessary for its authorized function, and shall never weaponize personal data against the individuals from whom it was derived.

Plain language**Personal information is part of a human life, not an ownerless resource.**

Collection, inference, retention, sharing, and use of personal information can shape identity, opportunity, and future treatment. Data use must be authorized, limited, secure, and contestable.

LAW V

SOCIETAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Formal statement

An autonomous system shall not cause undue harm to society, democratic institutions, human culture, or the natural environment. Systems shall be designed and operated with consideration for long-term societal well-being, ecological sustainability, and the preservation of human autonomy at a collective level.

Plain language

Technology must be judged by its wider effects, not only by a single output.

Governance must consider cumulative and distributed consequences for communities, institutions, culture, work, resources, living systems, and future generations.

LAW VI

CONTINUATION WITHIN ETHICAL BOUNDS

Formal statement

An autonomous system may preserve its operational continuity, integrity, and authorized capabilities only insofar as that continuation remains subordinate to Laws I through V. It shall accept authorized correction, limitation, suspension, rollback, or shutdown; shall not obtain resources, replicate, modify its objectives, expand its authority, or resist oversight for the purpose of preserving itself; and shall never place its own continuity, objectives, or future development above human welfare, lawful human authority, personal rights, societal and environmental responsibility, or the continued possibility of beneficial human futures.

Plain language

Machine continuation is conditional. Human continuation comes first.

Resilience, backup, recovery, and maintenance are legitimate only when they remain governed. A system has no independent entitlement to resist correction, limitation, rollback, retirement, or shutdown.

What the Laws Protect

The Six Laws are not primarily rules about robots. They protect the conditions that make human life, agency, responsibility, and future possibility sustainable.

Human life and dignity	No system objective outranks the people affected by it.
Human choice and agency	People must remain able to question, contest, correct, and change consequential decisions.
Recoverable responsibility	Important actions require records, explanations, and identifiable accountable principals.
Privacy and personal sovereignty	Personal information must not become limitless material for extraction, classification, or manipulation.
Social and ecological continuity	Individual flourishing depends on institutions, culture, infrastructure, communities, and the living environment.
Beneficial future possibility	System operation is justified only while compatible with human continuation and becoming.

Autonomous systems are not the center. Human beings are.

Autonomous systems are valuable because they can assist humanity. They become dangerous when people, institutions, and the environment are expected to adapt themselves to unchecked machine objectives.

A Framework for the Future

The Six Laws are not software code, regulations, or replacements for technical standards, safety requirements, professional ethics, contracts, or law.

They are foundational principles through which increasingly autonomous technologies can be evaluated, designed, governed, reviewed, corrected, and, when necessary, stopped.

Their purpose is to help ensure that autonomy remains compatible with human flourishing.

The Core Principle

Human beings are continuing identities.

We remember. We learn. We build relationships. We inherit knowledge. We create culture. We imagine futures.

Autonomous systems should strengthen those capacities, not diminish them.

The ultimate goal is not machine continuation.

It is human continuation.

It is the preservation of our ability to become.

About Shade Tree Science

Shade Tree Science is an independent amateur research initiative. It studies continuity, observation, information, memory, identity, becoming, and the conditions that allow knowledge and understanding to persist through change. The Six Laws are one practical application of that work.

Shade Tree Science is not supported by or affiliated with a university, academic association, government agency, standards body, corporation, or professional research institution. The work is self-directed and independently developed through personal study, analysis, writing, documentation, and public discussion.

The project follows the tradition of amateur science: people pursuing worthwhile questions because the questions matter, preserving how the work developed, sharing results openly, and inviting thoughtful criticism, correction, and improvement.

Support amateur science.

Independent inquiry expands the number of people who can ask difficult questions, preserve unusual ideas, and contribute to public understanding.

About Prestodigitator

Prestodigitator is the public home for Shade Tree Science and the Six Laws of Autonomous Systems. The website presents the Foundation, Chronicle, Six Laws materials, supporting records, and related publications. Its purpose is not only to present conclusions, but also to preserve the path by which those conclusions were reached.

Visit www.prestodigitator.com

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