

ETHICS IN A TECHNOLOGICAL AGE (SAMPLE SYLLABUS)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS

Advances in technology have taken place at such a rapid rate that it is tempting to adopt the latest practices and norms without reflection. But as philosophers have pointed out, new technology raises new questions, or old questions in new forms, about how we ought to live, what social structures and institutions should look like, and what sorts of advances are desirable. In this course we will look at philosophical questions about how technology impacts social norms, whether technology is value-neutral, what practical challenges to living well together are presented by particular technological developments, and how we should respond to those challenges.

This course has four main goals:

- Become familiar with how philosophers have approached the subject of technology from an ethical perspective
- Learn and understand the arguments they make for their positions
- Practice using philosophical tools to think about and evaluate the arguments both individually and with others
- Reflect critically about the upshot of these ideas for how we ought to live in a technologically advanced age

The readings, class discussions, and assignments are designed to help you meet these goals.

REQUIRED READINGS

Readings will be made available through the library online reserve.
(For references, see course bibliography)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Group Presentation. You will be required to participate in one group presentation during the semester. Each group will prepare a 10-15 minute presentation to give in discussion section on a current issue that pertains to a passage from the readings for that week. The presentation should explain an idea or an argument from the readings, introduce a current issue, and then use the issue to support, challenge, or problematize the idea or argument in the text under consideration.

Short Paper Assignments. Throughout the course of the semester, you will write **3** short papers from 800-1000 words responding to the prompt of your choice. Each of the prompts will ask you to identify an argument from one of the readings and answer the following questions:

- What is the argument saying?
- How does it work?
- What is your evidence for thinking this is what the author means?
- Does the argument succeed? If not, why not? If so, what is an implication of the conclusion?

Papers are due on Friday week 4, week 8, and week 12. Please save your papers in Word format (as a .doc or .docx file) and use your university ID number and the paper number as the name of the document (e.g. "111222333 paper 1"). Submit papers to the online grading system no later than 11:59 pm on the due date.

Class Participation. One of the goals of the course is to develop the ability to reason well together. For us to accomplish this goal, everyone's voice needs to be heard. You'll be expected to have read carefully for class so you can offer your own understanding of the readings aloud. You'll also be expected to listen to others, appreciate their unique insights, and engage with them in discussion. Excellent class participation consists in thoughtful and respectful engagement with others in discussion and being prepared to offer your own reasoned views about the text.

Final Paper Project. For the final paper, you will write a 1200-1450 word essay defending an original thesis about an issue in the ethics of technology we discussed in the course. You can offer your own novel defense of a view from the readings, critique a view from the readings, or develop your own line of argument that attends to related literature we read in the course.

You will turn in the first draft of your paper to a classmate at least two weeks before the due date of the paper. Then, each of you will meet to discuss the other's paper and will give written comments on the paper. The final draft, along with the written comments from your peer, will be turned in to me on the due date for the final.

Assessment. The final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Short paper 1	20%
Short paper 2	20%
Short paper 3	20%
Participation	10%
Final Paper Project	30%

READING SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

Week 1: Conceptions of technology

Winner, "Techne and Politeia: The Technical Conscitution of Society"
Jurgen Habermas, "Technology and Science As Ideology"

Week 2: The neutrality thesis and its opponents

J.C. Pitt, *Thinking About Technology*, selections

Martin Heidegger, "The Turning"

Week 3: Social and individual ethics of computer use

Bernd Carsten Stahl, "Social Issues in Computer Ethics"

D.G. Johnson, "Computer Ethics"

Week 4: Artificial intelligence, computers, and agency

Daniel Dennett, "When HAL Kills, Who's To Blame?"

D.G. Johnson, "Computer Systems: Moral Entities But Not Moral Agents"

Luciano Floridi and J.W. Sanders, "On the Morality of Artificial Agents"

Week 5: Applied issues of computer ethics

John Weckert and Adam Henschke, "Computer Ethics and Applied Contexts"

"Her" (watch movie)

Week 6: Information ethics

Luciano Floridi, "Ethics After the Information Revolution"

Judy Anderson, "Intellectual Property: Fee or Free?"

Week 7: Engineering ethics

Michael Davis, "An Historical Preface to Engineering Ethics"

Harris, C. E., M. S. Pritchard, and M. J. Rabins, *Engineering ethics: concepts and cases* selections

Week 8: Biotechnology and its ethical ramifications

Jonathan Moreno and Dominic Sisti, "Biomedical Research Ethics: Landmark Cases, Scandals, and Conceptual Shifts"

Nick Bostrom, "Smart Policy: Cognitive Enhancement and the Public Interest"

Week 9: Distributing responsibility

N. Doorn, "Responsibility Ascriptions in Technology Development and Engineering"

D.G. Johnson and T.M. Powers, "Computer Systems and Responsibility: A Normative Look at Technological Complexity"

Week 10: Taking responsibility

H. Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, selections

Michael Davis, "Ain't No One Here But Us Social Forces: Constructing the Professional Responsibility of Engineers"

Week 10: Developing professional codes of ethics

Michael Davis, "Getting Started: Helping a New Profession Develop an Ethics Program"

B. Fairweather, "No PAPA: Why Incomplete Codes of Ethics are Worse than None at all"

Week 11: Changing the norms of work

Michael Crawford, *Shop Class As Soul Craft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*,
selections

Richard De George, "Business, the Digital Divide, and the Changing Nature of Work"

Week 12: Does technology change morality?

Keulartz, Pragmatist Ethics for a Technological Culture 2002

Beauchamp, "Medical Ethics in the Age of Technology"

R.E. McGinn, "What's Different, Ethically, About Nanotechnology?"

Week 13: wiggle room/catch-up

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