PHIL/ENGR 265: Ethics, Technology, and Value
Section 49474R
Spring 2023
M/W 5:00-6:20

Instructors

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Course Description

Engineering and technology affect every aspect of our lives, from communication and transportation to commerce, healthcare and politics. Thus, technologies have profound ethical implications that everyone who develops or employs technology has a responsibility to consider. In this course, we'll be exploring the central ethical issues surrounding technology. We'll consider very general questions about the nature of technology, including questions about the values that are embedded in technology, as well as questions about our control over technology and its development. We'll examine various theoretical frameworks that philosophers have developed for answering ethical questions, and we'll consider the problems facing these frameworks. And we'll consider pressing ethical questions that are raised by particular kinds of technology, such as social media, biomedical technology, and artificial intelligence.

Learning Objectives

In this course, students will develop their abilities to
- Think critically about the interrelationships between technology and society;
- Identify ethical issues related to the development and implementation of technology;
- Understand and engage with a range of moral theories and philosophical concepts;
- Use these theories and concepts to analyze and develop arguments about the ethical issues in technology;
- Write and speak clearly and persuasively.

Prerequisite(s): None
Co-Requisite(s): None
Concurrent Enrollment: None
Recommended Preparation: None

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

All readings will be available on Perusall, which can be accessed via Blackboard.

Grading Breakdown

The grade distribution is as follows:

Perusall readings	20%
Critical responses (6)	25%
Midterm essay	20%
Final essay	25%
Participation	10%

Written Work and Participation

Perusall
Students will use the online platform Perusall to engage with course readings both individually and collaboratively. Perusall promotes active reading and discussion of the texts. To access Perusall through Blackboard, click "Perusal" on the left-hand navigation menu. Then click the Assignments tab in Perusall to access the course readings and raise comments, questions, and interact with other students' contributions. Annotations are scored on their level of engagement with the text and their level of interaction with other students' posts. Perusall contributions are due by 4:00 p.m. the day the reading is scheduled. The lowest Perusall grade will be dropped.

Critical responses

At the end of every other week (depending on the student's last name–see schedule of classes), students will submit a one page (double-spaced) critical response to one of the readings or to a prompt given by the instructors. The paragraphs will be submitted on Turnitin for a grade. **Critical responses are due Fridays at 11:59 p.m.**

Midterm and final essays
There will be two short argumentative essays: one midterm and one final. Essays will be 4-5 pages in length, in which the students will articulate and defend their own position on one of the topics discussed in the course.

Participation
Both lectures and discussion sections are designed to be interactive; therefore, students are expected to participate in both lectures and discussion sessions: at least one substantive contribution to each discussion session and several contributions over the semester to the lectures.

Lateness Policy

Unless otherwise directed, written assignments will be submitted through Turnitin as PDFs. Late Perusall assignments will be penalized on a declining scale for two weeks. The critical responses and midterm essay will be penalized one third of a letter grade the first day it is late and one third of a letter grade every two days thereafter.

Attendance

Attendance will be taken in all lectures and will affect the participation grade. All classes will be held in person, no remote option. If you must miss class, please consult Blackboard and Perusall for course materials and if needed contact a classmate and/or your TA.

Course Schedule

All readings are available on Perusall. Topics and readings are subject to change. Bring the reading to class on the days indicated. We will never assign more than 60 pages of reading in a week.

Unless otherwise specified, Perusall comments are due by 4:00 p.m. on the day scheduled. Note that annotations are due before, not after, the reading is discussed in class.

Unless otherwise specified, critical response paragraphs are due, depending on the first initial of your last name, on alternating Fridays at 11:59 p.m.

Topics and readings are subject to change.

Week 1	M 1/9	*Introduction to class* ChatGPT
	W 1/11	ChatGPT, continued Academic integrity and natural language processors
Week 2	M 1/16	Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday−no class
		Unit 1: Technology and the Environment
Critical response #1 (always due Friday): A-L	W 1/18	*Climate change and collective action* Reading: Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations"
Week 3	M 1/23	*Climate change and moral theory* Reading: Parfit, "Five Mistakes in Moral Mathematics"
Critical response #1 (always due Friday): M-Z	W 1/25	*Climate change and moral theory, continued* No reading
		Unit 2: Technology and Human Interaction
Week 4	M 1/30	*Democratic discourse* Misinformation and hate speech Reading: selections from J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*
Critical response #2: A-L	W 2/1	Misinformation and hate speech, continued *"Hate speech" (SEP article)*
Week 5	M 2/6	Misinformation and hate speech, continued
		Unit 3: Technology, Rights, and Fairness
Critical response #2: M-Z	W 2/8	*Social media and friendship* Reading: Selections from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
Week 6	M 2/13	*Online privacy* Barocas & Nissenbaum, "Big Data's End Run on Anonymity

		and Consent," 2014
Critical response #3: A-L	W 2/15	*Justice and fairness: algorithmic bias* Reading: Angwin, et al., "Machine Bias," *ProPublica* (2016), ~6 pages.
Week 7	M 2/20	President's Day holiday–no class
		Unit 4: Technology and Work
Critical response #3: M-Z	W 2/22	*Autonomous vehicles and the trolley problem* Reading: Thomson, "Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem" Moral machine Introduce midterm essay prompt
Week 8	M 2/27	Trolley problem, continued
Critical response #4: A-L	W 3/1	*The end of work?* Reading: TBD
Week 9	M 3/6	*Universal basic income* Reading: TBD
		Unit 5: Moral Status of Software Objects
	W 3/8	*Artificial intelligence and consciousness* Reading: Selections from Alan Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence": Sections 1-3, all of p. 442, and subsection 6.4, "The Argument from Consciousness"
	F 3/10	**Midterm essays due 11:59 p.m.**
	M 3/13	Spring break–no class
	W 3/15	Spring break–no class
Week 10	M 3/20	AI and consciousness, continued

		Reading: John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs," selections
Critical response #4: M-Z	W 3/22	*Moral status of robots/AI* Reading: Eric Schwitzbegel & Mara Garza, "A Defense of the Rights of Artificial Intelligences"
Week 11	M 3/27	*Relationships with robots* Danaher, "Embracing the Robot"
Critical response #5: A-L	W 3/29	*The Matrix: simulated worlds, virtual reality* Reading: TBD (Nozick's Experience Machine?, Chalmers)
		Unit 6: Technology and Human Nature
Week 12	M 4/3	*Genetic testing* Reading:
Critical response #5: M-Z	W 4/5	*Gene therapy, disability, and enhancement* Reading: Harris
Week 13	M 4/10	Gene therapy, continued Reading: Reindal
Critical response #6: A-L	W 4/12	*Transhumanism and life extension* Reading: TBD
		Unit 7: Technology, Responsibility, and Existential Risk
Week 14	M 4/17	*Dangers of AI, possible safeguards* *Singularity* Bostrom, "Ethical Issues in Artificial Intelligence," https://nickbostrom.com/ethics/ai
Critical response #6: M-Z	W 4/19	*Longtermism* Reading: MacAskill; Torres
Week 15	M 4/24	

	W 4/26	Course wrap-up: Control over technological development

Final essay due Wednesday, May 3, 11:59 p.m. on Blackboard