PHIL S183: Philosophy of Technology
Yale Summer Session B, 2020
Course Syllabus
Instructor: Joanna Demaree-Cotton (joanna.demaree-cotton@yale.edu)

Class times: Mondays and Wednesdays 9am EST – 12:15pm EST
Class meeting format: Zoom (link to be distributed). Students will require an adequate internet connection and will need to connect to the online classroom with audio and video.

Office Hours: Times and days tbc. These are times I reserve outside of class when I will be available to talk to online. You can pop in unannounced or reserve an appointment via Canvas. We can use this time to answer any questions you have, chat about course material, talk about ideas you’re interested in or feel puzzled about, talk about your progress, discuss feedback on your work, or address concerns you have. Appointments on Canvas must be made at least 12 hours in advance.

Course Description:
What should a self-driving car do in a crash when every likely outcome leads to the death of some number of innocent people? To what extent is it morally acceptable to pursue the enhancement of humans? Should we use virtual reality or chemicals to make us feel happy? Is it ethical to use social media to call out bad behavior? Who’s responsible when a drone kills a civilian? Does playing violent video games make us bad people? Can an algorithm be racist?

The goal of the philosophy of technology is to step back and reflect on the ethical impact of technology. Over the course of the summer session, we will apply classic debates in ethics to case studies in modern developments in technology. As we learn about ethical concepts and their application to specific technologies, we will learn how to apply philosophical thinking and argument to questions about our ethical obligations, the nature of being human, and what it means for us to lead a good life.

This course serves as an in-depth introduction to the fields of applied ethics and technology studies. No previous experience of philosophy or technology studies is expected. This course fulfils the Yale humanities and writing requirements.

Learning objectives
By the end of this course, you will be able to:

• Identify key ethical challenges arising from the development of technologies
• Understand a range of core concepts from philosophical ethics and how they apply to issues in technology
• Independently analyze how particular technologies promote or impede wellbeing and how they ought or ought or not to be used
• Critically evaluate your own ethical views and the views of others using philosophical argument
• Express ethical arguments in writing

Summary of Course Assignments:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percent of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading responses</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Argument analysis</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Midterm paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Personal reflection project</td>
<td>15%</td>
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**Required readings:**

All readings will be supplied through Canvas. You must complete readings before the corresponding class. Readings are mandatory unless explicitly specified as optional. Sometimes you are only required to read excerpts, not the whole thing. Where applicable, this is noted below.

Many of the readings will present controversial ideas and opposing points of view. Your task is: (a) try to understand the arguments and ideas; (b) be curious about the claims being made; (c) critically evaluate the ideas and arguments.

Sometimes the primary function of syllabus readings is to communicate facts for you to learn and memorize (like a chapter from a chemistry textbook). This is not how you should think of the readings on this syllabus. Many of them present excellent and worthwhile ideas and arguments, and you may conclude that some are even correct. But this does not mean that all, or even any, of the readings, serve the purpose of:

- Presenting the correct view, for you to memorize and accept without question
- Illustrating flawless arguments

The readings on this syllabus do serve these purposes:

- Present interesting, worthwhile philosophical ideas and questions
- Introduce you to useful ethical concepts
- Introduce you to philosophical argumentation techniques
- Illustrate philosophical skills such as how to critically evaluate ideas and arguments in ethics
- Give examples of interesting, worthwhile arguments for ethical conclusions

**Course Schedule (subject to change)**

**PART 1: INTRODUCING THE ETHICS OF TECHNOLOGY**

**Class 1: Introduction: What is technology? What is ethics?**

*Mini Workshop: How to Read a Philosophy Paper*

*Mini Workshop: What Is An Argument?*


Class 2: What should we do? Self-Driving Cars

*Media (during class): Excerpt from The Good Place*


**Focus especially on the following excerpt:** sections 8.1-8.4, pp.102-111.

Jeffrey K. Gurney. (2016). Excerpt from “Crashing Into The Unknown: An Examination of Crash-Optimization Algorithms Through The Two Lanes of Ethics and Law.” *Read the following excerpt:* pp.183-208. (There is no need to read the footnotes.)


**PART 2: TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN FLOURISHING**

Class 3: Simulation, Authenticity, And the Good

*Media (during class): Excerpts from The Matrix and Westworld*


*Mini Workshop: Paragraph Structure*


Class 4: – Enhancement, Flourishing, and Human Nature

*Mini Workshop: Criticizing To Ethical Arguments*

*Media (shown during class): Meet the Biohackers [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWvUs8el8-A&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWvUs8el8-A&feature=youtu.be)*

Andy Clark (2003), *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, Chapter 1: Cyborgs Unplugged. (pp.13-34).


Class 5: Enhancement cntd.: genetic enhancement
*Media* (shown during class): Gattaca excerpt

*Mini Workshop: Argument By Analogy, Consistency Reasoning, and Counterexamples* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Geqn270G248&list=PLBDvSh8aJqe7VYFaSiCipt1ZrnqMQGMCW&index=7


Julian Savulescu. Genetic Interventions and the Ethics of Enhancement of Human Beings. (15 pages)


**PART 3: TECHNOLOGY, CHARACTER AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Class 6: Moral Skills and Violent Videogames

*Mini Workshop: The Goals of Philosophical Writing*

*Mini-Workshop: Structuring a Paper*

Optional media: Black Mirror, *USS Callister*

Aristotle & Virtue Theory: Crash Course Philosophy #38 (9 minutes 21 seconds) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrvtOWEXDIQ&list=PL8dPuuaLiXtNgK6MZucdYldNkMybYIHKR&t=0s


Class 7: Virtual Friendships
*Mini-Workshop: How to Use Quotes in a Paper*


**PART 4: TECHNOLOGY, RESPONSIBILITY AND BLAME**

**Class 8: Moral Responsibility: Automated Warfare**

*Mini-Workshop: Writing an Introduction*

*Media (during class): N. Sharkey, ‘Killer Robots in War and Civil Society’, video talk [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mL_3CxmmfHY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mL_3CxmmfHY)*

Introduction: moral responsibility and blame (tbc)


**Class 9: Punishment and Blame: Online Shaming**

*Optional recommended media: Black Mirror, Season 3, Episode 6: Hated in the Nation. [spoilers in readings and class]*

Aline Maya. (2020). Hated In The Nation and #DeathTo: What are the Consequences of Trial by Twitter?

Paul Billingham and Parr. Online Public Shaming: Virtues and Vices.


**PART 5: TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL EQUALITY**

**Class 10 – Technology, Equality, and Social Justice**

Langdon Winner. Do Artifacts Have Politics?

Howard and Borenstein. The Ugly Truth About Ourselves and Our Robot Creations: The Problems of Bias and Social Inequity.


**Explanation of Assignments**
Further details of assignments and what is expected of you will be discussed and distributed in class.

10%: Course participation (every class)

Attendance is mandatory in summer sessions, and any unexcused absence will significantly harm your participation grade. In this course, you will also be graded on the quality of your participation. Good participation is a matter of coming prepared and on time, remaining engaged throughout class, listening to other students, contributing to discussion, completing and engaging in class activities, and serving as a good classroom citizen. We will spend time in the first session discussing participation and setting norms for the class, and you will receive feedback from me on the quality of your participation.

10%: Reading Responses (due the evening before every class)

By 9 pm EDT the evening before each class, you are required to post one comment about the reading for the next day’s class. Most days I will provide a recommendation about what you should think about. These should be 2-4 sentences. Each class, we will discuss some of these reading questions. You have one “free” reading response that you do not need to submit over the course of the summer session. However, if you do choose to take advantage of this, please send me an email noting that you are using your “free” question that day.

15%: Argument Analysis (due Friday of Week 2)

A 3 page short writing assignment, double-spaced, due at 5 pm on the Monday of Week 2. In this writing assignment, I will give you a selection of excerpts from readings related to topics we have discussed so far. You will be asked to pick one excerpt, identify what conclusion the author is trying to establish, and identify the premises the author uses to support that conclusion. Finally, say whether or not you think the author is successful in establishing this conclusion. No introduction or conclusion will be necessary.

20%: 5-6 page midterm paper (due Monday, Week 4)

A midterm paper, double spaced, on your choice of topic to be distributed on Canvas, due by 5 pm on the Friday of Week 3. You will be required to meet with me to discuss an outline of your paper.

30%: 6-7 page final paper (due Friday, Week 5)

A final paper, on your choice of topics to be distributed on Canvas, due by 5 pm on the Friday of Week 5. You will be required to meet with me to discuss an outline of your paper.

15%: Personal Reflection Project (each component due at the end of Thursday each week of class)

For this part of the course you will be invited to reflect on the role of ethics and technology in your own life through guided written reflections and personal challenges (detailed guidance for this assignment will be given in class). The project will be graded through four short write-ups. You must submit the write-up for each component by the end of Thursday of the corresponding week. You will be graded on sincere engagement with the task and writing up the reflection in time for each deadline.

Week 1: Observe and Ask. List some of the roles that technologies play or have played in your life, and brainstorm ethical questions that might be raised about them (e.g. whether or not the improve your wellbeing; whether or not there are ethical reasons against using them)

Week 2: Personal Technology Challenge. Take up a personal challenge to altering your own use of technology and observe what it’s like (you may select from examples I’ll distribute or make your own. For instance: go off social media for 24 hours; try researching the answers to questions you have without using the internet for a day);)
Week 3: Personal Ethics Challenge and Reflection: take up a challenge to engage in critical assessment of your own ethical views (I'll give you examples of what you might do for this. For instance: record an ethical decision you face during the week and reflect on analyse your decision; note an ethical view that you hold strongly and think of the best reasons someone might have to disagree with you; record and assess an ethical disagreement you have with someone).

Week 4: no write-up this week!

Week 5: Reflection and Looking Forward. Look over the questions you raised in Week 1 and the challenges you engaged in weeks 2 and 3. Reflect on how your thinking has developed (e.g.: What do you think about your answers to the questions you raised in Week 1? Were the outcomes of the challenges what you expected? Did you learn anything from them? How, if at all, will you apply what you've learned after this class is over?)

Policies

Late Papers/Assignments: For each day that a paper is late, it will be penalized 2/3rds of a letter grade (e.g. from A to B+, from B+ to B-). Late papers will only be accepted up to four days after the assignment is due. It is your responsibility to make sure you have turned in a readable doc, docx, or pdf for all paper assignments in time of the deadline.

Extensions: I allow pre-arranged extensions to deadlines in some circumstances. If you need an extension on an assignment you must, where possible, email me to request this ahead of time; I will only grant extensions on the day of a deadline in exceptional circumstances. For reasons of fairness, extensions will only be granted in cases of clear need. Please contact me as soon as you think that you may need an extension so we can work out an appropriate plan.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas without acknowledging the original source and is a serious offense. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. Though it's sometimes easy to tell what constitutes academic dishonesty, sometimes things are less clear. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, just ask! I'll be happy to help. It's always better to ask than plagiarize accidentally. Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be treated according to university policy, and work containing plagiarized material will result in an automatic failing grade for that assignment.

Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or email me by the end of the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential.

Further resources:

Canvas is website on which most course information (including readings, rubrics for assignments, etc.) is posted. The link is: canvas.yale.edu. Once you log in, you can view information for any course you are taking at Yale. We’ll do a short tutorial of Canvas’s features on the first day of class.

Helpful guidelines for understanding appropriate citing techniques and avoiding plagiarism: https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism.

How to read, write and study philosophy: https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy

Yale Disability Office: http://rod.yale.edu/student-information
General writing tips: http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/undergraduate-writing