

# Ethics of Technology (PHIL S183)

## Course Syllabus

### Yale Summer Session A 2021

**Instructor: Joanna Demaree-Cotton** (joanna.demaree-cotton@yale.edu)

**Class times:** Mondays and Wednesdays 9am EST – 12:15pm EST

**Class meeting format:** This class will be taking place **online** via Zoom. See the "Zoom" tab on the navigation bar on the left of the course page for details including links and password. Students will require an adequate internet connection and will need to connect with audio and video.

#### Learning objectives

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

- Identify key ethical challenges arising from the development of technologies
- Understand of 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 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:

Assignment	Percent of Final Grade
Class participation	10%
Reading responses	10%
Argument analysis	15%
Midterm paper	20%
Final paper	30%
Personal reflection project	15%

**Office Hours:** These are times I reserve outside of class when I will be available to talk to on Zoom. 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.

There are two ways of meeting me in office hours:

- Drop-in: You can pop in unannounced during drop-in hours (Provisionally: Thursdays 11am-12:30pm, but check for updates closer to the start of the course. Zoom link tbc.) There's a virtual waiting room if I'm with another student.
- Appointment: you can reserve an appointment via the "Sign-Up BETA" tab on the left of this Canvas page, or arrange an alternative time over email. (Zoom link tbc.) Appointments made via Canvas must be made at least 12 hours in advance for it to be confirmed. If you realize you no longer need or want your appointment, please cancel as soon as you realize so it's available to other students.

#### Required Readings:

All readings will be supplied through Canvas. You must complete readings **before** the corresponding class. Readings are mandatory unless specified as optional. Sometimes you are only required to read **excerpts**, not the whole thing. Where applicable, **this is noted**; the rest of the reading in those cases is optional.

Many of the readings will present controversial ideas and opposing points of view. Your task are to: (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

## WEEK 1: INTRODUCING THE ETHICS OF TECHNOLOGY

Monday June 7 <sup>th</sup> 9am-12:15pm	<a href="#">Class 1: Introduction, What is Technology? What is Ethics?</a>	Langdon Winner (1983). <a href="#">Technologies as Forms of Life.</a> James Rachels, (2003). <a href="#">Chapter 1: What Is Morality?</a>
<i>DUE Tuesday June 8<sup>th</sup>: Reading Response on Class 2 readings</i>		
Wednesday June 9 <sup>th</sup> 9am-12:15pm	<a href="#">Class 2: What should we do? Self-driving cars</a>	James Rachels, <a href="#">The Debate over Utilitarianism</a> . Focus especially on the following excerpt: sections 8.1-8.4, pp.102-111. Jeffrey K. Gurney. <b>Excerpt pp.183-208</b> from <a href="#">Crashing Into The Unknown.</a>

## WEEK 2: TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

<i>DUE Sunday June 13<sup>th</sup>: Week 1 Personal Reflection, Observe and Ask</i> <i>DUE Sunday June 13<sup>th</sup>: Reading Response on Class 3 readings</i>		
Monday June 14 <sup>th</sup> 9am-12:15pm	<a href="#">Class 3: Simulation, Authenticity, and the Good.</a>	Robert Nozick, <a href="#">The Experience Machine</a> Jim Pryor, <a href="#">What's So Bad About the Matrix?</a> Paul Bloomfield, <a href="#">Social Media, Self-Deception, and Self-Respect</a>
<i>DUE Tuesday June 15<sup>th</sup>: Reading Response on Class 4 readings</i> <i>DUE Wednesday June 16<sup>th</sup> 11:59pm: Argument Analysis</i>		
Wednesday June 16 <sup>th</sup> 9am-12:15pm	<a href="#">Class 4: Enhancement, Flourishing, and Human Nature</a>	- Carl Elliott. <a href="#">What's Wrong with Enhancement Technology?</a> - Ginger Hoffman, <a href="#">The Self-Disrespect Objection to Bioenhancement Technologies.</a> Focus especially on <b>excerpt pp.498-509.</b>

## WEEK 3: TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL EQUALITY

<p><i>DUE Sunday June 20<sup>th</sup>: Reading Response on Class 5 readings</i>  <i>DUE Sunday June 20<sup>th</sup>: Week 2 Personal Reflection, Personal Technology Challenge</i></p>		
<p>Monday June 21<sup>st</sup> 9am-12:15pm</p>	<p><a href="#">Class 5: Genetic Enhancement, Eugenics and the Disability Rights Critique</a></p>	<p>Julian Savulescu. <a href="#">Genetic Interventions and the Ethics of Enhancement of Human Beings.</a></p> <p>Erik Parens and Adrienne Asch. <a href="#">The Disability Rights Critique of Prenatal Genetic Testing: Reflections and Recommendations.</a> Read <b>excerpts</b>: Introduction, pp.1-7; 11; 13; 14-18; 20-21. The sections are marked in the pdf.</p>
<p><i>DUE Tuesday June 22<sup>nd</sup>: Reading Response on Class 6 readings</i></p>		
<p>Wednesday June 23<sup>rd</sup> 9am-12:15pm</p>	<p><a href="#">Class 6: Algorithms and Discrimination</a></p>	<p><b>Optional:</b> helpful background: Moritz Hardt, <a href="#">How Big Data Is Unfair</a>; <a href="#">Safiya Noble, Google Has a Striking History of Bias Against Black Girls.pdf</a></p> <p><b>Core readings:</b> Cass Sunstein: <a href="#">Algorithms, Correcting Biases</a> Anupam Chander, <a href="#">The Racist Algorithm?</a></p>
<p><i>DUE Friday June 25<sup>th</sup>: Midterm Paper</i></p>		

#### WEEK 4: TECHNOLOGY, RESPONSIBILITY AND BLAME

<p><i>DUE Sunday June 27<sup>th</sup>: Reading Response on Class 7 readings</i>  <i>DUE Sunday June 27<sup>th</sup>: Week 3 Personal Reflection, Personal Ethics Challenge</i></p>		
<p>Monday June 28<sup>th</sup> 9am-12:15pm</p>	<p><a href="#">Class 7: Moral Responsibility: Automated Warfare</a></p>	<p>N. Sharkey, '<a href="#">Killer Robots in War and Civil Society (Links to an external site.)</a>' (Youtube video)</p> <p>Andrew Kimbrell, <a href="#">Cold Evil: Technology And Modern Ethics (sections I, II, III, IV, VII; others optional)</a></p> <p>Robert Sparrow, <a href="#">Killer Robots.</a></p>
<p><i>DUE Tuesday June 29<sup>th</sup>: Reading Response on Class 8 readings</i></p>		
<p>Wednesday June 30<sup>th</sup> 9am-12:15pm</p>	<p><a href="#">Class 8: Punishment and Blame: Online Shaming</a></p>	<p><b>Optional</b> media: Black Mirror, Season 3, Episode 6: Hated in the Nation. Available on Netflix and Amazon US</p> <p>Aline Maya. <a href="#">Hated In The Nation and #DeathTo: What are the Consequences of Trial by Twitter?</a></p> <p>Paul Billingham and Tom Parr. <a href="#">Online Public Shaming: Virtues and Vices</a></p>

#### WEEK 5: TECHNOLOGY, CHARACTER AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

## Explanation of Assignments

*DUE Sunday July 4<sup>th</sup>: Reading Response on Class 9 readings*

Monday July 5 <sup>th</sup> 9am-12:15pm	Class 9: Moral Skills, Virtue, and Violent Video Games	<a href="#">Aristotle &amp; Virtue Theory: Crash Course Philosophy #38 (Links to an external site.)</a> Youtube video - Morgan Luck, <a href="#">The Gamer's Dilemma</a> - Marcus Schulzke, <a href="#">Defending the Morality of Violent Video Games</a>
---	--	---

*DUE Tuesday July 6<sup>th</sup>: Reading Response on Class 10 readings*

Wednesday July 7 <sup>th</sup> 9am-12:15pm	<a href="#">Class 10: Virtual Friendships</a>	Andrew Kimbrell, Section V, <a href="#">The Techno-Cocoon</a> , in Cold Evil: Technology And Modern Ethics  Dean Cocking and Steve Matthews, <a href="#">Unreal Friends</a> .
--	---	---

*DUE Friday July 9<sup>th</sup>: Week 5 Personal Reflection, Looking Back and Looking Forward*

*DUE Sunday July 11<sup>th</sup>: Final paper*

Further details of assignments and what is expected of you will be discussed and distributed in class or on Canvas. See [Course Policies](#) for information about late submissions and extensions.

### 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 week discussing participation and setting norms for the class.

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

By 11:59 pm EST the evening before each class, you are required to submit one comment about the reading for the class through Canvas. Most days I will provide recommendations for what you should think about. Specific instructions will be added to the Canvas Module for the class in question. Reading responses should normally be 100 words or 2-4 sentences. I may discuss reading responses in class or ask students to discuss their responses with the group. You have two "free" reading responses that you do not need to submit over the course of the summer session. However, if you do choose to take advantage of this, you must send me and your TA an email noting that you are using your "free" question that day.

### 15%: Argument Analysis

A 2-3 page short writing assignment, double-spaced. 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

A midterm paper, double spaced, on your choice of topic (options to be distributed on Canvas). You will be required to meet with me or your TA to discuss an outline of your paper. We will discuss how to write a philosophy paper in class.

We will discuss how to write a philosophy paper in class. The goal of the paper assignments is to argue clearly and precisely for your own thesis – your own view – on some topic in the ethics of technology in a way that considers possible objections to your own point of view and that demonstrates understanding of the material.

#### 30%: 6-7 page final paper

A final paper, on your choice of topic (options to be distributed on Canvas), due by 5 pm on the Sunday of Week 5. You will be required to meet with me or your TA 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, informal 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. You will be provided with a guiding worksheet.

Part 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 they improve your wellbeing; whether or not there are ethical reasons against using them)

Part 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). Report on the experience.

Part 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 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; assess an ethical disagreement you have with someone).

Part 4: 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?

### **Course Policies**

**Inclusion:** It is my intent that all students in class are treated respectfully regardless gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, and politics. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated, and I invite you to let me know as soon as possible if you have any concerns or suggestions about this, by emailing me, speaking to me in office hours, or leaving feedback via Canvas.

**Disabilities:** Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations for class is requested to speak with me or email me as soon as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas without acknowledging the original source and it is a serious offense. Examples include: copying and pasting chunks of text from websites or books into your reading responses or essays as if you wrote it, i.e. without putting it in quotation marks and acknowledging the source; copying arguments or chunks of text and simply altering some words or phrases using a thesaurus in an attempt to avoid detection; paying someone else to write your assignment for you; using another student's essay as your own. You must cite any sources from which you obtain ideas, numbers or other material. "Cite" means: clearly indicate that these numbers, ideas, arguments, images etc. are not your own creation or discovery, and give a reference for the source. Further resources for how to cite sources and avoid plagiarism can be found [here](#). 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 me or your TA! We'll be happy to help. It's always better to ask than plagiarize accidentally. If you're having trouble keeping up, it's **always** better to discuss this with me or your TA to get help rather than plagiarize, which is almost always caught and penalized. Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be treated according to university policy. Work containing plagiarized material will result in an automatic failing grade for that assignment and you will not be permitted to re-submit a non-plagiarized version of the assignment.

**Late Papers/Assignments:** For each day that a paper is late without a pre-arranged extension, 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.

**Absences:** Yale Summer Session strictly requires attendance at all class sessions. You may not miss class unexcused, and given the compressed timeline of the summer session, it's difficult to catch up. Excuses for absence will only be granted in exceptional circumstances such as illness or emergency. If this applies to you, please don't hesitate to get in touch and try to let me know as soon as is possible.

**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 and your TA 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. If you require an extension beyond the end of the Summer Session, Yale Summer Session policy requires the request to be approved by the Dean of Summer Session.

**Behavior:** harassment, intimidation, and other kinds of inappropriate behavior towards students, staff or faculty will not be tolerated and will be reported to the Dean of the Yale Summer Session. Please contact me or the Dean as soon as possible if you are the victim of any behavior of this kind from students, staff or faculty. If you're unsure, it's still okay to get in touch to ask; your query will be dealt with respectfully.