

PHIL S183E: Philosophy and Technology – DRAFT syllabus

Instructor: Paul Forrester

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Office hours: by appointment

Dates: Session A, May 26 – June 25, 2025

Location: tbd

Meeting times: MW 9.00 – 12.15

1: Course description

The last few years have witnessed significant improvements in artificial intelligence and virtual reality technologies. Within the next few years, we are likely to see major disruptions like the advent of self-driving cars, or permanent human settlement in space, or the development of human-level AI. This prospect forces us to grapple with a host of important new questions about the ethical problems raised by these new technologies. Should we protect people from technological employment caused by AI? Is human settlement of extra-terrestrial bodies morally permissible? Is it ethical to develop business practices based on harvesting peoples' attention? Do social media companies have a right to respect free speech like the government? Who should be liable for harms caused by autonomous systems, including motor vehicle accidents, casualties in war, and many more? Is it permissible for human beings to intentionally alter the Earth's climate to avert disruptions caused by climate change (geoengineering)? And more generally, is technological development good or bad for the environment and sustainability?

In this class we will discuss all of those questions. The class will not presume any background in philosophy or technology studies, and will use technological developments as a springboard into philosophy. We will devote much of our attention in the course to studying the political economy and recent history of technological developments in order to inform our philosophical theorizing. Students will leave the class with a working understanding of the economic, social and ethical issues surrounding technological development in a variety of domains.

2: Assignments

- 30% attendance, reading responses, participation
 - 24 hours before the start of each class, students will submit a response to the readings via Canvas. These responses should not summarise the readings. Rather, the student should aim to engage substantively and philosophically with one or more of the assigned authors. For instance, you might do one or more of the following things: (1) ask critical questions about the readings; (2) raise an objection to the author's arguments; (3) suggest a new argument in favour of the author's conclusion, or a way in which the author's arguments could be strengthened; (4) suggest that the author's arguments have interesting implications for other topics or areas that the author does not discuss. The typical length might be 250-300 words – one good, solid paragraph.
 - Students are expected to fully attend and participate in every course meeting.
- 35% midterm take-home exam
- 35% final exam

3: Schedule of readings

Monday May 26, Class 1: Surveillance Capitalism (1)

- Zuboff, *Surveillance Capitalism* Chapters 1-4
- Bagwell, *The Economic Analysis of Advertising*

Wednesday May 28, Class 2: Surveillance Capitalism (2)

- Zuboff, *Surveillance Capitalism* Chapters 8, 11, 12, 18
- Messina *Private Censorship* (selection)

Monday June 2, Class 3: Augmented and Virtual Reality

- Turner “Augmented Reality, Augmented Epistemology, and the Real World Web”
- Forrester & Kim “Immersive AI and the ethics of virtual experience”

Wednesday June 4, Class 4: Artificial Intelligence and Intellectual Property

- Nawar “Generative Artificial Intelligence and Authorship Gaps”
- Chatterjee “Lockean Copyright vs. Lockean Property”

Monday June 9, Class 5: Self-Driving Cars

- Crawford *Why We Drive: Toward a Philosophy of the Open Road* (selections)
- Judith Jarvis Thomson. 1976. Killing, letting die, and the trolley problem. *Monist*, 59, 204-17 [~15 pages, academic paper]
- Bhargava and Berkey “Autonomous Vehicles and the Ethics of Driving”

Wednesday June 11, Class 6: Technological Unemployment

- Keynes “Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren”
- Floridi “Technological Unemployment, Leisure Occupation, and the Human Project”
- Kim and Scheller-Wolf “Technological Unemployment, meaning in life, purpose of Business, and the Future of Stakeholders” (skim)

Monday June 16, Class 7: The New Space Race

- Lawrence et al “The case for space environmentalism”
- Headrick and Griset “Submarine Telegraph Cables: Business and Politics, 1838-1939”
- Rebecca Lowe “Space Invaders: Property Rights on the Moon” (selections)

Wednesday June 18, Class 8: Autonomous Weapons; Military-Technology-Industrial Complex

- Nathan Wood “Autonomous weapon systems and responsibility gaps: a taxonomy”
- Marcus Schulzke “Autonomous Weapons and Distributed Responsibility”
- Selection of news articles on the use of Autonomous Arms in Ukraine conflict & US-China strategic competition, including but not limited to:

- <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/battlefield-drones-and-the-accelerating-autonomous-arms-race-in-ukraine/>

Monday June 23, Class 9: Geoengineering & Climate Change

- Britta Clark “Negative Emissions and Excuses”
- Jed Purdy *After Nature* (selections)

Wednesday June 25, Class 10: FINAL EXAM

- Students will be given access to the exam at the start of class, and must finish by the end of class.