



**Philosophy 304 - The Future is Now:
Ethical Questions Raised by Emerging Technologies**

Fall 2019
Helen C. White 4275
T/Th 1:00pm-2:15pm

Instructor: Greg Nirshberg

Email: nirshberg@wisc.edu

Office: 5174 Helen C. White

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30pm-3:30pm, Thursdays 11:30am-12:30pm

Course Description

Fifty years ago, phones were tethered to the wall by a cord and watching a film at home required owning both a movie projector and a film reel. Today, from a device you carry around in your pocket, you can make a call to anywhere in the world and watch almost any movie ever made. Clearly, technology has changed our lives in innumerable ways. However, advancements in technology also force us to tackle ethical questions that, until recently, were the stuff of science fiction. In this course, we will explore a range of important ethical questions that have arisen (or will likely arise) in the wake of technological change. Should a self-driving car be programmed to drive into a group of pedestrians in order to protect the lives of its passengers? Do parents have a right to genetically modify their children? Should we create robot soldiers to fight our wars? Should legal punishment be taken out of the hands of humans and be given to computers? Students will focus on developing the philosophical skills needed to carefully think through these questions and more. Towards the end of the semester we will discuss some (possibly) more speculative topics such as existential risk scenarios, Artificial Intelligence and whether a life lived in a simulation would have value.

Contact Information

Please email me at the address listed above. I check my email regularly and will do my best to respond within 24 hours, but if you don't hear back from me within those 24 hours, email me again as a reminder. If you have a conflict with my office hours, email me and we can set up an appointment for an alternate meeting time. I'm happy to accommodate!

Readings

All readings and any supplemental material can be found on Canvas. Any materials handed out in class, including this syllabus, will be posted there as well.

There is no required text. However, many of our readings are drawn from the following books: *Superintelligence*, Nick Bostrom; *Radical Technologies*, Adam Greenfield; *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts*, Jaron Lanier; *Weapons of Math Destruction*, Cathy O'Neil. Those of you interested in exploring some of our topics in more detail should consider purchasing one or more of these.

Grade Composition

Online Reflections (5x3%)	15%
Critical Assessment 1	10%
Critical Assessment 2	15%
Critical Assessment 3	15%
Final Paper	25%
Participation	20%

Grading Scale

A	92.5% - 100%
AB	87.5% - 92.5%
B	82.5% - 87.5%
BC	77.5% - 82.5%
C	70% - 77.5%
D	60% - 70%
F	0% - 60%

Grading

Individual assignments will be given numeric grades, which will be converted to a final letter grade according to the scale above. There will be no opportunity for extra credit. I also will not impose a curve on any individual assignment, or your final grades.

Online Reflections

You will have five online discussion assignments throughout the semester. For each of these, I will start by posting a short reading or prompt on Canvas. There will then be two different posting windows available to you. During the first window, you will be required to write a short, thoughtful response to the prompt. During the second window, you will be required to write a short, thoughtful response to one of your fellow classmates' posts. Students will be split up into small groups of 5-6 to make this aspect of the assignment easier. **Length: A few paragraphs**

Critical Assessments (CA)

You will be required to hand in three CAs throughout the semester. These are short, focused papers in which you will critically engage with an argument. They are an opportunity for you to practice a number of skills we will focus on developing throughout this course, including careful and critical reading, argument reconstruction and argument evaluation. Though short, successful CAs will require a larger investment of time than the length might suggest to you. For this reason, the requirements for a CA will build and develop over the course of the semester. With each new CA, you will be asked to incorporate a new skill you have learned. CA prompts will be posted on Canvas. **Length: Variable (1-3 pages)**

Final Paper

For this paper you will get to put the skills you've acquired throughout the semester to work by writing a longer paper evaluating arguments *from material that we did not discuss in class*. You will be required to find at least two philosophical and informative articles on your topic, and then reconstruct their arguments and critically assess them. You'll also be required to formulate and defend your own position in light of the arguments that you've critically assessed. I will discuss these requirements in more detail as the due date approaches. Before starting on the paper, I must approve your proposed topic and sources. I am happy to help you with this task, but you must do some work before meeting with me. **Length: 1800-2200 Words**

Attendance and Participation

You will not gain or lose points for *attendance*. But keep the following in mind: Acquiring a new skill requires practice, and active participation during class will be an integral part of this process. So though I will not take attendance, it will be difficult to earn high marks in this course without showing up. As you'll quickly see, there's no substitute for talking as much as you can about the difficult questions we'll be considering. This ongoing dialogue with me and your fellow classmates will also provide you the opportunity to further reflect on your own beliefs.

Each week, you will be required to a question for one of the readings under discussion. The question can be as simple as a clarificatory question, but it must demonstrate that you have thoughtfully engaged with the reading (doing so will likely requiring providing background/context to your question). Your questions will be due by 10am on the day the reading is due. Each question will be worth a total of 1 point of your 20 participation points.

With all this in mind, a note about classroom etiquette: Disagreeing with others is absolutely fine. And you should feel free to voice your disagreement with your fellow classmates *and* with me. We philosophers thrive on *reasoned* disagreement. In this class, we will often be exploring controversial questions about which many people have strongly held views. It's important to keep in mind that no matter what view you hold, or how strongly you hold it, what we're interested in are the *arguments* for a view, the *reasons* to believe. It is not enough that what you say is true; we are interested in why it is true and why we should also believe it. It can be difficult and frustrating to figure out, articulate, and explain the reasons that support your strongly held views—and it can be difficult to hear objections to them. But it also can be intellectually exciting, and even, sometimes, fun! Finally, it's crucial that we all treat each other with the highest respect when we disagree. Make sure you listen carefully to what others say, reply respectfully to them, and be willing to accept criticism of what you say. The goal of philosophical argumentation is not to win, but to achieve understanding.

Administrative Requirements

Credits: 3

Repeatable for Credit: Yes, unlimited number of completions

Instructional Mode: All face-to-face

How credit hours are met by the course

This class meets for a total of 3 class period hours each week over the fall semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc.) for about 2 hours out of classroom for every class period.

Course Designation

Breadth - Either Humanities

Level - Intermediate

L&S Credit - Counts as Liberal Arts and Science credit in L&S

Requisites

Open to all students.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will have developed the ability to think critically about arguments, interpret complex texts accurately and analyze them logically, communicate precisely and concisely in both writing and speech and have become familiar with a diversity of philosophical ideas and arguments about topics in different areas of applied ethics.

Class Policies

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the

highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/. Note that you need not intend to plagiarize in order to do so. You are guilty of plagiarism if you represent the ideas of others as your own or if you present, as new, ideas derived from an existing source regardless of intending to do so.

Special Accommodations

McBurney Disability Resource Center syllabus statement: “The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.”

<http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php>

Diversity & Inclusion

Institutional statement on diversity: “Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.” <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

Late Work Policy

Late assignments will not be accepted, except for certain unusual, extremely good reasons. If you know that you won't be able to hand in an assignment, please contact me asap about it.

Class Etiquette

Cell phone use is not allowed during class time. If you need to take a call, please step out of the room. Laptop use will *tentatively* be allowed, however, I reserve the right to revoke laptop privileges if they are being abused. Also, See here: <http://tinyurl.com/laptopsarebad>.

Course Calendar and other miscellaneous remarks

You will find the course calendar on the next page. The below schedule is tentative, and subject to change. I will inform the class of any changes in lecture and by posting an announcement on Canvas.

Date	Content	HW Due	Assigned Reading	Suggestions
BEFORE				
September 5 th	Course Preliminaries: Logic and Methodology <i>"How do I think clearly about difficult problems?"</i> <i>"Can there be objective answers to ethical questions?"</i>		Collingwood , "Philosophy as Lit"	Conception , "How to Read Philosophy"
September 10 th			Philosophical Disquisitions: The Gamer's Dilemma (Part One)	
September 12 th			Philosophical Disquisitions: The Gamer's Dilemma (Part Two)	Logical Fallacies
September 17 th			Shafer-Landau , "Ethical Relativism"	
September 19 th				
NOW				
September 24 th	Social Media and the Internet		Aeon: Escape the echo chamber	
September 26 th	<i>"Is our use of social media harming us?" "Do companies or the government have a responsibility to regulate these platforms?"</i>	CA1	Lanier , "Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Right Now: Chapter 2"	Stanford Encyclopedia: Social Networking and Ethics (Section 3)
October 1 st			Spinello , "Privacy and Social Network Technology"	
October 3 ^d	Information Privacy <i>"Do we have a right to privacy, and how does cybertechnology change the ethical landscape?"</i>		Spinello , "Information Privacy"	
October 8 th			Radiolab: Eye in the sky	Philosophy Bites: Tom Sorrell on Surveillance
October 10 th			Utilitarianism/Consequentialism	Wi-Phi – Utilitarianism: Part 1 & Part 2
October 15 th			Kant/Deontology	
October 17 th				O'Neil , "Weapons of Math Destruction: Intro & Chapter 1"
October 22 nd	<i>"What are the morally salient features of the many uses to which algorithms are put?"</i>		ProPublica: Machine Bias	Radiolab: Forget About Blame
SOON				
October 24 th	Genetic Modification	CA2	Savulescu , "Genetic interventions and the ethics of enhancement"	Philosophy Bites: Allen Buchanan on Enhancement
October 29 th	<i>"Is it morally permissible to modify yourself or your child?"</i>		Sparrow , "A Not-So-New Eugenics"	Philosophy Bites: Sandel on Enhancement in Sport

October 31 st	<i>"Is it permissible for the government to stop individuals from doing so?"</i>		Hausman and McPherson , "...Libertarianism"; Nozick , "Distributive Justice"	The Stone: Questions for Free-Market Moralists
November 5 th			Rawls , "A Theory of Justice"	The Atlantic: What isn't for sale?
November 7 th			NO READING	
November 12 th	Automation <i>"What ethical rules should automated systems be programmed with, and who is responsible when something goes wrong?"</i>		Shaw, et al. , "Automated vehicles, big data and public health"	MIT: Moral Machine
November 14 th			Matthias , "The Responsibility Gap"	
November 19 th			Greenfield , "Radical Technologies: The annihilation of work"	Russell, " In Praise of Idleness "
MAYBE?				
November 21 st	Artificial Intelligence <i>"What rights, if any, should robots have?"</i>		Levy , "The Ethics of Robot Prostitutes"	
November 26 th		CA3	Neely , "Machines and the Moral Community"	Youtube: In a Nutshell – Do Robots Deserve Rights?
November 28 th	<i>"If my mind is scanned and uploaded to a computer system/robot body, is it ME that has been uploaded?"</i>	THANKSGIVING BREAK		
December 3 rd	Existential Risk <i>"Do we have any obligations with respect to future persons (biological or otherwise)?"</i>		Schneider , "Transcending and Enhancing the Human Brain"	Talks at Google: Susan Schneider: Artificial You
December 5 th			Bostrom , "Existential Risk Prevention as Global Priority"	Ted Talk: Nick Bostrom on Existential Risk
December 10 th			TBD	
FINAL PAPERS DUE ON CANVAS BY 11:59PM ON DECEMBER 17TH				