PPHA 38860 Technology, Ethics, and Politics
Harris School of Public Policy
University of Chicago
Autumn Quarter 2022

Instructor: Jeff Jackson
Email: jcjackson@uchicago.edu
Class Meetings: M/W 10:30-11:50am (Keller 0023)

Office: TBD
Office Hours: TBD

Required Texts (available at Seminary Co-op)

- Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Alfred A. Knopf)
- Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York University Press)

*All other assigned readings will be available on the course Canvas site.

Course Overview

In this course students will engage with critical debates surrounding technology, ethics, and politics. The course will: (1) explore important philosophical frameworks that historically have driven debates over the impact of technology on politics and society; (2) provide intellectual tools for analyzing ethical dilemmas that may arise through the uses of particular forms of technology in which students have special interest or expertise; and (3) confront multiple examples of ethical and political predicaments raised recently by the employment of prominent forms of technology.

The field of ethics is defined by contestation between conflicting perspectives, and as such we do not expect to arrive at undisputed, settled answers to the questions we study in this course. Rather, through engaging with profound philosophical arguments on the impact of technological advancement on modern society, this course will expand students' awareness of ethical questions raised by technology and of the possible positions we can take regarding those questions.

Course Requirements

Because we are engaging with philosophical subject matter on which there are no settled answers, our most appropriate approach to the course material will be a collaborative inquiry where we collectively pursue greater understanding of ethical and political issues pertaining to technology, and where different perspectives within the classroom itself can be brought into a productive dialogue. Therefore, this course will primarily be run in a seminar format, in which the ideas and viewpoints of students will drive the class discussions. Through these discussions, students will be able to participate in reasoned debate over the complex questions focused on in this course, and will be able to build their own nuanced ethical and political standpoints with respect to technology's expanding presence in modern society.

Participation in class discussion is essential for a successful seminar. Students are expected to have completed each day's assigned reading and to be prepared to discuss it in detail. As participation is a crucial component of your grade for this course, it will be important to avoid absences at class sessions (there is no specific penalty to your grade if you miss a class session,

but missing any substantial number of sessions will obviously have an effect on your participation grade). This is a text-driven course, so you must have the day's reading in front of you for each class.

Each student will also be required to begin one class session with a presentation on the assigned reading for that day. Your presentation should not simply summarize the day's reading, but should address what you see as the most important themes in that day's reading, and should provide your own analysis regarding how we should think of the arguments the particular author is making in that reading. The presentation should also pose questions for the rest of the class to consider in the subsequent discussion. We will begin the presentations at the start of Week 3 (Monday, October 10th), and instructions for how to sign up for a day to give your presentation will be provided early in the quarter. Depending on the number of students enrolled in the course, it is possible that at least some class sessions will begin with presentations from multiple students.

In addition, also starting with our session on Monday, October 10th, students will be required to post a "think piece" on each day's reading on the Canvas discussion board by 8am before each class session. The think pieces are to be brief (250-500 words) and should identify what you consider to be the most important or most interesting aspect of that day's reading, and should provide your reaction to that part of the reading. You **do not** have to post a think piece for the class session in which you give your presentation for the quarter, but you must post a think piece for every other class session from October 10th until the end of the quarter.

The most significant components of your grade will come from the midterm exam and final paper. Further instructions on the midterm and the paper will be provided as we get closer to the dates of each assignment. The midterm exam will consist of multiple essay questions, and will test comprehension of critical concepts from the readings in the first half of the quarter. The final paper will provide several options with respect to the type of paper you can write, and these options will include: (1) a policy memo recommending a particular position on containing a form of harm brought by a specific employment of technology; (2) a philosophical paper that builds and defends a thesis regarding a prominent theme raised in the course related to technology's impact on modern society; and (3) an ethical self-reflection that uses material from the course to explain the actions you would take if your employer asked you to use technology in a way you considered to be unethical. Taking the midterm exam on an alternative date, or receiving an extension on the due date for the final paper, are available for documented medical and family emergencies only. Missing the midterm exam for any other reason will result in a score of zero on the exam. Late papers will be penalized by 5 percentage points per day late.

With respect to challenging a grade received on the midterm exam or final paper, please note that it is highly unusual for such challenges to result in a higher score on the assignment, and so it is not recommended that you seek to challenge a grade. If you feel you must challenge a grade received on one of those assignments, you must return your graded assignment to me along with a written explanation for why you believe you deserve a higher score. I will then re-grade the entire assignment, and it is possible that your score on the assignment may ultimately decrease rather than increase. If you do not wish to take the risk of your score decreasing, then it would be advisable to not go through with such a challenge.

Grading

- Participation – 15%
- Presentation – 10%
- Think Pieces – 10%
- Midterm Exam – 25%
- Final Paper – 40%

Rubric:

- 93% and above: A
- 90-92.9%: A-
- 87-89.9%: B+
- 83-86.9%: B
- 80-82.9%: B-
- 77-79.9%: C+
- 73-76.9%: C
- 70-72.9%: C-
- 67-69.9%: D+
- 63-66.9%: D
- 60-62.9%: D-
- 59.9% and below: F

Electronic Etiquette

I encourage you to take notes by hand and to limit your use of a laptop during class. However, if you feel that you need to take notes on your laptop rather than by hand then you may do so, and you may have your laptop with you during sessions where we are discussing reading that is available on the course website. Please do not use your laptop for any other reasons—it is of course not acceptable to be using email, twitter, facebook, etc. during the class period. Please also have your cell phones on silent and put away during each class.

Pass/Fail Policy

Students who wish to take this course pass/fail rather than for a letter grade must use the Harris Pass/Fail request form (https://harris.uchicago.edu/form/pass-fail) and must meet the Harris deadline, which is posted on the Harris academic calendar. Students who take the course pass/fail must attend class meetings and turn in all assignments, achieving marks on assignments that are overall commensurate with at least a C- letter grade.

Academic Honesty

All University of Chicago students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Among other things, this means that students shall not represent another's work as their own, use un-allowed materials during exams, or otherwise gain unfair academic advantage.

The University's policies regarding academic integrity and dishonesty are described here.

The Harris School's student policies are available on the [policies page of our website](). Please pay particular attention to the *Academic Honesty and Plagiarism* section, and especially the sub-section titled *Harris Procedures for Allegations of Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Dishonesty*.

Reading Schedule:

Wednesday, September 28th

- Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation".

Monday, October 3rd

- Weber, "Politics as a Vocation".
- Weber, "Bureaucracy".

Wednesday, October 5th

- Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology".

Monday, October 10th

- Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, pp. 3-22, 61-147.

Wednesday, October 12th

- Ellul, *The Technological Society*, pp. 228-280, 307-318.

Monday, October 17th

- Ellul, *The Technological Society*, pp. 319-387, 428-436.

Wednesday, October 19th

- Andrew Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, pp. 1-12, 72-129.

Monday, October 24th

- Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, pp. 130-147.
- Feenberg, "Subversive Rationalization: Technology, Power, and Democracy."
- Feenberg, "On Being a Human Subject: AIDS and the Crisis of Experimental Medicine."

Wednesday, October 26th

- Feenberg, *Transforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revisited,* pp. 3-27, 89-130.

Monday, October 31st

- Midterm Exam

Wednesday, November 2nd

- Langdon Winner, "Citizen Virtues in a Technological Order."
- Sheila Jasanoff, *The Ethics of Invention: Technology and the Human Future*, pp. 1-30.

Monday, November 7th

- Jasanoff, *The Ethics of Invention*, pp. 31-58, 147-176.

Wednesday, November 9th

- David Lyon, "Surveillance Technology and Surveillance Society."
- Yongxi Chen and Anne Cheung, "The Transparent Self under Big Data Profiling: Privacy and Chinese Legislation on the Social Credit System."

Monday, November 14th

- Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, pp. 1-63.
- Engin Bozdag, "Bias in Algorithmic Filtering and Personalization."

Wednesday, November 16th

- Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*, pp. 64-133.
- Moritz Hardt, "How Big Data is Unfair."

Monday, November 21st

- No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Wednesday, November 23rd

- No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Monday, November 28th

- Amitai Etzioni and Oren Etzioni, "Incorporating Ethics into Artificial Intelligence."
- Jonathan Shaw, "Artificial Intelligence and Ethics."
- Dominic Martin, "Who Should Decide How Machines Make Morally Laden Decisions?"

Wednesday, November 30th

- Robert Sparrow, "Killer Robots."
- Joanna Bryson, "Robots Should Be Slaves."

Final Paper due Monday, December 5th