**Fall 2018: Introduction to Philosophy**

*Philosophy and Technology*

**Instructor:** Allauren Forbes

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**Office hours**: By appointment

**Course meetings:** MW 3:30pm-5, MEYH B7

**Course Description**

This course is designed to get you to think critically about the nature of technology and its role in our lives. To do so, we will engage in philosophical investigations of technology through questions exemplary of different branches of philosophy and we will consider arguments for how we should understand and use technology. Throughout this course, we will explore the nature of humans and reality, economics, education, democracy, and medical and reproductive technology, among other dimensions of technology. In doing so, students will learn the kinds of questions, topics, and methods employed by philosophy; to recognize and analyze philosophical arguments; and to construct and defend arguments for their positions.

**Course Learning Outcomes**:

In this class, you will learn how to:

* Critically analyze and assess philosophical arguments;
* Recognize and articulate philosophical questions and arguments implicit in various genres;
* Discuss philosophical questions in a respectful, engaging, and constructive way;
* Construct clear and persuasive arguments about philosophically-rich questions in technology

In order to do so, we will read a wide variety of philosophical material, we will have small and large group discussion about this material in a way that examines and applies it, and we will have small and large assignments to formalize and extend these skills.

**Required Texts**:

What we read may change depending on student interest, etc. Readings will be made available on the course website in pdf format.

**Course Requirements and Grading**:

Your grade in this course will be determined by the following:

Participation: 15%

Reflection papers: 20%

RP-1: 10%

RP-2: 10%

Philosophy & Science Fiction: 15%

Final paper: 25%

Exam design: 10%

Exam: 15%

*Participation*

Participation is very important. Philosophy is something that we do; it is an activity. You need to attend class and be an active participant – this means listening carefully to the content of the lecture and to your classmates’ questions and comments, as well as contributing your own thoughts or concerns. While it can be intimidating to speak in class, remember that your peers probably feel the same way, and that we will be careful to maintain a friendly and open-minded attitude in order that all contributions will be welcome and treated with the principle of charity – that is, we will all try our best to understand what others say in the spirit of how it is intended.

*Reflection papers*

This assignment is in the form of two (2) reading responses, each worth 10% of your final grade. Your task will be to pick one of the recent readings/topics, give an exegesis of it – demonstrate understanding of some position it holds – and then briefly critically engage with it – provide an argument about it, or an application of it in other domains (e.g., in day-to-day life, in other academic fields, etc.). I will provide lots of feedback so that you will have some opportunity to practice your philosophical skills and get good, developmental feedback before your final paper.

*Philosophy and science fiction*

For this assignment, you will write a brief (3-5 pages) paper about some work of science fiction (novel, film, short story, etc.) in which you (very briefly) set out the plot of the work and discuss/analyze its philosophical content. A list of possible choices is below (though this is merely scratching the surface). For this assignment, think about what kinds of claims are being advanced by the characters/plot, what kinds of problems raised or resolved, what kinds of assumptions are involved, etc.

* Aeon Flux (2005)
* Altered Carbon (2018-; novel 2002)
* Black Panther (2018)
* Blade Runner (2017/1982)
* Ender’s Game (2013; novel 1985)
* Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)
* Eureka (2006-2012)
* Ex Machina (2015)
* Get Out (2017)
* Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy (2005; novel 1978)
* Inception (2010)
* Jupiter Ascending (2015)
* Moon (2009)
* Primer (2004)
* Ready Player One (2018; novel 2011)
* Total Recall (2012/1990)
* Transcendence (2014)
* Westworld (2016-)

*Final paper*

The paper will be of the standard philosophical form (2000-2500 words), and it will account for 25% of your final grade. Here, I expect you to develop a substantial point in service of some critical assessment of a topic, theme, or argument that we examine in the course. I will provide some prompts, but you are encouraged to create your own topic or question. Should you choose to do this, please confirm your topic with me ahead of time. This will be due on the last day of exams.

*Exam design and exam*

Prior to the last day of class, you will prepare a series of questions for the exam (based on guidelines to be provided). These will be collected and graded, and some questions will be selected from each student to appear on the exam. Creating the questions will account for 10% of your final grade, and the exam itself will be 15%.

**Course Expectations**

*Behavior*

It is deeply important that we maintain an attitude of respect for one another and for the subjects we cover in this class. Philosophy is, at its core, a practice of critical thinking. This often consists in making arguments and responding to one’s interlocutors in ways that interrogate their positions and claims; we will consider reasons for and against views in a way that incorporates an underlying commitment to trust, empathy, and cooperative inquiry.

*Electronic Devices*

A great deal of [research](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0956797616677314) shows that [laptop](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/05/16/why-smart-kids-shouldnt-use-laptops-in-class/?utm_term=.0ffdcc27fe44) (etc.) use in [classrooms](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131506001436) is negatively correlated with student attention, learning, etc. Use of these devices to message, look at memes, etc. can also be distracting to those around you. That said, you are free to use these devices in class – I acknowledge how helpful it can be to have pdfs of readings in front of you, or to be able to take notes in Word, etc. Please be sure that your use of them does not undermine your engagement or attention in class. If I find that you are using your devices in problematic ways, I will ask you to put them away. Repeated infractions may lower your participation grade.

*Email*

I will sometimes communicate with you via email, particularly if something changes in the course – unexpected cancellation, new or additional readings, etc. Please ensure that you are receiving these notifications. My general policy is to respond to emails within 24 hours of receiving them; however, I will not discuss grades over email, and would prefer that longer questions about assignments are addressed in office hours. Please check the syllabus and the (forthcoming) detailed instructions on assignments, etc. before emailing me about them.

*Grades*

I am committed to a fair and unbiased grading process. As such, all assignments must be submitted with no identifying information other than your student number. This allows me to grade anonymously. If you have concerns about this process, please contact me and we will discuss possible solutions. If you are unsatisfied with your grade and would like to appeal it, the process is as follows. Between 24 and 72 hours after the grades are posted, explain in writing – in a way that responds to each of my comments – how you think the grade/comments are inappropriate for your assignment. I promise to consider these appeals and to re-examine your assignment. Please note, however, that a request for regrading can result in your mark going up or down.

*Late Work*

My policy on late work is for every 24 hours after the deadline, you will lose one third of a letter grade. So, if you turn in a B+ assignment, after one day it is a B, after another it is a B-, etc. That said, I know that extenuating circumstances do occur. Should you find yourself in such a situation, please contact me as soon as possible, but keep in mind that this is no guarantee of an extension.

*Academic Integrity*

It is very important that you are graded on your own contributions rather than those of others. If you are drawing from other work, please be sure to cite it appropriately. Familiarize yourself with the University’s [Code of Academic Integrity](http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html); this determines how cases of plagiarism or other academic misconduct will be handled. Since philosophy is an activity that we do together, feel free to discuss things with your peers, friends, etc. Just be sure that what you hand in for grading is reflective of your position on things.

**Accessibility and Support Services**

I want all of you to succeed and flourish philosophically. There are, of course, many ways to learn; I will strive to adapt to your needs, but this means that you must tell me how you learn best. Please feel free to contact me via email or in office hours to let me know what works for you. Students with disabilities are strongly encouraged to make use of services here at the University, and, if you feel comfortable with it, to let me know how I can make the course more accessible to you.

**Schedule and Readings**

I know that you have other courses, obligations, and activities, but some of these papers/ideas are a little complicated, and may require more than one reading. As such, it is important that you come to class prepared – that you read the material and are ready to discuss it.

I may change the readings, depending on student interest, and if so I will email you in advance.

**Schedule of Readings**

***\*\*tentative – subject to change in light of student interests\*\****

**Week 1: Introduction**

Aug 29: What is philosophy? What is technology?

* No required reading!

**Week 2: Human Nature**

Sept. 5: What is a human being?

* Mikael Stenmark, “Theories of Human Nature: Key Issues”

**Week 3: Human Nature**

Sept 10: What is a human being?

* Excerpts from René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Sept 12: What is a human being?

* Neil Levy, “Culture by Nature”

**Week 4: Human Nature and Identity**

Sept 17: What is a human being?

* Michael Cerullo, “Uploading and Branching Identity”
* Natasha Vita-More, “Life Expansion Media”
* **Reflection paper #1 due**

Sept 19: What makes us the same person over time?

* Excerpts from John Locke, “Of Identity and Diversity”
* Excerpts from David Hume, “Of Personal Identity”

**Week 5: Posthumans**

Sept. 24: *Repo Men* (2010)

Sept. 26: finish *Repo Men*

* Debate: should we pursue posthuman modifications?

**Week 6: The nature of knowledge**

Oct 1: What is knowledge?

* SEP entry on JTB theory of knowledge – section one [here](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/#KnowJustTrueBeli)
* Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”

Oct 3: How should we hold beliefs?

* W. K. Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief”
* William James, “Will to Believe”

**Week 7: How do we acquire knowledge?**

Oct 8: Methods of knowledge acquisition, Social epistemology

* Section 4 of [this](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/#SOU) SEP entry
* Excerpt, Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*
* **Philosophy & Fiction due**

Oct 10: Social epistemology and epistemic injustice

* Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing”

**Week 8: Knowledge and Technology**

Oct 15: Knowledge of the external world

* Hilary Putnam, “Brains in a Vat”
* Excerpt,Jay Garfield, “Pramana,” in *Engaging Buddhism: Why it Matters*

Oct 17: Knowledge of the internal and external world

* Nick Bostrom, “Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?”

**Week 9: Value Theory – Ethical perspectives**

Oct 22: Ethical frameworks

* Excerpt from J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*
* Excerpt from Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Oct 24:

* Vivek Wadhwa, “[Law and Ethics Can’t Keep Pace with Technology](https://www.technologyreview.com/s/526401/laws-and-ethics-cant-keep-pace-with-technology/)”
* Jack Stilgoe and Alan Winfield, “[Self-driving car companies…](https://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2018/apr/13/self-driving-car-companies-should-not-be-allowed-to-investigate-their-own-crashes)”

**Week 10: Bioethics**

\* indicates excerpt only

Oct 29: Cloning

* Michael Tooley, “The Moral Status of Cloning Humans”
* Joyce Havstad, “Human Reproductive Cloning: A Conflict of Liberties”\*

Oct 31: Genetic engineering

* Jean Chambers, “Women’s Right to Choose Rationally: Genetic Information, Embryo Selection, and Genetic Manipulation”
* Jessica Hammond, “Genetic Engineering to Avoid Genetic Neglect”\*

**Week 11: Bioethics**

Nov 5: Surrogacy

* Casey Humbyrd, “Fair Trade International Surrogacy”

Nov 7: Sex robots

* Laura Bates, [“The Trouble With Sex Robots”](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/17/opinion/sex-robots-consent.html)
* David Graham, “[What Interacting With Robots Might Reveal About Human Nature"](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/06/kate-darling-robots-aspen/532194/)

**Week 12: Ethics of Artificial Intelligence**

Nov 12: Can AIs trust us?

* Eric Schwitzgebel and Mara Garza, “A Defense of the Rights of Artificial Intelligences”
* **Reflection paper #2 due**

Nov 14: Can we trust AIs?

* Theo Lorenc, “Artificial Intelligence and the Ethics of Human Extinction”

**Week 13: Politics and Technology**

Nov 19: Privacy and surveillance

* Titus Stahl, “Indiscriminate Mass Surveillance and the Public Sphere”

**Week 14: Politics and Technology**

Nov 26: On capitalism

* Excerpts from Karl Marx, *German Ideology*
* Excerpts from Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

Nov 28: On war

* Molly Wood and Kristin Schwab, “[How will technology change war?](https://www.marketplace.org/2017/12/18/tech/how-will-technology-change-war)"
* Joe Kullman, "[Looking at war, technology, and identity...](https://asunow.asu.edu/20171227-solutions-looking-war-technology-and-identity-moral-perspective)”

**Week 15: Politics and Technology**

Dec 3: Democracy

* Cambridge Analytica [scandal](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html)
* Social Media and the ‘Arab Spring’: [here](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/25/egypt-5-years-on-was-it-ever-a-social-media-revolution)
* *Optional*: [this](https://www.theatlantic.com/projects/can-technology-rescue-democracy/) collection

Dec 5: Net neutrality

* The ACLU on Net Neutrality as a first-amendment issue: [here](https://www.aclu.org/issues/free-speech/internet-speech/what-net-neutrality)
* Carmen Scurato, “[Who will be hit hardest by net neutrality](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/18/net-neutrality-marginalised-america-open-internet-fcc)?”

**Week 16: Wrap-up**

Dec 10: TBD by student interest

*Update: The ethics of space exploration*

* **Exam questions due**

**Exam TBD by UPenn registrar**

**Final paper due Dec. 19th**