Technology, Ethics & Politics

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Unlisted

Course Description

Technological artifacts and platforms are developed and created to realize specific aims, needs, and desires, and in turn, those artifacts end up changing and molding human behavior and larger social, cultural, economic, political and ecological systems. Human ideas, dispositions, worldviews, and imaginaries in turn, also shape and mold the artifacts we make — in effect, technologies are political and ethical dispositions made material and durable.

Understanding how technology both shapes and molds, and is shaped and molded by, the human condition, is imperative for people working, directly or indirectly, with the creation of technologies, and this course has been designed as an interrogation of the products of our making. It is an exploration of many different approaches culled from a plurality of disciplines: philosophy, science and technology studies, cultural studies, history, political science etc., in thinking about the politics and ethics of artifacts, of practices of making, and about how technology is caught up with contemporary public issues.

Examples of topics we will cover: public discourse and dissent in social media, issues of race and gender and computation, surveillance and privacy, the geopolitics of knowledge and design imperialism etc. This is primarily a seminar course, and so lots of reading, watching, listening will be expected, supplemented by in-class exercises and discussions of case studies, where we will use our newly gained knowledge and insights to deliberate on current issues around old, current, and emerging technologies.

Learning Goals

By the end of this class, you should:
1. Have a good understanding of the general landscape of contemporary political and ethical issues around specific technologies and the discourses around them;

2. Have a grasp of different ways of framing and resolving ethical issues in a number of disciplinary ways;

3. Understand how technologies embody various politics (race, culture, gender etc.) and create various kinds of political subjects;

4. Be able to apply your understanding to problematize specific technologies, analyze and reflect critically on their impacts, think through various interventions and argue for how to develop technologies in more thoughtful ways.

Syllabus

As a seminar, this course has been designed mostly as a survey course, dealing with various texts and thinkers, and heavily designed around in-class discussion and individual projects.

Week 1

01.17.2018 Introduction
Introductions, discussion of the syllabus, and a general discussion of the course

Week 2

01.22.2018 Why an Ethics\Politics of Technology?
Required Texts
Langdon Winner, *"Do Artifacts Have Politics?"*
LM Sacasas, "Do Artifacts Have Ethics?"

Additional Texts
Jonas, Hans. *"Toward a philosophy of technology"*

01.24.2018 Classical Ethics of Technology: The Ancient Greeks
Required Texts
David Tabachnik, *"A Tale of Two Cities: Plato's Kingly Techne and Aristotle's Phronetic Rule"*

Additional Texts
Vilem Flusser, *"On the word design: An etymological essay"*
Larry Hickman, *"John Dewey as a Philosopher of Technology"*

Week 3

01.29.2018 Technological Determinism
Required Texts
Tao Ruspoli, *"Being in the World"*

Additional Texts
Karl Jaspers, *"The Origin & Goal of History", Pgs 114 -125*
Hannah Arendt, *"The Vita Activa & The Human Condition", Pgs 7–11*

01.31.2018 Mediating Morality
Required Texts
Peter Paul Verbeek,*"Materializing Morality"*

Additional Texts
Don Ihde, *"A Phenomenology of Technics"*

Week 4

02.05.2018 Workshop: Ethical Mediations

02.07.2018 Bioethics
Required Texts
Nick Bostrom, *"The Fable of the Dragon Tyrant"*

Additional Texts
Peter Sloterdijk, *"Rules for the Human Zoo"*

Week 5

02.12.2018 Democracy, Freedom & Technology
Required Texts
Albert Borgmann, Excerpt from *"Technology & The Character of Contemporary Life"*, Chapter 14, *"Technology & Democracy"*
Michel Foucault, *The Michel Foucault Reader,* Chapter *"Space, Knowledge and Power"*

02.14.2018 Gendered Labor
Required Texts
Ruth Cowan, *"The Industrial Revolution in the Home"*
Evan Selinger, *"Technology Transfer & Globalization: A New Wave for Philosophy of Technology?"*

Week 6

02.19.2018 Workshop: Technologies of Control
Manfred Max Neef, Needs and Satisfiers
Niesche & Haas, Emotions & Ethics

02.21.2018 Molding Bodies
Required Texts
Nelly Oudshoorn, *"The Decline of the One-Size-Fits-All Paradigm"*

Additional Texts
Cynthia Cockburn, " *The circuit of technology*: *Gender, identity and power"*
Anni Dugdale, *"Inserting Grafenberg's IUD into the Sex Reform Movement"*

Week 7

02.26.2018 Molding Desire
Required Texts
James Bridle, "Something is Wrong on the Internet"
Evan Selinger, "Will the Internet of Things Result in Predictable People?"

Additional Texts
Bernard Stiegler & Irit Rogroff, *"Transindividuation"*

02.28.2018 Culture & Technology
Required Texts
Nicola Bidwell, "Decolonising Africa's HCI and Interaction Design Discourse*"*
Yuk Hui, Excerpt from *"The Question Concerning Technology in Asia",* Pg 3–33

Week 8

03.05.2018 Workshop: Intersectional Technologies

03.07.2018 Final Presentations

Spring Break (Yay!)

Grading Criteria

There are a total of three workshops, eight reflections, and one term paper, each with different grading criteria and assessment, for this course. Final grades will be assessed and given at the mid-term, at the end of spring break. Timely completion and submission of both reflections and exercises is a crucial part of your grade and we require that you submit on time.

Workshops (20% each):

There are a total of three workshops, each taking up a full class. In each of these will will apply our knowledge of the themes recently discussed to do an exercise. Each workshop will have an in-class component, and a homework component for which a brief will be provided. The workshops amount to 60% of your grade altogether.

Discussions (20%):

Group discussion is very important to debating ethical and political questions, and as part of this course, one of you will be responsible each week for uploading an article relevant to the issues and concepts discussed that week onto the class Tumblr, and everyone will be required to comment on and discuss the issues and\or questions raised in that article.

By the end of the mini, you should have a minimum of two uploaded posts on Tumblr, and have consistently contributed to discussing articles in a thoughful manner. You will be assessed both on your timely submission and the quality of your engagement.

Final Presentation (20%):

You will be required to present on an ethically or politically problematic issue of your choosing in the final class. A brief with details on the assignment, expectations and assessment criteria will be provided. An external jury will be brought in to help assess the presentations.

Policies

Responsibility — Students are responsible for all assignments, even if they are absent from class. Late assignments, failure to complete the assignments for class discussion and/or critique, and lack of preparedness for in-class discussions, presentations and/or critiques will jeopardize your successful completion of this course. Students must have prior permission from the instructor to submit work late and/or adequate evidence of unforeseeable circumstance, such as a sudden illness. Work is considered late if it is not received before the beginning of class on the

date due, or as otherwise detailed by the instructor. Even with permission, late work is subject to a grade penalty of a full letter grade deduction per day, i.e from an A to a B, after the original due date.

Academic Integrity — It is the responsibility of students to know and follow the university's policies for academic integrity and to learn the procedures specific to their discipline for correctly and appropriately differentiating their own work from that of others. Compromising your academic integrity may lead to serious consequences, including failure of the assignment, failure of the course, or more significant disciplinary action with the university. See: https://www.cmu.edu/academic-integrity/

Participation and attendance — Class participation is an essential part of class and includes: keeping up with reading, assignments, projects, contributing meaningfully to class discussions, active participation in group work, and coming to class regularly and on time.

Class attendance is mandatory. Missing class for any reason counts as an absence, even if unavoidable. If an absence is unavoidable, always provide evidence of the reason, such as a doctor's note, and notify the instructor directly prior to the class, if possible, or soon after. This will not automatically excuse the absence but will provide a basis for discussion if a student exceeds the allowable number of absences and an incomplete is requested. 3 absences on any grounds brings you down a full letter grade, i.e. an A into a B. More than 3 absences on any grounds constitutes grounds for failure.

The following may also be counted as an absence: coming to class without the required materials, sleeping in class, doing other work in class, and using a phone, email or social media during class if not related to class work.

Delays — In rare instances, the instructor may be delayed arriving to class. If s/he has not arrived by the time class is scheduled to start, you must wait a minimum of thirty minutes before leaving. Please use the time effectively on any current group or individual work. In the event that the instructor will miss class entirely, a notice will be posted in the classroom and/or by email indicating activities for making use of class time and for the next week's assignment.