

Philosophy of Technology

Course Number	PHIL 3181-L01
Day Time Location	Tuesday/Friday 1:00-2:15PM LL 522

Instructor Information

Dr. Philip J. Walsh

Office hours: Tuesday/Friday 2:15-5PM, Lowenstein Room 917G

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Course Description

“What I propose is very simple: it is nothing more than to *think* what we are doing”

- Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958)

The human condition may very well be a technological condition. Developing and refining technology has proven central to our evolutionary history, the development of science, our economic practices, and—most importantly—our self-understanding. Should we understand the co-development of humanity and technology as a continuous history? Or have the past two centuries—with the development of industrial mechanization, the computer, and now the Internet—marked a radical shift of some kind? This course will explore the philosophy of technology, seeking to understand the way in which technology is transforming our relationships to ourselves, to other people, and to our world. Guiding questions for the course include: What is technology? Is technology necessarily good or bad for human flourishing, or is just neutral? How are science and technology related? Do we need a special ethics of technology? We will also explore specific areas of technological development in greater depth, such as:

- Social media, personal identity, authenticity
- The “Internet of things,” surveillance, big data, privacy
- Brain-machine interface technologies, human enhancement, artificial intelligence
- Deep ecology, geo-engineering

Learning Objectives

- To gain a critical perspective on the nature and significance of technology in human life.
- To become familiar with major philosophical theories of technology and to practice identifying their premises/assumptions and developing critical responses to them
- To develop critical reading and thinking skills
- To develop academic and professional writing skills

Required texts

Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition (2nd Edition). Scharff & Dusek (eds.). Wiley Blackwell. 2014. ISBN: 978-1118547250.

- Additional reading assignments and course content will be made available on the course website.

Course Schedule (subject to change at discretion of instructor)

Note: all page numbers refer to our course textbook

Day	Topic	Assigned Readings
Jan. 15	Course Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review syllabus & course requirements (no assigned reading) - Introductory lecture
Jan. 18	Historical Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aristotle, "On 'Technē' and 'Epistēmē'" (19-24) - Schadewaldt, "The Greek Concepts of 'Nature' and 'Technique'" (25-32)
Jan. 22	Historical Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comte, "The Nature and Importance of the Positive Philosophy" (54-67)
Jan. 25	Heidegger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" (305-312)
Jan. 29	Heidegger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" (313-317)
Feb. 1	Heidegger's Shadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Borgmann, "Focal Things and Practices" (329-338)
Feb. 5	Heidegger's Shadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Borgmann, "Focal Things and Practices" (338-347) - First short paper assigned
Feb. 8	Heidegger's Shadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dreyfus & Spinoza, "Heidegger and Borgmann on How to Affirm Technology" (350-359)
Feb. 12	Heidegger's Shadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feenberg, "Philosophy of Technology at the Crossroads: Critique of Heidegger and Borgmann" (362-372)
Feb. 15	Heidegger's Shadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verbeek, "Postphenomenology of Technology" (561-571) - First short paper due
Feb. 19		NO CLASS (MONDAY SCHEDULE)
Feb. 22	Minds, Machines, Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dennett, "Consciousness in Human and Robot Minds" (588-596)
Feb. 26	Minds, Machines, Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clark & Chalmers, "The Extended Mind" (online)
Mar. 1	Minds, Machines, Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bostrom, "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity" (495-501)
Mar. 5	Minds, Machines, Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Radoilska, "An Aristotelian Approach to Cognitive Enhancement" (online) - Second short paper assigned

Mar. 8	Minds, Machines, Identity	- Selinger & Engström, “A Moratorium on Cyborgs” (631-640)
Mar. 12	Minds, Machines, Identity	- Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” (610-625)
Mar. 15	Minds, Machines, Identity	- Butler, excerpts on gender and performance (online) - Second short paper due
		SPRING BREAK
Mar. 26	Big Data	- Winner, “Do Artifacts Have Politics?” (668-679)
Mar. 29	Big Data	- Mittelstadt et al., “The Ethics of Algorithms” (online)
Apr. 2	Big Data	- Herrman, “Inside Facebook’s...Political-Media Machine” (online) - Fisher, “Inside Facebook’s Secret Rulebook for Global Political Speech” (online)
Apr. 5	Big Data	- Anderson, “The End of Theory” (online) - Bencivenga, “Big Data and Transcendental Philosophy” (online)
Apr. 9	Privacy, Surveillance, Selfhood	- Foucault, “Panopticism” (654-666)
Apr. 12	Privacy, Surveillance, Selfhood	- Hartzog & Selinger, “Facial Recognition is the Perfect Tool for Oppression” (online) - Mozur, “Inside China’s Dystopian Dreams: A.I., Shame and Lots of Cameras” (online)
Apr. 16	Privacy, Surveillance, Selfhood	- Orwell, <i>1984</i> , part 1, chapter 1 (online) - <i>Black Mirror</i> , “Nosedive” (Netflix)
Apr. 19		NO CLASS (EASTER HOLIDAY)
Apr. 23	Techno-capitalism	- Marx & Engels, “Capitalism and the Modern Labor Process” (74-87)
Apr. 26	Techno-capitalism	- Arendt, “The ‘Vita Activa’ and the Modern Age” (389-405) <i>Planet Money</i> podcast, “The Last Job” (online)
Apr. 30	Deep Ecology	- Devall, “The Deep Ecology Movement” (482-490)
Exam Week		- Final paper is due [TBA] @1159PM on Blackboard

Grading

Letter Grade	Numerical equivalent	Meaning of the Grade
A	94-100	Excellent. Honors-level work, outstanding.
A-	90-93	Still excellent.
B+	87-89	Very good. High Level of performance.
B	83-86	Good. Solid and above average level of performance.
B-	80-82	Good. Still above average.
C+	77-79	Average level of performance.
C	73-76	Satisfactory. Acceptable level of performance.
C-	70-72	Minimally acceptable.
D	65-69	Passing, but unsatisfactory. Below average performance.
F	<65	Failure. Inferior performance.

Standards for Distinguishing between Excellent, Good, Average and Poor:

- Professionalism: Papers should demonstrate good grammar as well as good spelling. They should also be copy-edited to reduce or eliminate typos.
- Writing Quality: Writing should be clear and exhibit good structure. Paragraphs should be cohesive and build towards a complete essay with a substantial thesis (as opposed to a string of disconnected thoughts).
- Accuracy and Understanding: Papers should be able accurately to re-create an argument or a position. They should find the relevant issues and argument(s) worthy of analysis.
- Argument: Papers should argue for or against a position rather than merely exchange opinions. Is the argument for or against a position constructed persuasively within the confines of the paper? (Note: I am not looking for your argument to be true — there is no need to guess my opinion. What I want to see is persuasion.)

Grade Breakdown

25% - short paper 1

25% - short paper 2

35% - final paper

15% - discussion questions

Short Papers

There will be two short paper assignments. Short papers are approximately 1000-1200 words. I will make a prompt for each paper and distribute in class (see Course Schedule above). Papers will be submitted on BlackBoard (no hardcopies necessary): 12 point Times New Roman font, double spaced, 1 inch margins. Do not put your name or the date or my name or the name of the course on the paper. Just a title, centered at the top of the first page (and you can do better than “Philosophy Paper” or “Paper 1”).

Final Paper

Students will develop their own topics for a longer final paper (2500-3000 words). The paper should address a broader issue and multiple readings. These readings may include texts from our course, but also external research as well. Students should develop their topics in dialogue with me (email me, come to office hours). Ideally you should have this paper outlined by mid-April and fully drafted by the final week of class. We will discuss possible

topics and paper strategies in class.

Discussion Questions

See the handout “Discussion Questions: Instructions and FAQs” (on Blackboard). Students are expected to submit **fifteen** Discussion Questions in all over the course of the term. **These must be submitted both online and in hard copy in class** (legibly handwritten or typed and printed are both fine). They must be uploaded to our Blackboard no later than **two hours before the class** for which they are submitted (the purpose of this is so that your classmates and I have an opportunity to read your question in advance), and you must also deliver a hard copy to me **within the first five minutes of class** (the purpose of this is to have a record that you punctually attended the class for which you submitted a question; also sometimes we use the hard copies in class discussion).

No partial marks are given for this portion of the course grade: if you submit fifteen, you will receive full marks. But if you are even one Discussion Question short, you will receive zero marks for this portion of the course grade. This is because submitting fifteen Discussion Questions punctually for classes you attend punctually represents a minimum level of participation in the class. Note that **this requirement also passes on to you the margin for lateness and absence**: you are not obliged to get lateness or absence excused by me for any reason as long as you meet the Discussion Questions requirement. Be careful, though! **This margin must absorb emergencies, technical difficulties, sick days, etc.** Students who squander the generous margin for lateness and absence this provides will find themselves hard-pressed to meet the Discussion Questions requirement. **While it is possible to pass the course without these marks, losing them would have a devastating impact on your grade.** (Value toward course grade: 15%)

Plagiarism:

The instructor reserves the right to deal with instances of plagiarism on a case by case basis. Penalties for plagiarism may include, but are not limited to:

- A reduced grade on an assignment
- Receiving a zero for the assignment
- Failure of the entire course

JUST DON'T DO IT. It is not worth it. It is easier than ever to plagiarize today, and it is easier than ever for your professor to catch you. If you are unsure if something counts as plagiarism (such as if/how you should cite something), just ask me, that's what I'm here for. It is better to ask and error on the side of caution.

From Fordham's student handbook:

Violations of Academic Integrity:

A. Plagiarism: Plagiarism occurs when individuals attempt to present as their own what has come from another source. Plagiarism takes place whether such theft is accidental or deliberate. Examples of plagiarism include but are not limited to:

- Failing to acknowledge the ideas of another person, whether or not such ideas are paraphrased, from whatever source including oral, print, broadcast or computer-mediated communication.
- Attempting to rewrite borrowed material by simply dropping a word here and there,

substituting a few words for others, or moving around words or sentences.

- Failing to place quotation marks around borrowed material in the approved style. It is no defense to claim that one has “forgotten” to do so.
- Presenting as one’s own an assignment, paper or computer program partially or wholly prepared by another person, whether by another student, friend, or by a business or on-line service that sells or distributes such papers and programs.

Some advice on plagiarism and paraphrasing from Joe Williams and Larry McEnerney, "Writing in College," in *Engaging the Humanities at the University of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 206-207.

Here is a simple test for inadvertent plagiarism: be conscious of where your eyes are as you put words on paper or on a screen. If your eyes are on your source at the same moment your fingers are flying across the keyboard, you risk doing something that weeks, months, even years later could result in your public humiliation. Whenever you use a source extensively, compare your page with the original. If you think someone could run her finger along your sentences and find synonyms or synonymous phrases for words in the original in roughly the same order, try again. You are least likely to plagiarize inadvertently if as you write, you keep your eyes not on your source, but on the screen or on your own page, and you report what your source has to say after those words have filtered through your own understanding of them.

Class policies

- “A friend is one before whom I may think aloud” –Emerson

My fundamental policy in this class is to have a class environment of mutual respect where we help one another achieve our course objectives. The course policies in this section are designed to help achieve that environment.

Correspondence

- Email is the best way to reach me. I will reply to all emails within one business day.
- Class announcements and other information about the course readings, schedule changes, due dates, etc. will all happen through Fordham email and our course website. It is your responsibility to check your Fordham email daily and have access to the course website.
- General tip for emailing college professors: always error on the side of formality. You would be amazed how many emails I get that begin with “Hey” or no greeting at all. Email is a form of professional communication and has different rules than texting. When emailing a professor or TA or generally anyone other than your close friends and family, begin the email with “Dear Professor...,” and end it with “Sincerely...” or “Best...”.

Electronic Devices

- Laptops and tablets are permitted for course readings and note-taking. I reserve the right to ask you to close your laptop if it is becoming an obvious distraction.
- Silence your phone. Don’t look at it.

Food and Drink

- If it requires utensils or smells, don't bring it.

Attendance

- See "Discussion Questions" above
- In the case of absence, it is the student's responsibility to inquire after any material they may have missed. Office hours is an appropriate place to do this; an email reading "Hey professor what did I miss?" is not.

Late work policy

- Late work will be penalized one full letter grade per day late.
- Extensions are only granted for **exceptional** circumstances, and solely at the instructor's discretion. An excess of work for other courses, family travel, or your employment schedule are not sufficient reasons for seeking an extension.
- Carefully look at the course schedule, the assignments, and due dates. Budget your time accordingly.

Disability Statement:

Fordham University, in compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of disability in administration of its education related programs and activities. We have an institutional commitment to provide equal educational opportunities for disabled students who are otherwise qualified. Students seeking services should meet with Disability Services staff for an initial intake meeting to develop an accommodation plan directly with the student in accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. For more information please visit: https://www.fordham.edu/info/20174/disability_services