
UNIVERSITY of GUELPH

PHIL 3370 Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Winter 2023

****Please check Syllabus and Announcements on CourseLink for the most up-to-date information****

Schedule: Tuesday/Thursday, 10:00-11:20 AM in MINS 300

Professor: Joshua August Skorburg (but I go by “Gus”)

E-mail: skorburg@uoguelph.ca

Office Hours: By appointment on Teams or in-person (MCKN 336)

Teaching Assistant: Dylan White dwhite11@uoguelph.ca

Course Description

Emerging technologies powered by Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Data Science increasingly influence significant aspects of our lives including where we go to school, who we date, where we work, who we talk to, what news we read, how we are entertained, and more. The philosophical discipline of Ethics is concerned (among other things) with the question: How should we live a good life? Through a careful study of some ethical traditions applied to contemporary problems raised by AI, we will explore whether and how we can live well in the midst of rapid technological advancement.

Required Resources

Zerilli, J. (2021). *A citizen's guide to artificial intelligence*. MIT Press. ISBN: 9780262044813. Note, all of the individual chapters are available for free through the UofG library and are posted on CourseLink. But you can also buy a hardcopy or e-book if you prefer. Additional readings will be posted as .pdfs on CourseLink

Learning Outcomes

- To provide students with time and space to step back from their everyday practices to reflect on the nature of their interactions with technology.
- To provide students with familiarity in theoretical and empirical work in the ethics of technology.
- To provide students with examples of, and practice in, sustained analytical reflection on theoretical and empirical questions about technology.
- To provide students with the presentation skills (both written and spoken) necessary to meaningfully engage across disciplinary boundaries in the sciences and humanities.

Assessments

1. Weekly Responses (30% of final grade)

Each week, you will submit a Weekly Response about the readings for the **upcoming** week. The content of the response is up to you, but all responses should deal **directly** with the reading assigned for that week. You may want to choose a sentence or paragraph you found especially provocative, difficult, or remarkable, then explain why you found it provocative, difficult, or remarkable.

Alternatively, you may want to argue that one of the authors is right or wrong in making some particular claim. Or you may wish to connect two passages in the reading that illuminate each other. You might relate a central concept from the reading to recent or current events. You may even just pick a passage and ask detailed questions about it. Your responses will *directly* guide what we address in class, and I will sometimes quote from them, so please take them seriously. In general, the responses should demonstrate that you have made a good effort to engage with the readings, and that you have raised a question worthy of consideration and discussion with your peers. While there is no strict requirement for length, the responses should be at least a paragraph long but probably shorter than a full page. I will drop your lowest score.

2. Mid-term Exam (30% of final grade)

The take-home midterm will be distributed at 9:00 AM, Friday February 10; **DUE 5:00 PM, Monday February 13.** Please plan accordingly.

3. Final Research paper (30% of final grade)

The culmination of your work in the class is a final research paper. You will need to incorporate at least one peer-reviewed source from outside of the assigned readings. Your research paper should demonstrate high-level engagement with themes from the course. The paper should not be a mere summary of other people's writing, but should also reflect your unique contribution to debates in technology ethics. The paper should be around five pages (~1,000 words). Strategies for successful writing will be discussed in class. The due date is **Thursday, April 13 by 11:59 PM**

4. Engagement (10% of final grade)

Good philosophy happens through discussion. It is therefore of the utmost importance that you attend class and participate. Excused absences will be granted for documented emergencies, or matters discussed with me AHEAD of time. In addition to showing up, you need to be prepared to participate. This includes showing up on time, actively speaking or listening, paying attention to what the other students have to say, taking notes, asking questions, etc. And of course it includes not sleeping, texting, snapchatting, emailing, tweeting, yik yaking, tik toking, instagraming, etc.

Schedule (subject to change)

*always check CourseLink for most up-to-date information on scheduling, readings, assignments, etc.

Week 1: January 10 & 12 – Introduction to Technology Ethics

Readings

- .PDF on Courselink: Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues*, Introduction & Ch. 1 (pp. 1-34)

Assignments: None

Week 2: January 17 & 19 – What is AI?

Readings

- Zerilli, Prologue and Ch. 1 (35 pgs.)
- Browse some of the blog posts, “Philosophers on GPT-3”:
<https://dailynous.com/2020/07/30/philosophers-gpt-3/>

Assignments

- Weekly Response 1 by 11:59 PM on Sunday January 15
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Week 3: January 24 & 26 – Transparency & Bias

Readings:

- Zerilli, Ch. 2 (22 pgs.)
- Zerilli, Ch. 3 (18 pgs)

Assignments

- Weekly Response 2 by 11:59 PM on Sunday, January 22
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Week 4: January 31 & February 2 – Responsibility & Control

Readings:

- Zerilli, Ch. 4 (18 pgs)
- Zerilli, Ch. 5 (14 pgs)

Assignments:

- Weekly Response 3 by 11:59 PM on Sunday, January 29
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Week 5: February 7 & 9 – Privacy & Surveillance; MIDTERM

Readings:

- Zerilli Ch. 6 (14 pgs)
- .PDF on Courselink: Amnesty International (2019) *Surveillance Giants: How the business model of Google and Facebook threatens human rights* (51 pages)

Assignments

- Weekly Response 4 by 11:59 Sunday February 5;
 - Midterm distributed at 9:00 AM, Friday February 10; **DUE 5:00 PM, Monday February 13**
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Week 6: Feb 14 & 16 – Autonomy & Government

Readings:

- Zerilli Ch. 7 (20 pgs)
- Zerilli Ch. 8 (22 pgs)

Assignments:

- **MIDTERM DUE 5:00 PM, Monday February 13**
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Week 7: February 21 & 23

WINTER BREAK NO CLASS

Week 8: February 28 & March 2 – Deepfakes and Disinformation

Readings:

- .PDF on Courselink: Rini, R. (2020). Deepfakes and the epistemic backstop. *Philosopher's Imprint*, 1-16.
- .PDF on Courselink: NATO Association of Canada (2019) - Disinformation and digital democracy (52 pgs.)
 - **we will focus on Rini's essay "Social Media Disinformation and the Security Threat to Democratic Legitimacy" pp. 10-15, but feel free to read other articles of interest).

Assignments:

- Weekly Response 5 due 11:59 PM on Sunday, February 26
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Week 9: March 7 & 9 – Robots & Rights

Readings:

- .PDF on Courselink: Gruen, L. (2017). The moral status of animals. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- .PDF on Courselink: Danaher, J. (2020). Welcoming robots into the moral circle: a defence of ethical behaviourism. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 26(4), 2023-2049.

Assignments:

- Weekly Response 6 due 11:59 PM on Sunday, March 5
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Week 10: March 14 & 16 – Automation & Future of work

Readings:

- Zerilli, Ch. 9 (10 pgs)
- .PDF on Courselink: Danaher, J. (2017). Will life be worth living in a world without work? Technological unemployment and the meaning of life. *Science and engineering ethics*, 23(1), 41-64.

Assignments:

- Weekly Response 7 due 11:59 PM on Sunday, March 12
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Week 11: March 21 & 23 – Autonomous vehicles

Readings:

- .PDF on Courselink: Nyholm S (2018). The ethics of crashes with self-driving cars: A roadmap, 1 & 2 *Philosophy Compass*. (20 pgs)
- .PDF on Courselink: Bonnefon, J. F., Shariff, A., & Rahwan, I. (2016). The social dilemma of autonomous vehicles. *Science*, 352(6293), 1573-1576.

Assignments:

- Weekly Response 8 due 11:59 PM on Sunday, March 19
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Week 12: March 28 & 30 – The Singularity

Readings:

- .PDF on Courouselink: Chalmers, D. (2010). The singularity: A philosophical analysis. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 17(9), 7-65.

Assignments:

- Weekly Response 9 by 11:59 PM on Sunday March 26
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Week 13: April 4 (NO CLASS on Thursday April 6) – Oversight & Regulation

Readings:

- Zerilli Ch. 10 (16 pgs)

Assignments:

- Weekly Response 10 due 11:59 PM on Sunday April 2
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Final Research Paper is due Thursday, April 13 by 11:59 PM
