PHIL 238: Ethics and Technology
Peters 234, MWF 1:30-2:20

Professor Amy Berg
Email: aberg@oberlin.edu
Office: King 120A
Office hours: Wednesdays 2:30-4:30 pm (Zoom by request) or by appointment
Course prerequisite: One previous philosophy course (or instructor consent)

What this course is about

With the rise of new forms of technology, we face a variety of questions about the moral dimensions of that technology. What technology should I use, and how? What responsibilities do corporations have regarding the technology they develop and sell? And, finally, what role (if any) is there for government regulation of technology? In this course, we will explore these questions by using the tools of philosophy to carefully examine some current and future technological innovations.

By the end of this course, you will be able to

- Identify ethical issues in technology
- Apply moral theories to various issues and innovations in technology
- Connect philosophical arguments about technology to your own experiences
- Argue, in discussion and writing, for your own views about the ethics of technology

Course policies

What you'll need to have

- The readings. Complete each day's assigned reading before coming to class, and bring your copy of the reading with you to class. Please come to my office during business hours in the first week of class to pick up your packet of readings.
- Access to Blackboard:
  - It's where I will post the most current version of the syllabus.
  - It's also where you can find links to the materials we will be using in class—handouts, assignment instructions, Zoom for remote office hours, and so on.
  - It's where you can find the link to our annotated bibliography, where you can find, add, and comment on additional resources about ethics and technology.
  - Advice from students who have been successful in this course in the past is posted in the "Miscellaneous" tab.

What you'll need to do
Assignments
There are five assignments due in this course:

- The final assignment for this course is the **policy memo**. In this memo, you will propose a policy concerning one form of technology; your audience will be yourself (as a user of that technology), a corporation (as a provider of that technology), or the government (as a regulator of that technology). Your job will be to explain the technology and your method for assessing it, make recommendations, and consider objections to your recommendations.

- The other written work in this course asks you to practice each of the sections of your final memo. The four shorter assignments are one Background, one Methodology, one Recommendation, and one Objections (which will also include the Header and Summary for your final memo).
- All assignments will be graded anonymously; you should put your T number, *not* your name, on them. At the end of each assignment, write the Honor Pledge and type or handwrite your T number; do not type or sign your name.
- **Extension policy for written work:** Assignments must be turned in at the time and date they are due. I am happy to consider requests for extensions if you ask me before the assignment is due. I generally approve extensions due to unforeseeable events (for example, a family or medical emergency) that significantly affect your ability to complete assignments on time; I generally do not approve extensions due to foreseeable events (for example, work in other courses or extracurricular activities). If you turn in an assignment late, and you have not made prior arrangements with me, I will deduct three percent of your grade if that assignment is turned in late on the day it's due and three percent for each day after that (so, for example, an assignment that would have gotten 100% if it were turned in on time on Tuesday would get 91% if turned in on Thursday). **Unless you are in extraordinary circumstances, I will not accept assignments that are turned in more than one week late.**
- In this course, **your writing is a public act.** I will occasionally use anonymized and (sometimes) edited versions of your work in class and in future courses in order to generate discussion, share viewpoints, ask questions, and so on.

Participation

Philosophy is a collaborative, discussion-based discipline. Your writing and thinking will benefit from considering others' views, reactions to readings, and experiences. And your classmates and I will benefit from hearing your take.

- I want you to come to class and participate, but it's more important for you and others to stay safe and healthy. **Do not come to class if you feel even a little bit sick!** Please follow ObieSafe rules whenever you're in this course.
- That said, this class is discussion-based, and it's important to attend whenever you're able to and to participate when you attend. Your first **two absences** are free: you can miss those classes for any reason, and you don't have to let me know what that reason is. If you're absent more than twice, I'll apply the same policy as for late work. If you miss class because of an unforeseeable event, and you communicate with me about that absence, I will generally excuse that absence; absences due to foreseeable events, or absences you don't discuss with me in a timely way, will generally not be excused. **Absences because you're sick never count against you,** as long as you communicate with me in a timely way. You count as absent if you are not present when I take attendance, even if you show up later in the class period; you also count as absent if you leave early without checking in with me. You'll lose two percentage points from your participation grade for each unexcused absence (beyond your first two). If at any point in the semester, you believe you are in a situation for which I should make an exception to this policy, please talk with me outside of class.
- In order to receive the highest participation grade you can, come ready to make active, serious, charitable contributions to class discussion. To make sure our discussion is productive and includes a wide variety of voices, I may sometimes call on students at random. To help guide your participation, I will give you an evaluation at midsemester (separate from your midterm grade) of how you've done so far. When I grade participation, here's what I'm looking for:

- o *A range:* You take on at least your fair share of the responsibility for making sure discussion is productive, both in class discussion and in smaller groups. You frequently volunteer to speak, even when others are not. Your comments demonstrate that you've done the reading carefully (this is *not* the same thing as understanding the reading—questions count!). At the same time, you don't dominate; you listen carefully to and engage with what others are saying, and you balance taking an active role in discussion and group activities with making sure others have a chance to speak. You are never a distraction.
  - o *B range:* You speak up in most but not all classes or group activities, contributing but not quite doing your fair share to make discussion productive. Your comments generally demonstrate that you've done the reading. You may have a tendency to dominate discussion, and/or your comments may not demonstrate that you're carefully listening to and engaging with others. You are never or rarely a distraction.
  - o *C range:* You speak up only occasionally (less often than once per class meeting on average), doing well below your fair share to make discussion productive. Your comments demonstrate a lack of familiarity with the reading. Your comments don't do much to engage with others in the course, and/or you talk over others. You may sometimes be a distraction.
  - o *D or F range:* You never or almost never speak up in class discussion and/or group activities. You may frequently be a distraction.
  - o Additions to and comments on our annotated bibliography boost your participation grade, but they are neither necessary nor sufficient for your grade in this part of class (you can do well even if you never contribute to the annotated bibliography, and contributions to the bibliography are not a complete substitute for engagement in class).
- Because philosophy is done best when it's done collaboratively, my goal is to create a space where productive conversations can happen. Research on classrooms and workplaces consistently supports the conclusion that, for most people, technology is a barrier to these productive conversations. (Ask me if you're curious about this research!) For that reason, **electronic devices (laptops, tablets, phones, etc.) are generally not allowed in class.** I will ask you to put these devices in your bag at the beginning of class and leave them there until the end of class. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. **If you need an electronic device in order to be successful in this course (because of a disability, a life situation, or some other reason), please speak with me during the first two weeks of the course.** If I give you permission to use technology, it's your responsibility to work to minimize your distractions to other students (a good way to do this is to sit in the back or to the side of the classroom, so that your screen will not be visible to others).

Here's how the work in this course contributes to your final grade:
- **Memo practice:** 50% total
  - o **Background:** 5%
  - o **Methodology:** 10%
  - o **Recommendations:** 20%
  - o **Objections, Header, and Summary:** 15%
- **Final policy memo:** 35%
- **Participation:** 15%

The grade scale is:

	A: 93-100%	A-: 90-92%
B+: 87-89%	B: 83-86%	B-: 80-82%
C+: 77-79%	C: 73-76%	C-: 70-72%
D+: 67-69%	D: 60-63%	D-: 60-62%
F: below 60%		

What I'll need to do

My responsibilities in this course include:

- Making sure our discussions are productive. If at any point you're not feeling that our discussions are respectful and charitable, please come talk to me.
- Grading your work quickly and fairly. I will return all graded work no later than two weeks from the day you turn it in.
- Communicating with you over email.
  - My responsibility is to email you whenever there are time-sensitive announcements about this course; your responsibility is to check your Oberlin email (including your spam folder) every day.
  - I use Blackboard when I need to send announcements to the entire class. Replies to emails I send through Blackboard do not go to me, and I have no way to see them. **If you need to contact me over email, please make sure you're emailing my email address, aberg@oberlin.edu.**
  - Our emails to each other in this course are professional documents, and it is my and your responsibility to write them professionally. For tips on how to write a professional email, check the email rubric posted to Blackboard. I will respond to your email no later than 5 pm on the next business day; in the rare case I do not, please feel free to follow up with me after that.
- Holding office hours, which you can use to talk to me about course content, what you've missed if you have to miss class, and so on. (This semester, office hours will be in person by default, but I'm also happy to meet over Zoom—just let me know ahead of time.) I'm happy to discuss questions about assignments and to provide feedback on your work before you turn it in; if you want me to read a complete draft of an assignment, send it to me at least one week before it's due.

Some ways to succeed in this course

- I am committed to making sure that you can succeed in this course, regardless of whether you have a disability (visible or invisible). If you have a disability that may impact your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see me and the Office for Disability and Access so that we may arrange appropriate accommodations. If you have questions, or if you need an accommodation of another type (athletic, religious, etc.), please let me know as soon as possible.
- **Every student is expected to adhere to the Honor Code.** This means in very general terms that you only submit work that is yours. More specifically, it means that you will not plagiarize; that is, you will not appropriate the work or ideas of someone else—whether written or not—without acknowledgement, using the conventionally agreed-on scholarly practices for quoting and citation, and that you will not cheat, fabricate, collaborate on a project that is meant to be done individually, or submit the same work for multiple classes or assignments without the prior approval of all instructors involved. While you are allowed and encouraged to ask for

advice and help from the instructor, librarians, or official writing tutors, you are, in the end, to submit work produced by you. Some assignments may be collaborative in nature; those will be clearly identified as such. Everyone in the campus community is required to report all suspected violations of the honor code to the student honors committee. Following college-wide policy, include the Honor Pledge and your T number at the bottom of each assignment. For more information, see the Academic Integrity section of the Dean of Students website (https://www.oberlin.edu/dean-of-students/student-conduct/academic-integrity).

- I encourage you to use the Writing Center (https://www.oberlin.edu/arts-and-sciences/resources-and-support/wap) as you work on your assignments in this course.
- You are welcome and encouraged to come to my office hours or make an appointment with me whenever you want to talk about the course material, your assignments, or any other philosophy-related concerns you have.

Schedule of readings and assignments

Pick up your copies of the readings at my office (King 120A) as soon as you can. This schedule is provisional, and you are responsible for learning about any changes we make to it; you can always find the most current syllabus on Blackboard.

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments
M 1/30	Introduction	None	
W 2/1	Introduction	Winner, "Technologies as Forms of Life"	
T 2/2	Visit the Allen Museum during your assigned time (sign up using the link on Blackboard)		
F 2/3	Allen Museum	None	
M 2/6	Artificial intelligence	Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics* (chapters 5 and 6)	Background assigned
W 2/8	Artificial intelligence	Rizer and Watney, "Artificial Intelligence Can Make Our Jail System More Efficient, Equitable, and Just" (selections)	
F 2/10	Artificial intelligence	None	
M 2/13	Artificial intelligence	Eubanks, *Automating Inequality* (chapter 4: read *at least* pp. 127 – 132, 134 – 147, 152 – 158, and 166 – 168)	
W 2/15	Artificial intelligence	Benjamin, *Race after Technology* (chapter 4)	
F 2/17	Artificial intelligence	No reading	Background due
M 2/20	Moral theory	Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (chapter 9)	
W 2/22	CLASS CANCELED		
F 2/24	CLASS CANCELED		

M 2/27	Privacy	Véliz, *Privacy is Power* (skim chapter 1; chapter 5 pp. 127 – 147, 154 - 163)	Methodology assigned
W 3/1	Privacy	Toobin, "The Solace of Oblivion"	
F 3/3	Privacy	No reading	
M 3/6	Moral theory	O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics"	
W 3/8	Moral theory	Aristotle, selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*	
F 3/10	Moral theory	No reading	Methodology due
M 3/13	Social media	Vallor, "Flourishing on Facebook"	
W 3/15	Social media	Ronson, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* (chapter 4)	
F 3/17	Social media	No reading	
M 3/22	SPRING BREAK		
W 3/24	SPRING BREAK		
F 3/26	SPRING BREAK		
M 3/27	Social media	Bhargava and Velasquez, "Ethics of the Attention Economy: The Problem of Social Media Addiction"	Recommendations assigned
W 3/29	Moral theory	Wong, "Dao, Harmony and Personhood: Towards a Confucian Ethics of Technology	
F 3/31	Moral theory	No reading	
M 4/3	Democracy	Meeks, "Better Democracy through Technology"	
W 4/5	Democracy	Nguyen, selections from "How Twitter Gamifies Communication"	
F 4/7	Democracy	No reading	Recommendations due
M 4/10	Democracy	Rini, "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology"	
W 4/12	Enhancement	Sandel, "The Case against Perfection"	
F 4/14	Enhancement	No reading	
M 4/17	Enhancement	Tannenbaum, "The Promise and Peril of the Pharmacological Enhancer Modafinil"	Objections (and draft Header and Summary for final memo) assigned

W 4/19	Enhancement	Douglas, "Moral Enhancement"	
F 4/21	Enhancement	No reading	
M 4/24	Enhancement	Liao, Sandberg, and Roache, "Human Engineering and Climate Change"	
W 4/26	Geoengineering	NOAA, "State of the Science Fact Sheet: Climate Engineering" AND Wong, "Consenting to Geoengineering"	
F 4/28	Geoengineering	No reading	Objections (and draft Header and Summary) due
M 5/1	Geoengineering	Smith, selections from "Who May Geoengineer: Global Domination, Revolution, and Solar Radiation Management"	
W 5/3	Policy memo workshop	No reading (bring a draft of your policy memo to class)	
F 5/5	Wrap-up	No reading	
W 5/10	Final policy memo due at 11 am		