PHIL 238: Ethics and Technology
King 337, Tu/Th 9:30-10:45

Professor Amy Berg
Email: aberg@oberlin.edu
Office: King 120A
Office hours: Tuesdays 12-2 in person (Zoom by request) or by appointment
Course prerequisite: At least one previous college-level philosophy course or my consent
Mode of instruction: In person
Zoom for class: https://oberlin.zoom.us/j/87369574059 (passcode: technology)
Zoom for office hours: https://oberlin.zoom.us/j/84559948719 (passcode: office)

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

- 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.
- You will also need 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, and so on.
    - And 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.

What you'll need to do
Assignments

There are seven 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, 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. There are six of these shorter assignments: one Background, two Methodologies, two Recommendations, and one Objections (plus 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. Before you submit any assignments, you must sign and return the Honor Pledge.
- **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).
- 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 to stay safe and healthy. **Do not come to class if you feel even a little bit sick!** I will take attendance every day, for my records and to help me assess your learning in this course. Please communicate with me if you will need to miss class; if you miss several classes in a row, I may follow up with you, and frequent unexplained absences may result in a lower participation grade.
- To show respect for your peers and for me, avoid coming late to class or leaving early.
- 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. If you have to miss class, I will count active, serious, charitable visits to my office hours toward your participation grade. To help guide your participation, I will give you an assessment 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:
    - *A range:* Your comments demonstrate that you've done the reading, you actively and positively participate in all group activities, you ask questions or offer comments at least every other class session, you listen to and respond to others, and/or you come to office hours at least a couple of times. You are never a distraction.
    - *B range:* Your comments demonstrate that you've usually done the reading, you participate in most group activities, you ask questions or offer comments sporadically, and/or you generally listen and respond to others. You are never a distraction.
    - *C range:* Your comments demonstrate a lack of familiarity with the reading, you do not participate very actively in class (or else are a distraction), you talk over others, and/or you never come to office hours.
    - *D or F range:* You either do not participate or are an active distraction in class, and you never come to office hours or communicate with me via email.
    - 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 (that is, 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
  - **Background:** 2%
  - **Methodology 1:** 5%
  - **Methodology 2:** 8%
  - **Recommendations 1:** 10%
  - **Recommendations 2:** 12%
  - **Objections, Header, and Summary:** 13%
- **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%		

COVID-19 policies
- Stay healthy and keep others healthy! Follow the ObieSafe requirements at all times, inside and outside our classroom. **Do not come to class if you feel even a little bit sick**.
- If you're not fully vaccinated (>2 weeks past your final dose), please wear your mask.
- If you're coming to class via Zoom, you can find a link to the Zoom room at the top of this syllabus and on our Blackboard site. When we are engaged in discussion as a whole class, participate by raising your hand in Zoom. Please keep your camera on whenever possible.
- I will record our sessions on Zoom and make them available to members of this class on request; if you have concerns about this, please contact me as soon as possible.
- If you have to miss class for illness, I'll work with you to figure out what's best on a case-by-case basis. This may include joining our class meetings via Zoom, receiving extensions on your assignments, or even being excused from some assignments altogether.
- Some material and images in this course may be considered sensitive or interpreted as illegal outside of the United States (US). These materials are being presented and distributed for purposes of educational use in the US. They do not represent the views of Oberlin College and Conservatory. Materials in this course, including but not limited to PDFs and images of any kind, may not be downloaded, displayed, distributed, reproduced, published, transmitted, or

broadcast (including and especially via any social media) outside of the educational framework of this course, without prior written permission of the faculty member. Class lectures and discussions may not be recorded or reproduced in any way (including screenshots), unless necessary to comply with approved accommodations.

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 Disability Resources at the Center for Academic Success 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, you will sign a statement at the beginning of the

semester to certify that you will adhere to the honor code. 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; appointments available at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dGrwegnHC1Q0dkfxF228cdBB6zOviTLtjuOn91OlURA/edit) 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.

REMOTE-OPTIONAL Tuesday, May 25: Course introduction
  Reading: None
REMOTE-OPTIONAL Thursday, May 27: Course introduction
  Reading: Langdon Winner, "Technologies as Forms of Life"

Tuesday, June 1: Artificial intelligence
  Reading: Mark Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics* (chapters 5 and 6)
  Memo assignment 1 (Background) distributed
Thursday, June 3: Artificial intelligence
  Reading: Arthur Rizer and Caleb Watney, "Artificial Intelligence Can Make Our Jail System More Efficient, Equitable, and Just" (selections)

Tuesday, June 8: Artificial intelligence
  Reading: Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality* (chapter 4: read *at least* pp. 127 – 132, 134 – 147, 152 – 158, and 166 – 168)
Thursday, June 10: Artificial intelligence
  Reading: Ruha Benjamin, *Race after Technology* (chapter 4)
  Memo assignment 1 due

Tuesday, June 15: Moral theory: consequentialism
  Reading: Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (chapter 9)
  Memo assignment 2 (Methodology) distributed
Thursday, June 17: Allen Museum presentation
  Reading: None, but visit the Allen Museum and complete the VoiceThread before class

Tuesday, June 22: Privacy
  Reading: Carissa Véliz, *Privacy is Power* (skim chapter 1; chapter 5 pp. 127 – 147, 154 - 163)
Thursday, June 24: Privacy
  Reading: Jeffrey Toobin, "The Solace of Oblivion"
  Memo assignment 2 due

Tuesday, June 29: Moral theory: deontology
  Reading: Onora O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics"
  Memo assignment 3 (Methodology) distributed
Thursday, July 1: Moral theory: virtue ethics
  Reading: Aristotle, selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*

Tuesday, July 6: NO CLASS – INDEPENDENCE DAY
Thursday, July 8: Social media
    Reading: Shannon Vallor, "Flourishing on Facebook"
    Memo assignment 3 due

Tuesday, July 13: Social media
    Reading: Jon Ronson, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* (chapter 4)
    Memo assignment 4 (Recommendations) distributed
Thursday, July 15: Social media
    Reading: James Williams, *Stand Out of Our Light* (chapters 4 and 5)

Tuesday, July 20: Moral theory: Confucian ethics
    Reading: Pak-Hang Wong, "Dao, Harmony and Personhood: Towards a Confucian Ethics of Technology"
Thursday, July 22: Technology and democracy
    Reading: Brock Meeks, "Better Democracy through Technology"
    Memo assignment 4 due

Tuesday, July 27: Technology and democracy
    Reading: Jaron Lanier, *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (selections from ch. 2 and all of ch. 9)
    Memo assignment 5 (Recommendations) distributed
Thursday, July 29: Technology and democracy
    Reading: Regina Rini, "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology"

Tuesday, August 3: Human enhancement
    Reading: Michael Sandel, "The Case against Perfection"
Thursday, August 5: Human enhancement
    Reading: Julie Tannenbaum, "The Promise and Peril of the Pharmacological Enhancer Modafinil"
    Memo assignment 5 due; assignment 6 (Objections, Header, and Summary) distributed

Tuesday, August 10: Human enhancement
    Reading: Thomas Douglas, "Moral Enhancement"
Thursday, August 12: Climate change
    Reading: S. Matthew Liao, Anders Sandberg, and Rebecca Roache, "Human Engineering and Climate Change"

Tuesday, August 17: Climate change
    Reading: Clive Hamilton, "Ethical Anxieties about Geoengineering"
    Memo assignment 6 due
Thursday, August 19: Climate change
    Reading: Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò and Holly Jean Buck, "Capturing Carbon to Fight Climate Change Is Dividing Environmentalists" AND David Morrow et al., "Principles for Thinking about Carbon Dioxide Removal in Just Climate Policy"

Tuesday, August 24: Conclusion
    Reading: None

Monday, August 30: Policy memo due at 2 pm