

PHIL 4310: Philosophy of Technology

Syllabus

Spring 2012

Course Information

Time MW 10:00 AM - 11:15 AM

Location JO 4.102

Professor Contact Information

Professor Matthew J. Brown

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Office Phone 972-883-2536

Office Location JO 4.120

Office Hours Wednesday 2:00-4:00pm and by appointment

Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

Prerequisite: PHIL 1301, PHIL 2316, PHIL 2317 or permission of the instructor.

This course is upper-level course in philosophy and assumes basic familiarity with the problems, modes of inquiry, and major traditions of philosophy, though no particular familiarity with any philosophical specializations are assumed. As an upper-level course in the humanities, it presupposes the skills of reading, analyzing, and writing at an academic level. Students unused to reading and writing about difficult, sometimes fairly technical material are urged to consult with the professor early and often.

Course Description

Never before in human history has technology been such a pervasive part of our lives. But what does it mean? How should we think about the cultural, ethical, and political effects of technology?

The goal of this course is to learn to think critically about the nature and value of technology. This requires healthy skepticism about two common views about technology:

techno-boosterism – the view that technology is always a force for good, that it will solve all of our problems

ludditism – doom-and-gloom technology bashing.

Instead, we will learn frameworks for thoughtful analysis of particular technologies and technology in general. We will explore questions such as: What is technology? How is it related to science? Is it a good thing for society? What are the responsibilities of its creators? What role does technology play in human nature? How is modern technology changing what it means to be human? Where are we headed?

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

- Students will analyze and interpret a significant body of primary works in philosophy of technology.
- Students will develop their ability to read, analyze, and write about complex texts.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the major questions and traditions in the philosophy of technology.
- Students will reflect on the socially responsible creation and use of technology, and create a project to further that end.
- Students will be able to critically analyze and discuss the nature of, value of, and challenges to technology as an intellectual and cultural institution.

Textbooks and Materials

Required

Codes in [brackets] used to specify reading assignments.

- Dusek, *Philosophy of Technology: An Introduction* [D]
- Kaplan, *Readings in Philosophy of Technology* [K]
- Electronic reserves at <http://utdallas.docutek.com/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=1260> [ER]
- Class resources at <http://philtech.pbworks.com/>

Further Reading

These provide sources that would be useful for your research paper.

- Scharff & Dusek, *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition*
- *Technology and Values: Essential Readings*, ed. Craig Hanks
- Shrader-Frechette, *Technology and Values*

Course Schedule

Note: The introductory text by Val Dusek provides a general overview of the field, but its chapters rarely track the topical approach we will taken in the class. It is recommended that you read the full text cover-to-cover early in the course, and

continue to use it as a general reference. I have indicated where particular chapters are useful to particular weeks, but you are free to read the book in its ordinary order.

1. What is philosophy? Why *philosophy of technology*? 1/18
Read: Farris [ER], Kaplan, “Introduction” [K]
Assignments: Email professor, join wiki, create profile
2. Basic issues and theory in philosophy of technology 1/23-1/25
Read: Dusek, “What is Technology?” [D:2], “Technological Determinism” [D:6], Drengson [ER]
Attend: Heather Douglas, 7:30pm 1/25, Jonsson Performance Hall
3. Heidegger’s philosophy of technology 1/30-2/1
Read: Heidegger [K: Chapter 1], Dreyfus [K:2], Idhe [ER], “Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Technology” [D:5] *Further Reading:* Borgmann [K:5]
4. Marcuse and Critical Theory 2/6-2/8
Read: Marcuse [K:3], “Rationality, Technological Rationality, and Reason” [D:4], *Further Reading:* Feenberg [K:10]
Attend: Robots, Ethics and Policy, 7:30pm 2/8
5. Dewey and Pragmatism 2/13-2/15
Read: Hickman [K:4], Dewey, “Science and Society” [ER]
Assignment: Meet w/ your professor outside of class prior to this date.
Due: Term Paper Prospectus 2/15
6. Technology, Values, Ethics 2/20-2/22
Read: Lowrance [ER], Jonas [K:12]
7. Technology & Politics 2/27-2/29
Read: Winner [K:17], “Technocracy” [D:3]
Midterm Exam: 2/29
Attend: Politics of Science Education, 7:30pm 2/29
8. Women, Feminism, & Technology 3/5-3/7
Read: Bush, “Women and the Assessment of Technology” [K:8], “Women, Feminism, & Technology” [D:9]
Due: Research Paper 3/7
9. **Spring Break** 3/12-3/17
10. Applications to Information Technology 3/19-3/21
Read: Berry [ER], Zuboff [ER]
Attend: Nancy Cartwright, 7:30pm 3/21, Jonsson Performance Hall
11. Technology and Human Nature 3/26-3/28
Read: Bostrom [K:23], Kurzweil [K:24], Dreyfus & Dreyfus [K:25]
12. Technology and Cognition 4/2 – *No class on 4/4*

Read: Clark [ER], Hutchins [ER], “Human Nature” [D:8]

13. *Group Presentations* 4/9-4/11

Summary and documentation due at the beginning of class 4/9

14. Science/Technology or Technoscience? 4/16-4/18

Read: Pitt [K:34], Latour [K:36], Hacking [ER], “Philosophy of Science & Technology” [D:1]

15. Latour on Human-Nonhuman Symmetry 4/23-4/25

Read: Latour [K:11], “Social Constructionism and Actor-Network Theory” [D:12]

16. Art and Technology: Usefulness & Beauty, Nature & Artifice 4/30-5/2

Read: McDermott [ER], Dewey, “The Live Creature...” [ER], Feyerabend [ER]

Final Exam: F 5/11 at 8:00am

Grading Policy

Graded Assignments

Your grade will depend on the following assignments (dates are approximate):

Homework Assignments (5 points) Brief assignments given a few times during the semester for 1 point or 1/2 point.

Class Participation and Citizenship (5 points) The quantity and quality of your intellectual contribution to class discussions, to close readings of the text undertaken in class, and participation in in-class assignments and activities, as well as how much you contribute to a productive and fair community of learning.

Midterm Exam (8 points) In-class, format TBA.

Research Paper (12 points) Assignment handout to be given early in the semester. Contribution to some major debate in the philosophy of technology, requiring outside research.

Group Project and Presentation (8 points) In groups of 2–4, you will do something to promote socially responsible technology. You will write a 300–500 word summary of your project, and give a brief in-class presentation. Your project will be evaluated according to effort, informedness (theoretical and practical), effectiveness, and creativity.

Final Exam (4 points) Format TBA.

Attendance at Special Lectures and Events (4 points) 1 point per event. It is your responsibility to check in with the professor and be counted.

Final Grades

Final grade will be calculated on a 4.0 scale by taking your points divided by ten. So, for example, a student with a 33 would have a 3.3 or a B+. 41+ points is an A+, 38+ points is an A, 35+ points is an A-, 32+ is a B+, 28+ is a B, 25+ is a B-, etc.

Evaluation Standards

The following is a clarification for the purposes of this course of the University's official policy with respect to grading standards.

- An **A** grade indicates *excellent* work. **A** work has something to say and says it well. It displays a subtle and nuanced understanding of the text, develops arguments clearly and effectively, and reflects insightfully on the course material. It often rises above other work in terms of creativity and sophistication, or it may add something valuable to the discussion that goes beyond merely fulfilling the letter of the requirements. Only few, minor mistakes are present.
- A **B** grade indicates *good* work. Such work displays a clear understanding of the text, develops arguments consistently towards a clear claim, and is thoughtful and careful. The presence of serious errors must not impair the clarity of an argument or the overall understanding of a text. **B** work is in many ways successful, but lacks the sophistication or originality of **A** work.
- A **C** grade indicates *adequate* work. It shows an adequate understanding of the key parts of the text. Arguments aim at a central claim, though they may rely on unsupported or insufficiently developed ideas. More serious errors may be present, so long as the central claims and basic understandings are not undermined.
- Work which deserves a grade less than **C** will display some of the following problems: it fails to show adequate understanding of the text; it fails to understand the assignment; it fails to articulate a coherent or adequate argument; it fails to reflect on the content of the course; it displays such pervasive grammatical errors as to be highly obscure in meaning.

+/- grades *will* be assigned

Course Policies

Note-Taking & Gadgets in the Classroom

During lecture, no students are allowed to use laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc. except for the day's assigned note-takers. Assigned note-takers will write up and compile notes on lecture, and then post them on the course wiki. All other students on that day are encouraged to take minimal notes, and instead to engage fully in listening, asking questions, and participating in discussion. Note-takers will earn 1/2 a point per lecture, up to 2 lectures (1 point).

Occasionally, students will be allowed to use laptops, etc. during in-class activities.

Email Policy

You are expected to check the email account you give me regularly for announcements related to the course. Crucial information will be emailed out at least 24 hours ahead of time.

Email is the best way to contact me. I will generally try to return your emails within 24 hours (often sooner) Monday through Thursday, and within 48 hours on the weekends or holidays. You are welcome to email me a followup or reminder *if* I have not done so within this time frame. You should not count on being able to get in touch with me less than 24 hours before a major assignment is due.

Late Work / Make-up Exams

No late work or make-up exams will be allowed without consent of the professor *prior* to the due/exam date, except in situations where University policy requires it.

Class Attendance

While reading and writing are crucial parts of the course, the central philosophical activity is live discussion. While class will occasionally involve bits of lecture, this is merely an instrument to a more well-informed discussion and other structured activities. *Attendance is thus considered **mandatory**.* Missed classes will count against your participation grade, and egregious absenteeism will be grounds for an **F** in the course at the professor's discretion. In-class assignments and activities likewise cannot be made up unless the professor agrees to it before the class is missed. Disruptive late arrivals or early departures are poor classroom citizenship and will also negatively impact your participation.

Classroom expectations

You are expected to have read the assignments *before* class, and it would be to your benefit to also read them again after class. You are expected to bring *all* of the texts assigned for each day's class, and have them available to refer to. You are expected to listen respectfully to the professor and your fellow students, and participate in class discussions and activities.

Further standard University policies can be found at

<http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>

These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.