

PHI 3270 / CIS 3270 – Computer Ethics

Location: Vertical Campus 10 -140

Time: Mondays & Wednesdays, 5:50 – 7:05

Instructor: Phoebe Friesen

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Office Location: VC 5-272

Office Hours: Mondays, 4:45 – 5:45

Course Description:

This course will explore ethical questions that arise in relation to digital technology. Throughout the course, philosophical texts will be interspersed with a variety of journalistic articles, podcasts, films, and websites, which will help us to navigate various questions pertaining to computer ethics. We will begin by taking a broad look at some of the tools we might use to engage in an analysis of contemporary moral dilemmas related to digital technologies. We will then look at the ultrasound as a case study of a new technology which shifted the moral landscape within medicine and family planning, and examine the role that the internet and fake news played in the most recent election, and consider the conditions in which many of our beloved gadgets are built in order to ask whether we are morally entangled with these conditions. We will follow this with an investigation of how the internet may be reshaping our selves, and look in particular at the way identities are explored and expressed in online spaces. We will explore the value of both privacy and surveillance in digital realms, and how online ‘hacktivists’ have responded to threats to privacy and free speech posed by governments and corporations. Several weeks will be focused on particular realms that have been morally impacted by digital developments, including video games, the music industry, and education. Finally, we will explore how morality is wrapped up with artificial intelligences today and how this relationship might look in the future.

Readings:

All readings will be available on Dropbox. I will send an invitation to the course folder to each of your Baruch email addresses. If you would prefer that I invite another email address of yours, let me know. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have access to the course folder.

Grading Breakdown:

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| Participation | 20% |
| Weekly Assignments (5% each) | 40% |
| Presentation | 20% |
| Final Exam or Paper | 20% |

Participation:

A significant portion of your grade will be based on attendance, contributions to class discussions, and the completion of in-class assignments. Both individual and group work will be assigned during class throughout the semester, and the quality and completion of these assignments will contribute to the 20% of your grade based on class participation. As per Baruch policy, more than 3 unexcused absences may lead to a student being dropped from the course. Please let me know if you are going to miss class; documentation is required to excuse an absence.

Weekly Assignments:

Weekly assignments will be posted on Dropbox in the 'Assignments' folder. The assignments will require you to critically engage with the readings (or podcasts, films, or video games) and will take approximately 2 - 5 hours to complete each week. They will be graded based on comprehension, critical thinking, creativity, and clarity. Assignments should be submitted on turnitin.com every Sunday by midnight (instructions for accessing turnitin are given within Assignment #1 in Dropbox).

* While there will be a total of 10 weekly assignments, I will only include your best 8 scores in your final grade. This means you can skip two weekly assignments without penalty, or complete them all and I will deduct your two lowest grades.

Presentation:

The major project is meant to allow you to critically and creatively engage with any topic in computer ethics that interests you. The presentation can take any form (video, podcast, slideshow, debate, game, quiz show, lecture, etc.), as long as it allows you to demonstrate that you have undertaken a detailed investigation of a topic related to computer ethics and are able to present your findings to the class. Each presentation should last 15-20 minutes and will be graded on 6 criteria: research (at least 5 references recommended), comprehension, clarity, novelty, class participation, and ethical content. Presentations can be completed alone or in pairs, but please note that if two people are presenting, the presentation should last 30-40 minutes. Presentations must be approved by me (please send an email briefly summarizing your topic) before April 19th.

Final Exam/ Paper:

You will have the option of completing a take home final exam or writing a final paper. The final exam will consist of essay questions based on course materials that we discussed in class. The final paper can be on any topic you like (including your presentation topic), and should be roughly 5-7 pages double-spaced. Your final exam or paper will be due on May 24th at midnight.

Accommodations for Disabilities:

It is college policy to provide accommodations and academic adjustments for students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability who may need accommodations in

this class, please feel free to speak me or to Student Disability Services located in Newman Vertical Campus, Room 2-271. All discussions will remain confidential.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism, intended or not, will be subject to penalties in conformity with the College's policies on Academic Honesty. In minor cases, you will receive a 0 on the assignment with no chance to make it up. If you are caught more than once, we will meet with the chair and you will most likely be dropped from the class.

Some examples of plagiarism are:

- Adopting a phrase, sentence, or passage from another writer's work without using quotation marks
- Paraphrasing a passage from another writer's work without citation
- Presenting facts, ideas, or text from the Internet as your own
- Submitting another student's work with your name on it
- Submitting your own work from another class
- Purchasing a paper online

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes plagiarism. Please consult the following website and familiarize yourself with Baruch's policies related to academic honesty if you have not already done so:

http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/academic/academic_honesty.html

Grading Scheme:

| Grade ^ | Grade Point Equivalent | Percentage Equivalent |
|---------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| A | 4.0 | 93.0-100.0 |
| A- | 3.7 | 90.0-92.9 |
| B | 3.0 | 83.0-87.0 |
| B+ | 3.3 | 87.1-89.9 |
| B- | 2.7 | 80.0-82.9 |
| C | 2.0 | 73.0-77.0 |
| C+ | 2.3 | 77.1-79.9 |
| C- | 1.7 | 70.0-72.9 |
| D | 1.0 | 60.0-67.0 |
| D+ | 1.3 | 67.1-69.9 |
| F | 0.0 | below 60.0 |

Reading Schedule:

| TOPIC | DATE | ASSIGNED READINGS ETC. |
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| <p>INTRODUCTION: MORAL THEORY AND DIGITAL VALUES</p> | <p>Monday, January 30th</p> | <p>No Readings</p> |
| | <p>Wednesday, February 2nd</p> | |
| <p>MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY</p> | <p>Monday, February 6th</p> | <p>“How the Ultrasound Became Political” – Moira Weigel</p> <p>“The Moral Significance of Obstetric Ultrasound” (Excerpt from <i>Moralizing Technology</i>) – Peter Paul Verbeek</p> <p>“Chloe’s Law: A Powerful Legislative Movement Challenging a Core Ethical Norm of Genetic Testing” – Arthur L. Caplan</p> |
| | <p>Wednesday, February 8th</p> | |
| <p>SWEATSHOPS AND JOURNALISM</p> | <p>Monday, February 13th NO CLASS</p> | <p>“Mr. Daisy and the Apple Factory” and “Retraction” – This American Life (podcasts)</p> |
| | <p>Wednesday, February 15th</p> | |
| <p>MEDIA, POWER, AND FAKE NEWS</p> | <p>Monday, February 20th NO CLASS</p> | <p>“Fake News Expert on How False Stories Spread and Why People Believe Them” – NPR (podcast)</p> <p>“From Headline to Photograph, a Fake News Masterpiece” – Scott Shane</p> <p>“The People Formerly Known as the Audience” – Jay Rosen</p> |
| | <p>Wednesday, February 22nd</p> | |
| <p>ONLINE SELVES</p> | <p>Monday, February 27th</p> | <p>“The Flight from Conversation” – Sherry Turkle</p> <p>“Is Google Making Us Stupid?” – Nicholas Carr</p> |

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| | Wednesday, March 1st | Network Effect (art project) – Jonathan Harris & Greg Hochmuth |
| IDENTITIES AND EQUALITY | Monday, March 6 th | “Grindring Bodies: Racial and Affective Economies of Online Queer Desire” – Senthorun Raj |
| | Wednesday, March 8 th | “Media, Place, and Multiculturalism” – Joshua Meyrowitz and John Maguire “Humanity, Police Violence, and Being Black on the Internet” – Andrew C. |
| PRIVACY AND SURVEILLANCE | Monday, March 13 th | “A Contextual Approach to Privacy Online” – Helen Nissenbaum “Citizenfour” – Laura Poitras (film) |
| | Wednesday, March 15 th | “9-eyes” – Jon Rafman (art project) |
| CREATIVE INDUSTRIES | Monday, March 20 th | “The Long Tail” – Chris Anderson |
| | Wednesday, March 22 nd | “Does the Rise of Streaming and Downloading Mean the Loss of Music?” – Peter Godfrey-Smith |
| HACKTIVISM | Monday, March 27 th | “Anonymous: From the Lulz to Collective Action” – Gabriella Coleman |
| | Wednesday, March 29 th | “The Internet’s Own Boy: The Story of Aaron Swartz” – Brian Knappenberger (film) |
| VIDEO GAMES | Monday, April 3 rd | No Readings |

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| | Wednesday, April 5 th NO CLASS | |
| April 10th - 18th SPRING BREAK | | |
| ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE | Wednesday, April 19 th | “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” – Alan M. Turing |
| | Thursday, April 20 th | “Outing A.I.: Beyond the Turing Test” – Benjamin H. Bratton |
| FUTURE MACHINES | Monday, April 24 th | “The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence” – Nick Bostrom and Eliezer Yudkowsky |
| | Wednesday, April 26 th | “Modernity Conceives the Future” (Excerpt from <i>Who Owns the Future?</i>) – Jaron Lanier |
| CLASS PRESENTATIONS | Monday, May 1 st | |
| | Wednesday, May 3 rd | |
| | Monday, May 8 th | |
| | Wednesday, May 10 th | |
| | Monday, May 15 th | |
| LAST CLASS | Wednesday, May 17 th | No Readings (Class Activity of Your Choice ☺) |
| | Wednesday, May 24 th | Final Exam or Paper Due at Midnight |