

**PHI3681- Ethics, Data, and Technology  
Fall 2024**

**Lecture Time and Location:**

Tuesday and Thursday, Period 4 (10:40 - 11:30) [LIT 0101](#)

Discussion Sections:

Fridays, time and location varies by schedule

**Your Instructors**

**Professor:** Amber Ross  
**Email:** amber.ross@ufl.edu  
**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 12-2, and by appointment. FLO 115c

**Teaching Assistants:** Steven Clark & Joshua Hasker

**Steven Clark**

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**Location:** Philosophy Dept Library, FLO 3rd floor

**Joshua Hasker**

**Email:** jhasker@ufl.edu  
**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 12:15-1:45; Thursdays 12:30-2  
**Location:** Philosophy Dept Library, FLO 3rd floor

**Course Description**

This course exposes students to important interactions between ethics, economics, and public policy in assessing the social value of emerging technologies. Students will grapple with foundational concepts in ethics, economics, and policy-making. The course pairs theoretical discussions of the philosophical dimensions of economics and policy-making with concrete issues in emerging technologies. Discussion topics include: cost-benefit analysis, risk, markets and market failures, economic valuations of technology, justice and fairness, and property rights. We will apply these concepts in assessing emerging technologies and technological issues, such as *surveillance capitalism and privacy invasion*, *algorithmic bias*, *AI-enhanced predictive policing*, and *geoengineering*, among others.

**Course Objectives**

1. Identify and explain the philosophical dimensions of foundational concepts in economics and public policy as they pertain to technology.
2. Develop a basic vocabulary for discussing the ethical dimensions of technology.
3. Analyze issues and policies concerning emerging technology through the application of ethical concepts.
4. Critique public policies, social practices, and political-economic institutions that shape, and are shaped by, scientific discovery and technological design.
5. Discern the structure of arguments, representing them fairly and clearly, and evaluating them for cogency.

6. Formulate original arguments, anticipating objections, and responding in a conscientious fashion.
7. Read and discuss complex philosophical texts from both historical sources and contemporary works
8. Speak and write clearly and persuasively about abstract and conceptually elusive matters.

## **Readings**

All required readings will be linked within the corresponding Modules on our Canvas website:  
<https://elearning.ufl.edu>

A very useful online guide for writing philosophy papers is available here:  
<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

## **Graded Requirements**

### **Emerging Technology Case Studies (3)**

Students will work in groups on three case studies concerning the social and ethical dimensions of different emerging technologies. All members will discuss all questions with their group, and each group member will provide a written analysis of at least one question within the case study. The group will submit one set of answers for their case study, and each group member will submit an individual peer report (see below).

Grades for the case studies will be determined by

- (a) **participation** in the case study discussion (as evidenced by **peer reports**) and
- (b) the **quality** of the group's submitted **written analysis**.

### **Case Studies Peer Reports (3)**

These reports are part of the overall Case Study assignment and will not receive a separate grade. Completing the reports thoroughly and thoughtfully, reflecting on your own contributions and those of your peers, will raise your overall Case Study grade. Poor quality peer reports and/or poor participation in the Case Study assignment (as evidenced by others' reports) will lower your overall Case Study grade.

### **Individual In-Class Writing Assignments (2)**

These assignments will be completed in the lecture hall at the regularly scheduled class meeting time. The content of the assignment will involve a critical assessment of a topic that we have discussed in class. I will give you the topic for this assignment and provide the structure that the assignment will follow.

These writing assignments will be argumentative in nature, and not merely expository. They will assess whether students have acquired:

1. skill in discerning the structure of arguments, representing them fairly and clearly, and evaluating them for cogency.
2. skill in formulating original arguments, anticipating objections, and responding in a conscientious fashion.
3. skill in reading and discussing complex philosophical texts from both historical sources and contemporary works, and
4. skill in writing clearly and persuasively about abstract and conceptually elusive matters.

### **Weekly Read and Annotate Assignments via *Perusall***

Weekly Read and Annotate assignments are intended to cultivate a **collaborative reading experience** that allows us all to engage one another and the materials in a thoughtful, social, and dynamic way. Annotating in detail and in this collaborative form is a step towards developing larger analyses and strategic reading skills.

#### **General instructions for Read and Annotate assignments:**

Starting in Week 2, you will need to make 3 contributions to the reading(s) for that week in the *Perusall* appt:

1. Your own original annotation- a comment about the text that relates to our course content, a question about the reading or part of the reading, a thought about the text that you would like discuss in your Friday section, etc. This annotation should be approximately 70-100 words (a medium length paragraph).
2. A reply to one of your classmates' original annotations (approx. 25-50 words)
3. Upvote TWO of your classmates' annotations that you would like your class to discuss in your section on Friday

[CLICK HERE for more detailed instructions regarding the weekly Read and Annotate assignments](#)

#### **Discussion Section Participation:**

Please come to Discussion Sections on time and prepared to contribute to the class in a positive way. Being prepared includes having completed the reading. There is a lot of reading in this class, and the reading can be difficult and dense. Tips on reading philosophy can be found at the end of the syllabus.

#### **Penalty for Late Submission of Written Work:**

If you are absent for an in-class writing assignments, alternative arrangements must be made with your instructor for completing the assignment in a similar environment (in-person, 50 minutes). Make-up assignments for unexcused absences will be considered on a case-by-case basis and subject to a late penalty. Official UF or University Excused absences will receive full credit on any make-up assignment.

The penalty for late work is 1/3 of a letter grade deducted immediately at the deadline, and again at each 24-hour mark beyond the deadline until the work is submitted (including weekend days).

No assignments will be accepted which are more than one week late. Exceptions to this require instructor approval.

**Absence due to illness will be excused:** If you are ill please do not come to class! - email your TA when you can and let them know you were ill so we have a digital record of you absence due to illness and can accommodate you accordingly.

### **SUMMARY OF GRADED REQUIREMENTS**

- 10% Case Study #1
- 10% Case Study #2
- 10% Case Study #3
- 20% In-Class Essay #1
- 25% In-Class Essay #2
- 15% *Perusall* Annotations and Replies
- 10% Discussion Section Participation

Grading Scale	(round up from .5)
A+	97-100
A	94-96
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	64-66
D-	60-63
E	0-59

### **Other Course Policies**

#### **Working with classmates:**

You are encouraged to talk to one another outside of class about philosophy and about this course as much as possible. This includes discussion of paper topics, and it includes reading drafts of one another's work. If you do work together, please be mindful of the following:

1. Your final product must be your own original work, and not a repetition of someone else's ideas or essay.
2. Each essay must be a piece of written thinking in itself. Sometimes conversation in advance of writing can make you feel like the conclusions of that conversation are now established, such that you can now talk about them by stating them (or assuming, or implying). But your essays need to "show your work"—if the argument is not explicitly on the page, you haven't made the argument. We need to see the important pieces of reasoning.

3. You must be willing to endorse what ends up in your paper. Beware of letting others persuade you to go in the wrong direction. You are ultimately responsible for both the understandings and misunderstandings in the papers you turn in.

### **Classroom conduct:**

Philosophy is sometimes mistakenly understood to be a combative exercise. That style does not impress us at all. I encourage you to direct your first effort toward trying to understand and develop both the contributions of the authors we read and the contributions of others in the class. Where those are limited, of course, good philosophy also happens when you (respectfully) disagree, note tensions, make distinctions, reshape the question, and so on. Students who repeatedly act aggressively, in ways which attempt to incite unnecessary conflict or to dominate the discussion and/or other people, will receive a reduction in their Discussion grade.

**Regular Attendance, Reading, and Note-Taking in Lecture (TR):** In order to have the fullest understanding of the material you will need to be present for each class meeting and take notes on the class discussion.

### **Campus Resources for UF Students**

An extensive list of campus resources- technical, academic, medical, and mental- can be found [here](#) and on the "Campus Resources" page

### **Academic Honesty and Plagiarism**

Most instances of academic dishonesty can be avoided by thoroughly citing the resources you have used to help you understand the topic on which you're writing. If you have read something that helped you understand the material, cite it! Failure to cite sources is the most common (and easily avoidable) academic offense.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states:

“We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Plagiarism on any assignment will automatically result in a grade of “E” for the course. Plagiarism is defined in the University of Florida's Student Honor Code as follows:

“A student shall not represent as the student’s own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to): a. Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or

unpublished, without proper attribution. b. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.”

Students found guilty of academic misconduct will be prosecuted in accordance with the procedures specified in the UF honesty policy.

### **Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/> ([Links to an external site.](#))

[Links to an external site.](#) Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/> ([Links to an external site.](#)) [Links to an external site.](#) Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/> ([Links to an external site.](#))

### **Attendance, Illness, Religious Holidays, and Twelve Day Rule**

In order to have the fullest understanding of the material you will need to be present for each class meeting and take notes on the class discussion. Given that we are all subject to the whims of our internet connection, there will be no penalty for missing a class, but to get the most out of this course you will want to be part of each of our class meetings.

Official requirements for class attendance, religious holidays, and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> ([Links to an external site.](#))

### **E-mail guidelines:**

(1) If you need some practical information about the course you should look at most recently updated syllabus or on the website. E-mails requesting information which is available on the most recently updated syllabus or on the website will not be answered.

(2) If you want to discuss a substantive philosophical question you should bring it up in your discussion section or visit your Discussion Leader's office hours. E-mails asking substantive philosophical questions will cannot be answered in full- philosophy just doesn't work that way! (You will likely receive a note suggesting that you visit one of our office hours or arrange an appointment to chat.)

If, after reading (1) & (2) you still think you should e-mail me, you are welcome to do so at [amber.ross@ufl.edu](mailto:amber.ross@ufl.edu). I will try to answer e-mail within a week. You must use your 'ufl' address.

Please note: I may not read email between 5pm and 9am.

### **How to do well in this course:**

1. Be sure to read the assigned material before our class meeting. This will help to ensure that our class time is quality time.
2. After class, re-read the material for the session, paying special attention to the questions that you had before. Hopefully the material will make much more sense to you now.
3. Bring specific questions with you to class. Even if there are aspects of the readings or study questions you didn't fully grasp, the fact that you tried should help you to narrow down what it is that you don't get.
4. See us in office hours, if there are still questions you are unclear about. That's what office hours are for. Don't be shy.
5. Manage your time well. The due date is not the DO date! Many students make the mistake of waiting until a few days before papers are due to start writing. That is *bad* time management. The same number of hours devoted to the material BEFORE class can lead to a much more efficient use of your time, better understanding, and higher grades.

### **Discussion Sections- How to make the most of them**

Your discussion sections are where you get a chance to go over some of the main points of the course in more detail. They are also the place where you get a chance to talk philosophy, to develop arguments of your own. Finally, they are the place where you will receive instruction about how to write philosophy, including specific training to do your written assignments. Discussion sections are entirely for your benefit, and engaging in these discussions will improve your performance on your written work as well as your understanding of the material. In grading your work, we will hold you to a standard that assumes your attendance in (lecture and) discussion.

Quality participation in discussion depends upon being prepared and making a substantial effort to engage with the material in class. Students who attend discussion section and make useful contributions to the class discussion will see a bump in their Discussion Post grade at the end of the term. Those who attend but are not prepared and participating will still improve their performance on their coursework by attending discussions, but merely being present in section will not boost your Discussion Post grade.

### **On Reading Philosophy Texts:**

You will be expected to have done the assigned reading before you come to class to be able to follow the lecture and participate in tutorial discussion. Learning philosophy is as much learning a style of thinking and reasoning as it is learning certain contents. Therefore it is important that you try to participate actively and learn to engage with the readings critically.

You should budget enough time for the reading to be able to read each piece at least three times. Don't expect to be able to 'breeze through' the texts and you can avoid a lot of frustration. For all the readings you should have a pen and paper ready to take notes as you read. Philosophical writing is concerned with advancing and defending arguments. Your task will be to try to reconstruct the arguments and to critically evaluate them.

The first reading of the text should be fairly quick. Your goal here should be to get a first, rough sense of the general argument the author is advancing and the rough structure of the text. What is his or her main thesis? (write this down!) Where in the text is s/he arguing for it? Where does s/he address objections? Where does he discuss qualifications? Where does s/he motivate the argument? Don't worry, if during the first reading you don't yet understand how precisely the author is arguing for a thesis.

The second reading should be devoted to giving a reconstruction of the argument that is as sympathetic as possible. Now you should spend a lot of time on trying to understand how the author supports the main thesis, and how s/he might address potential objections. Here it is usually useful to try to jot down the following: What are the premises of the argument? How are the premises themselves supported? For example the author might appeal to shared intuitions or might claim that the premises are self-evident. What are the steps which are meant to get the author from the premises to the conclusion? (Here words like 'because' and 'therefore' can provide a clue.) You might think of yourself as engaging in a dialogue with the text here. Ask critical questions of the text, such as "You say that all simple ideas are copies of impressions. Why should I be compelled to accept this?" Then search the text for answers. At this stage your aim should not yet be to try to discover flaws or problems in the argument. Aim to make the argument as strong as possible.

Finally it is time to be critical. During a third reading you ought to try to see if you can uncover weaknesses in the arguments. If someone would want to disagree with a conclusion, there are two general ways in which one might attack the author's arguments. One, you can disagree with one or more of the premises. That is you might accept that *if* we grant the premises, *then* the conclusion follows, but you might disagree with one or more of the premises. (But then you should ask yourself how you would respond to the attempt to motivate the premises.) Or, two, you might disagree with one or more of the steps in the argument. That is, you might be willing to accept the premises, but you might deny that this commits you to the conclusion as well. If you have an objection of the latter kind you should try to explain why it is possible to accept the author's premises and yet deny his or her conclusions. (Of course you also might have objections of both kinds.)

A careful reading of a difficult text takes time. Learn to read patiently and slowly, and before you get frustrated, remember that even professional philosophers struggle with some of the texts you are reading. One of the most wonderful aspects of reading philosophy is that it allows you to engage in conversations with some of the deepest and most original thinkers. Enjoy the challenge!

### **LECTURE & READING SCHEDULE (Including Assignment Due Dates)**

*This Schedule is Subject to Revision – please read all class announcements*

#### **WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION**

**Thursday, 8/22**– Course & Syllabus Overview (Add/Drop Period)

**Friday, 8/23** – Discussion Sections (Add/Drop Period)

#### **WEEKS 2 & 3: THE ATTENTION ECONOMY AND TECHNOLOGY AS FORMS OF LIFE**

**Tuesday, 8/27** – Reading TBD (Add/Drop Period)

**Thursday, 8/29** – Winner, Langdon (1997). **Technologies as forms of life.** In Kristin Shrader-Frechette & Laura Westra (eds.), *Technology and Values*. Rowman & Littlefield. pp. 55--69.

**Friday, 8/30** – *Discussion of the Week's Readings*

**Tuesday, 9/3** – Mesthene, Emmanuel G. (1997). **The role of technology in society.** In Kristin Shrader-Frechette & Laura Westra (eds.), *Technology and Values*. Rowman & Littlefield. pp. 71--85.

**Thursday, 9/5** – Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Philosophy of Technology” (Section 2.5)

**Friday, 9/6** – *Discussion of the Week's Readings*

### WEEKS 4 & 5: ALGORITHMIC BIAS

**Tuesday, 9/10** – 2 readings:

1. [ProPublica- “Machine Bias”](https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing) <https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing>
2. [Flores, Bechtel, & Lowenkamp- "False Positives, False Negatives, and False Analyses: A Rejoinder to \[ProPublica's\] 'Machine Bias'"](#)

**Thursday, 9/12** – [Medium -The Problematic Nature of Machine Learning: Opacity](https://medium.com/@camrussell215/the-problematic-nature-of-machine-learning-opacity-cc8871b7e7b6)  
<https://medium.com/@camrussell215/the-problematic-nature-of-machine-learning-opacity-cc8871b7e7b6>

**Friday, 9/13** – *Discussion of the Week's Readings*

**Tuesday, 9/17**– 2 readings:

1. [Speilkamp- "Inspecting Algorithms for Bias"](#)
2. [Medium- “Machine Learning in Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice”](https://medium.com/@camrussell215/machine-learning-in-crime-prevention-and-criminal-justice-47662291eeb3)  
<https://medium.com/@camrussell215/machine-learning-in-crime-prevention-and-criminal-justice-47662291eeb3>

**Thursday, 9/19** – **Group Case Study #1**

**Friday, 9/20** – *Discussion of Case Study #1*

### WEEKS 6 & 7: ETHICAL THEORY

**Tuesday, 9/24** – [Shelley Kagan \(1998\) “Preliminaries” \(pp1 – 22\)](#)

**Thursday, 9/26**– 2 readings:

1. [John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, ch. 2](#)
2. [Robert Nozick, “Moral Constraints and Moral Goals” \(83-89\)](#)

**Friday, 9/27** – *Discussion of the Week's Readings*

**Tuesday, 10/1** – Finish Mill and Nozick

**Thursday, 10/3** – **First In-Class Essay** due end of class period (11:40, October 3rd)

**Friday, 10/4** – *Discussion of the Week's Readings*

### **WEEKS 8 & 9: PROPERTY RIGHTS AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY**

**Tuesday, 10/8** – [John Locke, "Of Property"](#)

**Thursday, 10/10** – [David Hume, "Of Justice and Property"](#)

**Friday, 10/11** – *Discussion of the Week's Readings*

**Tuesday, 10/15** – [Thomas Paine, "Agrarian Justice"](#)

**Thursday, 10/17** – **Group Case Study #2**

**Friday, 10/18** – *Discussion of Case Study #2*

### **WEEKS 10, 11, AND 12: PUBLIC GOODS, RISK ASSESSMENT, AND COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS**

**Tuesday, 10/22** – 2 readings:

1. Introduction to Public Goods: Tyler Cowen, "Public Goods"
2. [Jonathan Anomaly, "Public Goods and Government Action"](#)

**Thursday, 10/24** – 2 readings:

1. Introduction to Risk and CBA: [HuffPost: Schweitzer, "Managing Risks in Public Policy: Impact vs.. Probability?"](#)
2. [Sunstein, "Cost-Benefit Analysis and the Environment" \(pp351-354 only\)](#)

**Friday, 10/25** – *Discussion of the Week's Readings*

**Tuesday, 10/29** – 2 readings:

1. [Broom, D. "Lives" \(pp156-166\)](#)
2. [David Schmidz, "A Place for Cost Benefit Analysis" \(annotated\)](#)

**Thursday, 10/31** – [Kelman, "Cost-Benefit Analysis- an ethical critique"](#)

*Suggested background readings for case study 3:*

- Emily Bazelon (Oct 13, 2020) "**Free Speech Will(?) Save Our Democracy- The First Amendment in the Disinformation Age**" *New York Times*
- C. Thi Nguyen (2020) – "**Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles**"

**Friday, 11/1** – *Begin Group Case Study #3 in discussion sections*

**Tuesday, 11/5** – *Finish Group Case Study #3*

**Thursday, 11/7** – *Homecoming Holiday; no lecture*

**Friday, 11/8** – *Homecoming Holiday; no discussion sections*

#### **WEEKS 13 & 14: DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE**

**Tuesday, 11/12** – *Marx, Capital, ch. 15, sections 5 and 6 only*

**Thursday, 11/14** – *Rawls, “Justice as Fairness”*

**Friday, 11/15** – *Discussion of the Week’s Readings*

**Tuesday, 11/19** – *Nozick, “Distributive Justice” (Read Only pp 45 – 60)*

**Thursday, 11/21** – *Second In-Class Essay due end of class period (11:40am, November 21)*

**Friday, 11/22** – *Discussion of the Week’s Readings*

#### **WEEK 15: THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**Tuesday, 11/26** – *No Class (Thanksgiving Break)*

**Thursday, 11/28** – *No Class (Thanksgiving Break)*

**Friday, 11/29** – *No Class (Thanksgiving Break)*

#### **WEEK 16: COURSE WRAP**

**Tuesday, 12/3** – *Course Wrap and Review*