

Philosophy of Technology

TECHNOLOGY AND VALUES

PHIL/EETH 4250/6250 – Spring 2009

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Beth Preston

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OFFICE HOURS: Monday & Wednesday 2:30 pm – 3:30 pm

REQUIRED TEXTS: We will be reading two or three papers every week. They will be made available on the WebCT site for this course under the Online Readings link. There is no textbook for this course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This is a course in philosophy of technology. We will be investigating the nature of human technology and the evolving role it plays in human life. For the purposes of this course, technology will be understood to encompass anything human beings make and/or use in the course of their activities. Similarly, value will be understood to encompass any type of valuation human beings engage in, including, but not limited to: ethical value, economic value, sentimental value, religious value and aesthetic value. ***Please note that this is NOT a course in environmental ethics!*** If your interest is in environmental ethics and not philosophy of technology, please take our Environmental Ethics (PHIL/EETH 4220/6220), which is taught fall semester every year.

The course will be divided into three sections. The topic of the first section is the origins of human technology up through the invention and spread of agriculture and urbanization. We will be thinking about questions such as: What, if anything, is distinctive about human technology in comparison with earlier animal and hominid technologies? In what sense are domesticated plants and animals technology? How have agriculture and urbanization and their associated technologies changed human nature and human culture? The topic of the second section is the invention and spread of modern technology. We will be thinking about questions such as: What, if anything, is distinctive about modern technology in comparison with traditional technology? How has large scale industry and its associated technologies changed human nature and culture? The topic of the third section of the course is the prospects for the future of human technology. We will be thinking about questions such as: Do we control our technology, or does it control us? What kinds of technologies foster human flourishing, and what kinds of technologies hinder it?

WRITTEN REQUIREMENTS:

- *Undergraduates* – Three papers (minimum 8 pages, maximum 10 pages if double spaced; minimum 5 pages, maximum 7 pages if single spaced). Each paper will count for one third of your final grade. Please see GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS (pp. 5-6) for further information about paper format, topics, etc. You may also earn up to one half grade (.50)

in extra credit for postings to the class WebCT Discussion list. Please see GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION POSTINGS (pp. 3-4) for details.

- *Graduate Students* – Three papers; the first two papers the same as the undergraduates, and for the third a term paper (15-20 pages) on a research topic of your choosing based on the course material and approved in a consultation with the instructor. You must also present your term paper project to the class. The short papers will each count for 25% of your grade, the term paper will count for 40% and the presentation for the remaining 10%. Please see GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS (pp. 5-6) for further information about paper format, topics, etc. You may also earn up to one half grade (.50) in extra credit for postings to the class WebCT Discussion list. Please see GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION POSTINGS (pp. 3-4) for details.

EXTENSIONS: Papers are to be handed in on the date and at the time specified in the Course Outline. If circumstances beyond your control (e.g., illness or a family emergency) make this impossible, you *must* ask for an extension. You may do this by e-mail, by phone, or in person. Extensions will not normally be granted a) retroactively, b) on the day the paper is due, or c) more than once during the semester. Documentation of the circumstances related to your request for an extension may be required.

LATE PAPERS: If you hand in a paper late without an extension, you will be penalized one half grade for every 24 hour period or fraction thereof beyond the date and time it is officially due. ***Papers that are more than three days late (72 hours, counting from the date/time the paper is due) will not be accepted, and you will be withdrawn from the course for failure to complete required work (see below).***

FAILURE TO COMPLETE REQUIRED WORK: If you fail to turn in a paper due *before* the midpoint withdrawal deadline (Tuesday, March 24th) you will be administratively withdrawn from the course with a WP. If you fail to turn in a paper due *after* the midpoint withdrawal deadline you will be administratively withdrawn from the course with a WF. The University does not allow WP's to be assigned after the midpoint withdrawal deadline.

Please note that the University has a new policy limiting the number of WP's you may receive in your time at UGA to *four*. This withdrawal policy and other information about withdrawals is explained at <http://www.franklin.uga.edu/students/withdraw.htm>.

GRADING POLICIES:

- Papers will be given letter grades, optionally followed by + or - . At the end of the semester all the letter grades will be converted into their numerical equivalents, weighted appropriately and averaged. The average will then be converted back into a letter to obtain the final grade. The letter-number conversions below will be used in grading.
- Eligible discussion postings will be given a grade of S (satisfactory) or U (unsatisfactory). Postings with a grade of S are worth .05 apiece. At the end of the semester they will be added up and the total will be added to the average of your papers to determine your final grade. For example, suppose the average of your papers is 3.36 (B+ for the course) and you have eight satisfactory postings. Your postings are worth .40, which added to the average of your papers would give you a 3.76 and thus an A- for the course.

Letters to Numbers

A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D+	1.3
D	1.0
D-	0.7
F	0
WF	0

Numbers to Letters

3.8-4.00	A
3.5-3.79	A-
3.2-3.49	B+
2.8-3.19	B
2.5-2.79	B-
2.2-2.49	C+
1.8-2.19	C
1.5-1.79	C-
0.5-1.49	D
0-0.49	F

LECTURE AND DISCUSSION: There will be two 50 minute lectures each week, on Mondays and Wednesdays. You will be expected to have done the assigned reading for the day, and to be able to answer basic questions about its content. Some time will be allotted for discussion at every class meeting, so please do not hesitate to bring up any questions or comments you may have. But the main opportunity for discussion and debate will be on Fridays, which are reserved primarily for this.

On Wednesday evening a discussion topic related to the week's readings will be posted on the class WebCT site. You are invited to post your response to the discussion topic to the WebCT site and to comment on other students' postings. You may also post other comments on or questions about the week's readings to the WebCT site.

The discussion topic and whatever postings are available will be the starting point for discussion on Friday. You will also be expected to come to Friday classes prepared with questions and comments, and to participate in the discussion of issues introduced by others.

ATTENDANCE: Attendance is required as a matter of University policy. Attendance will be taken in each class by means of a sign-up sheet. You are expected to arrive on time for class and leave only when the whole class is dismissed.

Administrative drops: The Instructor reserves the right, at her discretion, to withdraw administratively and without notice any student who accumulates six or more unexcused absences at any point during the semester. If this occurs *before* the midpoint withdrawal deadline (Tuesday, March 24th) you will be administratively withdrawn from the course with a WP. If it occurs *after* the midpoint withdrawal deadline you will be administratively withdrawn from the course with a WF. The University does not allow WP's to be assigned after the midpoint withdrawal deadline.

Please note that the University has a new policy limiting the number of WP's you may receive in your time at UGA to *four*. This withdrawal policy and other information about withdrawals is explained at <http://www.franklin.uga.edu/students/withdraw.htm>.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION POSTINGS

You are welcome to post comments or questions of any length at any time, provided they are relevant to the readings, lectures, discussions or other postings for this course. In your

postings you should maintain appropriate language for a public forum and an appropriately respectful attitude towards the other posters.

If you want a posting to be evaluated for extra credit, it must meet the following requirements.

- Length: 150-250 words (minimum and maximum, respectively).
- Content: Must concern the readings for the week in which the posting is made. May be either a question or a comment about these readings, or a question or comment about another posting on these readings. May also be a response to the posted discussion topic for the Friday class.
- Quality: Should show that you have done the reading carefully, thought about it hard, and done your best to present your question or comment clearly and concisely. This applies to postings on other postings as well.
- Due date: Must be posted by 10:00 am on Friday. Please indicate that you would like your posting evaluated for extra credit by putting an asterisk (*) at the end of your subject line.

Postings that meet these requirements will be given an S. Postings that fail to meet one or more of these requirements will be given a U. You are welcome to check at any time during the semester to see whether your postings have been given an S or a U, and how much extra credit you have accumulated.

GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS

Format: Must be typed; may be either single or double spaced. You may print double-sided if you wish. Please number your pages. Please make sure that spelling, punctuation and grammar in your paper are correct and consistent, otherwise it may be returned to you to be corrected before being graded. Please staple or paper clip your paper. Do *not* put it in any sort of binder or folder. Please make sure your name is on your paper at the top of the first page. Do *not* include a cover page. You should have a bibliography (list of works cited), but you should put it at the end of your text, not on a separate page. Electronic submissions will *not* be accepted unless they have been approved in advance. They will be ordinarily be approved *only* if documented circumstances exist that make it impossible for you to turn in a hard copy of the paper.

Evaluation: Criteria will include, but are not necessarily limited to: a) understanding of material, b) organization, c) clarity of exposition, and d) quality of criticism advanced.

Paper Topics: The topics for the papers are designed to help you develop your ability to analyze the ideas and arguments presented by an author and to evaluate them.

- **Paper #1:** Choose one of the papers we have read in the *first* part of the course. Explain the main idea or claim the author makes, and then explain the main argument or evidence the author uses in support of this idea or claim. Please note that this does *not* mean summarizing the paper. The assignment is to identify the most important elements of the author's view and focus on them. The lectures will be a good guide to this, so regular attendance and careful notetaking will stand you in good stead. Finally, explain *one* problem you see with the author's view. Do *not* give a whole list of criticisms—decide which possible criticism you think poses the most important or most interesting problem for the author's view, and focus on that.
- **Paper #2:** Choose one of the papers we have read in the *second* part of the course. Explain the main idea or claim the author makes, and then explain the main argument or

evidence the author uses in support of this idea or claim. Please note that this does *not* mean summarizing the paper. The assignment is to identify the most important elements of the author's view and focus on them. The lectures will be a good guide to this, so regular attendance and careful notetaking will stand you in good stead. Finally, to what extent do you agree with the author's view? Explain your position. Please note that when you agree with an author, it is not enough to simply repeat their view. Instead you should do one of the following: a) give an argument of your own supporting the author's view; or b) explain a possible problem with the author's view and then show how you think this problem can be solved.

- **Paper #3:** Choose *one* paper we have read in the *third* part of the course and *one* paper we have read in any of the three parts of the course. Choose papers that have contrasting views on some issue we have discussed. Explain these contrasting views and the main arguments the authors give in support of them. Which view do you think is more correct? Explain your answer, noting the main problem you see with the view you think is less correct, and how the view you think is more correct either solves this problem, or is not subject to it in the first place, or—if the problem is shared—has other advantages that outweigh it.

Graduate students must write the first two papers as described above. The third paper is to be a research paper. Choose two or three papers we have read this semester that deal with an issue you would like to explore further. Then find three to five other papers we have *not* read for this course that also deal with this issue. At this point you should set up a consultation to present your topic and the literature you are considering. This will allow problems to be identified and advice to be offered. You should start writing only after your topic has been approved in the consultation. In your paper you should a) explain the issue you have chosen to work on, b) explain the different views on it represented by the papers you have chosen, and c) compare, contrast and evaluate these views, with an eye to developing a view of your own about this issue.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: You are expected to abide by the standards for academic honesty established by the University of Georgia. If you have not already done so, you should familiarize yourself with these standards by reading *A Culture of Honesty*, a manual on the University academic honesty policy. It is available at: <http://www.uga.edu/honesty>. You are encouraged to work together by discussing the reading material and the paper topics with other people, and in particular with other students in the course. This constitutes an acceptable and commendable level of cooperation. However, all written work must be produced by each student independently of others. Here are some examples of activities which are *not* acceptable, and will be regarded as violating the academic honesty standards:

- Writing a paper for another student to use, or allowing another student to write one for you;
- Collaborating with other students in the actual writing of a paper for all the collaborators to use;
- Plagiarism; this includes but is not necessarily limited to:
 - Copying from a book, journal, web page or other written work without indicating that it is a quotation or acknowledging the source;
 - Paraphrasing passages from a book, journal, web page or other written work without acknowledging the source;

- Copying from another student's written work without acknowledging the source;
- Using other people's ideas, opinions, theories, data or statistics without acknowledging the source (unless the ideas or information in question are common knowledge).

If you have any questions about what activities constitute plagiarism or other violations of the standards for academic honesty, either in general or with regard to this course in particular, please ask.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Jan 9	Introduction to the course
Jan 12	Peter Reynolds, The complementation theory of language and tool use
Jan 14	Steven Mithen, Creations of pre-modern human minds (Please note that the references for Mithen's paper are in a separate file.)
Jan 16	Discussion: What, if anything, is distinctive about human technology?
Jan 19	MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY
Jan 21	François Sigaut, Technology
Jan 23	Discussion:
Jan 26	Marshall Sahlins, The first affluent society
Jan 28	Jared Diamond, Agriculture's mixed blessings
Jan 30	Discussion:
Feb 2	Tim Ingold, From trust to domination
Feb 4	
Feb 6	Discussion:
Feb 9	
Feb 11	
Feb 13	Discussion:
Feb 16	
	Paper #1 due in class.
Feb 18	
Feb 20	Discussion:
Feb 23	
Feb 25	
Feb 27	Discussion:
Mar 2	
Mar 4	
Mar 6	Discussion:
Mar 9-13	SPRING BREAK
Mar 16	
Mar 18	
Mar 20	Discussion:
Mar 23	
Mar 24	MIDPOINT WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE
Mar 25	
Mar 27	Discussion:

Mar 30	Paper #2 due in class.
Apr 1	
Apr 3	Discussion:
Apr 6	
Apr 8	
Apr 10	Discussion:
Apr 13	
Apr 15	
Apr 17	Discussion:
Apr 20	
Apr 22	HONORS DAY – NO CLASS
Apr 24	Discussion:
Apr 27	
Apr 29	
Apr 30	Graduate student research presentations. Note: The University is running a <i>Monday</i> schedule on this date.
May 1	Reading Day
May 4	Paper #3 due by 5:00 pm.

PLEASE NOTE:

This is the only paper copy of the syllabus you will receive. An electronic copy is available on the Philosophy Department web site (<http://www.phil.uga.edu>) under Courses and on the course WebCT site. This syllabus is intended for guidance only, and is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and a revised version of the syllabus will be posted on the course WebCT site.