

# Introduction to Ethics of Technology, Data, and AI

Dr. Jared Parmer

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[Specific dates and location removed. This course is designed as a twice-weekly, 90-minute, lecture-style course for students with no prior experience in philosophy.]

## Description and Learning Outcomes of the Course

Machine learning and robotics are advancing at a sometimes stunning pace, and bring with them urgent ethical questions. Should we build robots that have rights? What should we do about income if human labor becomes unnecessary? What is the human cost of artificial intelligence driven by 'big data'? This course introduces students to some of the major ethical questions about technology today, and to the methods whereby philosophers investigate those questions. By the end of the course, students will understand the basic theoretical landscape of philosophical ethics, have developed more articulated views on some of the core issues in philosophical ethics, and be versed in using these theories and methods to assess cutting-edge and near-future technologies. No prior experience in philosophy is expected.

## Prerequisites

None.

## Preparation Before Each Session

This course requires frequent writing by students, which will be held to high standards. To meet those standards, you will have to:

1. Complete each and every required reading *before* the session in which it is discussed. You are advised to skim each reading to get the general idea, then read it again, more carefully, to more deeply understand the argument.
2. Actively participate in each and every session.

## Required Reading Materials

Sven Nyholm. *This is Technology Ethics* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2023).

Additional required readings will be uploaded to the course Moodle.

## Assessment

Grades in this course are determined by the following components. Your final grade will be computed on the 4.0 scale, with the normal associated letter grade.

Attendance	–	pass/fail
Active Participation	–	pass/fail
Homeworks (x3)	–	15% each, graded
Midterm Exam	–	20%, graded
Final Exam	–	35%, graded

### Attendance (pass/fail) and Active Participation (pass/fail)

First, attendance to every meeting is expected – four absences without excuse will be permitted. Beyond that, your final grade will be penalized by 5% for each additional absence; with more than six absences, **you will automatically fail this course**. In truly exceptional, and documented, cases, contact me. With six or fewer absences, you will pass the ‘Attendance’ component.

Second, there will also periodically be questions posed to the class during lecture, which you will answer via an app or iClicker (details TBD). You will receive one ‘point’ for simply answering, and another ‘point’ for answering correctly. At the end of the term, your ‘points’ will be divided by the total possible points to produce your ‘grade’. If this ‘grade’ is 70% or more, you will pass the ‘Active Participation’ component.

**You must pass both Attendance and Active Participation to pass this course.**

### Homeworks (15% each)

You will be expected to complete three homeworks during this course. These homeworks will involve short answers to the readings assigned for the corresponding ‘Deep Dive’, and they will involve summarizing and critically engaging with those readings. You will be provided the questions in advance. These will be graded on a 4.0 scale.

You will be completing these homeworks in small groups of approximately three or four students each. You will discuss the questions together and submit a single set of answers with each person’s name attached, and you will all receive the same grade. In the event there are problems within your group, contact me.

### Midterm (20%) and Final Exam (35%)

There will be a midterm exam in the seventh week of the course, administered in class during our regular meeting time. This exam will be multiple-choice, and short-answer, and will focus on the theory and methods of ethics material from the first half of the course.

There will also be a final exam during the regular final exam period, as scheduled by the university. This will also be multiple-choice and short-answer, but will focus on the topics in technology ethics discussed from week 6 onward.

Each exam be graded on a 4.0 scale. I will provide study guides and review sessions before each.

### Digital Technology Policy, Accessibility

Digital technologies like smartphones and laptops may only be used for activities directly relevant, at that time, to the class meeting. Note taking, looking through the required reading, and participating in the in-class digital activities are the sorts of things I mean. Any usage beyond this is distracting and counter-productive, not only for you but for your neighbors.

Distracting uses of technology will be penalized for the sake of your neighbors, up to and including your being asked to leave the session and marked absent for that day.

Technologies that make this course more accessible for you are welcome and encouraged. Please consult with me and the university's office of accessibility so that we can accommodate you.

### Plagiarism and Cheating

Plagiarism and cheating are absolutely not tolerated in this course. Any activities counting as plagiarism or cheating under the university's definitions will meet with strict penalty – at a very minimum, failure on the given assessment. If you are unclear what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, you should feel free to seek clarification from me.

wk	Schedule with required readings	
1	Introduction <i>No reading</i>	What is Technology? Nyholm, <i>This is Technology Ethics</i> ch. 1
2	<i>No class</i> – Labor Day	Ethical Theory: An Overview Nyholm, <i>This is Technology Ethics</i> ch. 2
3	Theory Deep Dive: Meaning vs. Morality? ----- Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints”	<i>Recommended:</i> Elizabeth Ashford, “Utilitarianism, Integrity, and Partiality”
4	Theory Deep Dive: Feminist Ethics ----- Annette Baier, “The Need for More than Justice”	<i>Recommended:</i> Robin Dillon, “Feminist Virtue Ethics”
	<b>Homework 1 due end of week 4</b>	
5	Discussion Day	Methods in Technology Ethics Nyholm, <i>This is Technology Ethics</i> ch. 3
6	AI and Value Alignment Nyholm, <i>This is Technology Ethics</i> ch. 4	Tech, Autonomy, and Control Nyholm, <i>This is Technology Ethics</i> ch. 5
	<b>Midterm exam study guide distributed</b>	
7	Review Day	<b>Midterm Exam: in class</b>
8	Topic Deep Dive: Ethics of ‘Big Data’ ----- Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein, “What Gets Counted Counts”	Solon Barocas and Helen Nissenbaum, “Big Data’s End Run Around Autonomy and Consent”

9	Discussion Day	Responsibility and Technology Nyholm, <i>This is Technology Ethics</i> ch. 6
10	Topic Deep Dive: Ethics of AI	
	Kate Crawford, <i>Atlas of AI</i> ch. 2	Aimee van Wynsberghe, "Sustainable AI"
	<b>Homework 2 due end of week 10</b>	
11	Discussion Day	Moral Agency Nyholm, <i>This is Technology Ethics</i> ch. 7
12	Moral Status Nyholm, <i>This is Technology Ethics</i> ch. 8	Human-Machine Relationships Nyholm, <i>This is Technology Ethics</i> ch. 9
13	Technology into the Future Nyholm, <i>This is Technology Ethics</i> ch. 10	<i>No class</i> – Thanksgiving
14	Topic Deep Dive: The Future of Work	
	Shannon Vallor, "Carebots and Caregivers: Sustaining the Ethical Ideal of Care in the Twenty-First Century"	John Danaher, "In Defense of the Post-Work Future: Withdrawal and the Ludic Life"
	<b>Homework 3 due end of week 14; Final exam study guide distributed</b>	
15	Discussion Day	Review Day and Wrap-Up

**Final Exam: time/place TBD**