

**PHI 3681 Ethics, Data, & Technology**  
Spring 2021  
University of Florida  
MW 12:50-1:40 (Period 6)

**Professor:** Amber Ross [amber.ross@ufl.edu](mailto:amber.ross@ufl.edu)  
**Professor Office:** 301 Griffin-Floyd Hall  
**Professor Phone:** 352-273-1811  
**Course Location:** FLG 0220, and Online  
**Course Times:** MW Period 6 (12:25-1:40)  
Friday Discussions Period 5, 6, or 8  
**Office hours:** W 2-3pm and by appointment, On Zoom  
<https://ufl.zoom.us/j/99666691393?pwd=cHhHRGtUSXJ5ZjhuK1pVMXRsZ1J1UT09>  
**Course Website:** On Canvas <https://elearning.ufl.edu/>

### **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

**Discussion Section Attendance and Participation (10%):** Everyone will begin the class with a 75% participation and attendance grade. If you attend every Friday discussion section but do not participate, your grade will stay at 75% [C]. You have two free unexcused absences. After this you will lose 2 points on your A&P grade for every unexcused absence.

**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 (no doctor's note needed- please don't abuse this policy!)

**Absence due to computer issues will be excused!**- Please try your best to attend Discussion Sections via Zoom. If your tech fails and you cannot attend, email your TA ASAP and let them know.

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

**Emerging technology case studies (20%):** Students will work in groups on several case studies concerning the social and ethical dimensions of different emerging technologies. Each group member will provide a written analysis of at least one question within the case study, and all members will discuss all questions with their group. The group will submit one set of answers for their case study. 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.

**1st Short Paper (25%):** (1200 – 1500 words) This short paper involves a critical assessment of a topic that we have discussed in class. I will give you a choice of two topics for this paper, I will also provide the structure that the paper must follow.

**2nd Short Paper (25%)** (1200-1500 words) This short paper involves a critical assessment of a topic that we have discussed in class. I will give you a choice of two topics for this paper, I will also provide the structure that the paper must follow.

These papers should be argumentative in nature, and not merely expository, and will assess whether students have acquired:

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

**Short reading quizzes (10%):** There will be frequent reading quizzes, designed to make sure that you are doing and understanding the readings, and to double-check that you are coming to class.

**Discussion Board Contributions (20%):** Each student will contribute to 4 of the 8 graded Discussion Boards, and will have specific discussion boards assigned to them (either A-weeks or B-weeks). Your Discussion Board Contributions will consist of 3 parts:

- 1 original post of your own (150 word limit)
- 2 Comments (1 on each of 2 different classmates' posts for that same week- 100 word limit each)

Discussion Boards for each week will open at 5pm on Fridays.

**Discussion Contribution Rubric:** Your grade for your weekly discussion contribution will be effort-based; we are not looking for accuracy or argumentation, but a sincere effort to engage with and understand the material. This includes discussion posts that pose questions about the material for the week, offer criticism of the week's material, raise philosophically interesting points for discussion that tie to the class theme, etc. You should view these posts as a chance to engage with the material and show that you are putting effort into understanding and grappling with the course content. Some weeks, you will be given a specific prompt to reply to on the discussion board. Other weeks, the posts will be self-directed.

Though your TA Discussion Section Leader will be reading through your discussion posts and will assign points appropriately, they will not be able to give individual comments on each graded discussion post. They may, however, add their own replies to the discussion board in certain contexts, at their discretion.

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

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.

**There will be no late discussion board contributions.** Discussion boards close at 11:59 pm the Thursday before each Friday section.

Grading Scale	
A	94-100%
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 me 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 (MW):** 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 lecture (MW), but to get the most out of this course you will want to be part of each of our class meetings.

### **Regarding lecture recordings:**

In case student are unable to attend lectures online for Covid-related reasons, I will be recording our online lecture sessions. These will not be posted but will be made available to particular students as needed. These recordings will only be given to students with documentation of serious illness, hospitalization, or quarantine. Due to the size of our class, I ask that your camera and microphone be turned off during lecture. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited.

### **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 (Links to an external site.)**

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/>) ([Links to an external site.](#)) 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.](#)). 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.](#)). 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!