

Philosophy of Technology

Last Updated: Fri, 08/08/2025

Course prefix: PHIL

Course number: 3135

Section: RR

CRN (you may add up to five):

94639

Instructor First Name: Robert

Instructor Last Name: Rosenberger

Semester: Fall

Academic year: 2025

Course description:

The philosophy of technology is a developing field of thought which analyzes the roles technologies play in our society and our lives. Thinkers approach this topic from a wide variety of perspectives, address a number of topics, and consider technology's general character and its many particular cases.

We begin with an exploration of the general positions often taken within discussions of technology, including utopian, dystopian, and instrumentalist views. This includes an analysis of Martin Heidegger's influential account of our technological situation. His pessimistic view is a constant reference point of the field. We'll continue with Michel Foucault's work on panopticism and the construction of selfhood through our technologies.

In addition, we will consider several "social" accounts of technology, in which theorists such as sociologists and anthropologists explore how disagreements in society have shaped contemporary designs. From there, the course will move into political accounts of technology, exploring the views thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Andrew Feenberg, and Langdon Winner. Their works draw out a number of political issues, including the ways technologies contribute to the mechanisms of democracy and governance, and to the ways we conceptualize ourselves and others.

In the next section of this course, we analyze human bodily relations to technology, technology's capacity to influence our actions, and how these issues bear on technology design. And we conclude with a section on ethical accounts of technology, including the works of thinkers such as Peter-Paul Verbeek, Shannon Vallor, and Albert Borgmann. Ideas from their works and others will help us to consider the ethics of design, and how technology shapes moral decision making and personal character.

Course learning outcomes:

In the cases of all texts we read, we will carefully consider the specific arguments made, and critically analyze the authors' claims both in class discussion and individual writing. This study of the philosophy of technology will also serve as an introduction to Western philosophy more generally, and we will learn about clear reasoning argumentation. Also, these studies will help us to sharpen our reading and writing skills.

Required course materials:

Albert Borgmann (1984) *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Donna Haraway (2003) *The Companion Species Manifesto*. Prickly Paradigm Press.

Don Ihde (1990) *Technology and the Lifeworld*. Indiana University Press.

Shannon Vallor (2016) *Technology and the Virtues*. Oxford.

Grading policy:

The breakdown for the value of the assignments for this course goes as follows:

Mini Exams = 50%; Groupwork writings = 30%; Reading Reactions = 15%;
Participation/Attendance = 5%

The grading scale is standard:

100%-90% A; 89%-80% B; 79%-70% C; 69%-60% D 59%-0% F

Grades are neither curved nor rounded up (For example, the grades of 80.1, 85.6, 88.9, and 89.9 are all examples of Bs).

Late papers will be penalized at a rate of one letter grade per day; for example, a paper that would have received a B if turned in on time will receive a B- if it is received the day after it is due, and a C+ if received two days later. Exceptions can be made in cases of documented emergencies.

Attendance policy:

Attendance is mandatory and is part of the final grade. There will be a sign-in sheet passed around during most class sessions.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help students master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance, and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts or of works in the visual/performing arts.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Ethical Reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Intercultural Competence