Sci, Tech & Human Values

Course prefix: PHIL

Course number: 3127

Section: CJO, K01, K02, K03, K04

CRN (you may add up to five):
27188 27189 27190 27191 27192

Instructor First Name: Clint

Instructor Last Name: Johnson

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

What is the relationship between developments in science, technological progress and changes in human values? Do new technologies imply changes in values or do changes in values drive the development of new technology? Focusing specifically on the current developments in artificial intelligence, how should we understand the way that the *pace* of technological development could precipitate changes in values.

To answer these questions, this course will first introduce the current pressing issues with AI, ethics and social change: alignment, job displacement, our relationship with the idea of human intelligence and uniqueness. We will then look at the building blocks of value, what a worldview is and why we think the way that we do about value. We all have strong opinions on the state of the world and how technology is changing the world, but isn't it strange that people in this culture are so similar with those values? We will then look at ownership of values and beliefs, where they come from and the possibility of intentionally creating new ones. While it may seem like no one can know where we are going, it may not be as much of a black box as you might imagine. We will look at theory lag and how philosophical thinking on the intersection of virtual and "real" content affects us and finally how even our conception of self is currently (and rapidly!) changing.

Course learning outcomes:

Students will become conversant with the philosophy of tool use and how tools are integrated into our minds and affect our ways of being in the world. In doing so, they will become familiar with a number of major philosophers from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who have been influential on these topics. They will learn how philosophers think about the changes now happening in artificial intelligence and how the new technological

advancements can be understood in light of recent philosophical theory.

Required course materials:

Required Texts (eBooks available through GT library)

All articles and books are either made available on Canvas in the Files tab in the Readings folder or can be found electronically through the GT library website.

Course Website

All electronic class materials are available through the Georgia Tech library as free eBooks/articles or on. All assignments should be submitted electronically in the Canvas assignment dropboxes.

Grading policy:

The best way to gain insight and understanding in philosophy is through active engagement with the material: reading, reflection and conversation. We will accomplish this through group discussions that are fueled by the commentaries in your philosophical video journals. That ongoing dialogue will be supplemented by the other graded assignments. The final exam for this class is the final paper, which is to be submitted electronically no later than the class' final exam time. All written assignments must be submitted on Canvas. All assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed above. In other words, if they have the correct day stamped on them, they are on time. Otherwise, they are late (see below for the late policy).

Graded Assignments

Weekly video recitation sections

(top 12 grades of 14 count)

Total of 25%

Video journals and mind maps (3 total)

Total of 25%

Final paper and video discussion

25%

Final exam

25%

Recitation sections

The weekly recitation section meetings are meant to be elevated versions of the same discussions we would have in class. They are elevated because you are expected to prepare for them not only by reading and thinking about the assigned material, but also by finding additional discussions online that are relevant to the topics we're discussing that week. That extra material can be from online lectures, forums, books, journal articles, magazine articles or even blog posts. The idea behind the extra material is to encourage you to go out and discover how people are thinking about this topic right now. What is the current "buzz" in the online culture. Your source is "good" if it helps you to wrap your mind around how people are thinking about the topic.

In each video meeting, you will need to coordinate with your TA and log onto an online video service like Teams, WebEx, Zoom, etc. and record that interaction. Each person in the group should either speak or put text in chat about:

1. their understanding of the assigned readings, including any background they already had on the topic
2. what resources they found online and their understanding of how people are currently thinking about the topic
3. an informal discussion among the group, exploring the ideas

Not understanding everything that you read is completely fine. If you can pinpoint what it is about a particular writer's idea that you don't understand, that alone will help you to understand more and facilitate further insight. Success on this assignment means real engagement with the material, reflecting on it and working to try and find out what you think about it and what others think about it. Overly general off-the-cuff comments and not doing reading and research will, of course, proportionately lower your grade (see the rubric for details).

Each person will be graded individually. There is no group grade.

Video journals and mind maps

-   Mind map:
    -   diagram of all of the major ideas in the readings
    -   Relationships between ideas are key! Use arrows, annotations, drawings or anything else to show how the ideas and people relate to each other
    -   If it doesn't make sense to someone who **is not in the course**, it needs more detail

- Video:
  - 3-5 minute summary of all of the major ideas
    - It should make sense to someone who is not in the class
  - A casual conversation in addition to the summary (no time limit) describing:
    - Your reaction to and thoughts on the ideas, focusing on particular aspects of them: try to pinpoint what exactly is problematic or insightful about the idea(s) you discuss
    - Anything you don't understand (you are not expected to understand everything you read the first time – please be honest!)

The mind map should be so detailed that it covers all significant ideas and people so that it will still make sense to you a year from now (when you're in the middle of another class and realize that you've seen the idea before when you were taking philosophy…) or even to someone who is not in the class. Make it as clear and simple as you can.

I am principally looking for engagement with the material. Videos communicate a lot of information about how you are thinking about the material and how much time and energy you have put into understanding them. If you read the material, summarize it clearly, and reflect thoughtfully on the ideas, you will do well on this assignment. This does not have to be a difficult assignment… but there are no shortcuts.

The structure of the videos should be as follows (each section is equally weighted):

What you need to get an A, B or C on the assignment is listed under each section below

1. Describe what the ideas are and how the arguments for them work

Rubric (letter grades correspond to the descriptions below):

1. Clear, accurate and thorough descriptions of the ideas, describing the arguments for them and a discussion of how those arguments work.
    1. Good, clear descriptions of the ideas and the arguments, lacking in some details
    2. Descriptions of the ideas that are lacking in significant ways.
2. Describe how they relate to other ideas and values
    1. Clear and accurate discussion of the relationship of the ideas to one another
    2. A good account of how the ideas relate to other ideas and values, but lacking in some ways
    3. An account of how ideas relate to one another that is significantly lacking or absent
3. Tell me what you think about the ideas
    1. A carefully considered and detailed reflection on the ideas, including an agreement or objection that details philosophical specifics about why you agree or disagree (e.g., citing a particular passage or specific detail of the argument) that also makes use of additional external sources that were not part of the assigned reading

2. A good, thoughtful reflection on the ideas, including an agreement or objection that details philosophical specifics about why you agree or disagree (e.g., citing a particular passage or specific detail of the argument)
3. A simple summary that restates the ideas without clearly conveying your own understanding of them

Important note: The easiest way to do poorly on this assignment and have problems for the course is to not turn these in on time. They must be done *on time* to receive full credit. Please see the late assignment policy below for details.

Research Synthesis

To help you prepare for the final paper and to ensure that you know how to do academic research in philosophy, you will submit a document that has a list of sources that you will use for your final paper. The document should have the following structure:

1. Statement of your thesis and a brief description of the steps you will follow in arguing for it
2. A list of books and articles that you have found online and through the GT library. While you may use online blogs, magazines and websites like the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as supporting sources, the bulk of your sources and research should be from academic books and journal articles. For each source, provide the following:
    1. The citation of the source in the Chicago style (see below)
    2. A brief summary of the article's content, *specifically focusing on those elements that are relevant to your paper*. In other words, Semantic Scholar and other AI-based summary tools are great, but you need to craft your own summary of the content that's tailored to your thesis
    3. A description of how you will use this source in the paper with a list of quotes with citations that you believe may be useful

The very last item there is especially important! If you can get in the habit of creating lists of quotes with citations like that, the process of writing a master's thesis or dissertation will be *much* easier for you. I found that it was useful to organize my lists of quotes and citations by topic area. That way, when it came time to write the actual section of the paper or chapter of the book, I would start by pasting in my quotations and either writing text around the quotes or paraphrasing when I didn't need the actual quote and leaving the citation. This made the process of writing a densely cited research paper much more enjoyable.

Final paper and video

- **20% Research Synthesis**
- **20% video**
- **60% paper**

The paper:

You will be asked to submit a paper on any substantive philosophical topic in the course. The papers should be at least 2000 words. **You must use and cite external resources. Research is the key to succeeding on this assignment.** Citations should be done according to the Chicago Manual of Style (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmos_formatting_and).

In the paper, you will describe a position of a particular philosopher or philosophers (not too many – depth is key!) and do the following:

1. Say what your topic is and what your thesis is. The essay should revolve around **your** original philosophical contribution. In other words, this is not a book report.
2. Introduce the problem in the context of the current philosophical discussion. This is the "lit review" section and you will need to *DO RESEARCH FOR THIS!*
3. Describe the thesis in the context of that philosopher's thought in general (e.g., Kant's moral claims about duty fit neatly with the remainder of his philosophical system) *You'll want to use research for this too!*
4. Describe your objection, modification or twist on the topic
5. Try and determine how that thinker would have responded to your objection (AI agents are excellent for this)

To do well on this assignment, you will need to understand the state of the current discussion and also the mindset of the particular person you are addressing, which means being very familiar with their work. Although this is not an English course, since philosophers cannot often lean on numbers to make the point for them, they are left needing to clearly articulate their ideas in words. Thus, clarity in writing and grammar are important insofar as they facilitate the effective communication of your ideas.

The video:

Along with the paper, I will ask you to submit a short video. This is **not** a summary of the paper. I want you to casually describe the thought process of the paper, emphasizing points where you thought about going a different direction, didn't quite understand something or were surprised by something in your research. I want to hear about the **process** of doing the research and writing the paper. If you put a lot of thought into your own original philosophical ideas in the paper, this will be easy. Those who have AI agents write the papers for them (which is not allowed, of course – see below) will find this much more difficult.

Special note on using online AI agents like ChatGPT for the writing assignments

As we will discuss and demonstrate in class, I expect you to make use of online AI writing tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude. Using tools like this will be an important skill for you going forward. We will talk about how to use them and what the limitations are (viz., they are sometimes wrong and they haven't necessarily read the academic journals). You are of course expected to submit only your own work for the paper and not copy and paste material from these agents. That said, they provide excellent starting points and can be used to find clear and concise ways of saying things. **Since these tools are maturing rapidly and provide clear prose with a single click, the level of clarity and writing expected by this assignment has naturally increased in kind**. Similarly, the bar will be set higher for getting the information right. That is, since I know how easy it is to provide Wikipedia-level content for your topic from these agents, the onus is on you to make sure that the arguments are represented accurately and provide citations and quotations that support that. This will make the process of writing much easier and better in a variety of ways. I hope that it will enable us as writers in philosophy to focus more on research and quality of argumentation and less on the craft of writing and editing. While some professors are concerned about assigning papers since it is now so easy for students to have these agents write for them, I am embracing the new technology and want to help you to learn how to effectively use it.

Attendance policy:

Students are expected to attend and contribute to the recitation sections as described in the grading section above.

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.

Academic Honor Code

Speaking with other people about the arguments for your papers is helpful and, indeed, is expected. Submitting any work other than your own however is a violation of the Academic Honor Code. Quoting other authors, of course, is common practice. You must however distinguish clearly between your own work and that of others. If you quote or paraphrase an idea from someone else, you must cite them. All sources should be listed in the references section of your papers. I have a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism. It is the student's responsibility to know what plagiarism is. Plagiarism will be dealt with according to the GT Academic Honor Code. That said, I have never pursued a plagiarism case for a student who did not properly cite by accident.

For any questions involving these or any other Academic Honor Code issues, please consult me or www.honor.gatech.edu.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area.

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 understand human experiences and connections?

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

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following

Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion