

# Technology, Information, and Media Ethics

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Sample Syllabus

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Technology, Information, and Media ethics are each relatively young fields, beginning near the end of World War II and growing exponentially (especially since the 1970's) in pace with developments in computer and information technology. Because *computing devices*, the *Internet*, and the sharing of *information* have all become such central parts of our lives, the questions that information and media ethics deal with have significant implications for the policies, practices, and principles that guide our use of technology, the means with which we share information, and how that information is used.

This course will explore several foundational and contemporary arguments in Technology, Information, and Media Ethics, especially those that have shaped (and continue to shape) our notions of privacy, anonymity, the use(s) of artificial intelligence, responsibility and accountability, free speech, truth, and propaganda. Some of the questions we will discuss include: Ought we promote human values at the expense of limiting technological reach? Do those persons who design and develop computer-related technologies have a special responsibility to consider or prevent ethical dilemmas related to their designs? Must the ethical policies that govern computers and the Internet necessarily be global ethical policies? What kinds of things ought to be protected under the concept of 'Informational Privacy'? Ought we ensure that the information communicated via new media technologies is free from bias, or that it does not perpetuate dangerous stereotypes? What should be done about the way that personal data is collected and used?

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

The goals of this course are to provide students with an understanding of historical and contemporary debates in information and media ethics and, by doing so, engage them in broader philosophical debates about ethics, law, and political and social culture. By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Recognize, explain, and reflect upon the major philosophical arguments covered in this class, and critically compare them.
2. Understand the major ethical frameworks that shape information and media ethics and have the confidence to apply them to current events.
3. Hone critical thinking skills by analyzing philosophical arguments.
4. Refine writing skills through course papers and exams.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

- Week 1      **Introduction**  
    >> *AI and Machine Morality*  
    **Wendell Wallach & Colin Allen**, *Moral Machines*, “Why Machine Morality?”  
    (PDF on Blackboard)
- Week 2      >> *AI and Machine Morality*  
    **Wendell Wallach & Colin Allen**, *Moral Machines*, “Engineering Morality”  
    (PDF on Blackboard)  
    **Batya Friedman, Peter H. Kahn, & Alan Borning**, “Value Sensitive  
    Design and Information Systems” (PDF on Blackboard)
- Week 3      >> *AI and Machine Morality*  
    **Wendell Wallach & Colin Allen**, *Moral Machines*, “Does Humanity Want  
    Computers Making Moral Decisions?” (PDF on Blackboard)  
    John Markoff, “Should Your Driverless Car Hit a Pedestrian to Save Your  
    Life?”  
    **In-Class Activity:** MIT Moral Machine
- Week 4      >> *AI and Machine Morality*  
    **Nick Bostrom & Eliezer Yudkowsky**, “The Ethics of Artificial  
    Intelligence” (PDF on Blackboard)
- Week 5      >> *Privacy and Accountability*  
    **James Rachels**, “Why Privacy is Important” (PDF on Blackboard)  
    **Anita Allen**, “Privacy Isn’t Everything: Accountability as a Personal and  
    Social Good” (PDF on Blackboard)
- Week 6      >> *Privacy and Accountability*  
    **Kathryn Norlock**, “Online Shaming” (PDF on Blackboard)  
    **Watch in Class:** When Online Shaming Goes too Far  
    **Carissa Véliz**, “Online Masquerade: Redesigning the Internet for Free  
    Speech Through the Use of Pseudonyms”
- Week 7      >> *Information Accountability*  
    **Karen Frost-Arnold**, “Trustworthiness and Truth: The Epistemic Pitfalls of  
    Internet Accountability” (PDF on Blackboard)  
  
    >> **Op-Ed Round-Up #1: Machines, Privacy, & Accountability**  
    Discussion of current Op-Eds and Critical Blog Posts / Groupwork
- Week 8      >> *Information Accountability*  
    **Emma Paling**, “Wikipedia’s Hostility to Women”  
    **Jessica Pepp, Eliot Michaelson, & Rachel Katherine Sterken**, “What’s  
    New About Fake News?” (PDF on Blackboard)  
    **In-Class Activity:** Factitious

- Week 9 >> *Information Accountability*  
**Mariarosaria Taddeo & Luciano Floridi**, “The Moral Responsibilities of Online Service Providers” (PDF on Blackboard)  
**Dirk Lewandowski**, “Is Google Responsible for Providing Fair and Unbiased Results?” (PDF on Blackboard)
- Week 10 >> *Information Accountability*  
**Safiya Umoja Noble**, *Algorithms of Oppression*, “A Society, Searching” (PDF on Blackboard)  
**Richard Heersmink**, “A Virtue Epistemology of the Internet: Search Engines, Intellectual Virtues and Education”
- Week 11 >> **Op-Ed Round-Up #2: Fake News, User Behavior, & Regulation**  
Discussion of current Op-Eds and Critical Blog Posts / Groupwork
- >> *Propaganda, Big Data, and Social Media*  
**Jason Stanley**, *How Propaganda Works*, “Propaganda Defined”
- Week 12 >> *Propaganda, Big Data, and Social Media*  
**Étienne Brown**, “Propaganda, Misinformation, and the Epistemic Value of Democracy” (PDF on Blackboard)  
**Watch in Class:** The Great Hack
- Week 13 >> *Propaganda, Big Data, and Social Media*  
**Katarzyna Śledziwska & Renata Wloch**, “Should We Treat Big Data as a Public Good?” (PDF on Blackboard)
- Week 14 >> *Propaganda, Big Data, and Social Media*  
**Katy Waldman**, “Facebook’s Unethical Experiment”  
**Tal Yarkoni**, “In Defense of Facebook”
- >> **Op-Ed Round-Up #3: Propaganda, Big Data, & Social Media**  
Discussion of current Op-Eds and Critical Blog Posts