

Philosophy of Technology
Spring 2022 | MW 2:00-3:15
Langdale Hall Rm. 323

Instructor: Professor Daniel Weiskopf
 Email: dweiskopf@gsu.edu
 Office hours: Fri. 9-12 (via WebEx)

COURSE OVERVIEW



1. George Sheeler, *Suspended Power*, 1939

Humans are a technological species. Our world, from the air we breathe to the food we eat, has been reshaped by technologies as varied as industrial farming, automatic rifles, vaccines, and networked computing. In this course we will investigate the nature and uses of such technology. We will consider how to define technology, whether technology is morally or politically neutral, what are the ethics of technological risk and innovation, and how technology might change not just the natural and social environment, but human nature itself.

This course is designed to facilitate a transition between introductory and upper-level courses in philosophy. Its aim is to deepen your understanding and appreciation of one philosophical topic by examining it from many perspectives and bringing out its implications. Doing so will improve your facility with the analysis of complex arguments, sharpen the writing skills you will need for advanced coursework, and introduce you to more “seminar”-style learning, with smaller classes, less lecture, and more discussion.

By the end of the semester you will be able to:

1. Cogently **explain** various philosophical perspectives on the nature of technology and its relationships to society
2. **Assess** and **critique** arguments concerning how to manage technological risk
3. **Explain** various senses in which technology has ethical value and **relate** them to each other
4. **Apply** these concepts to real-world cases and situations, particularly in biotechnology and artificial intelligence
5. **Develop** and **critique** your own perspective on these topics

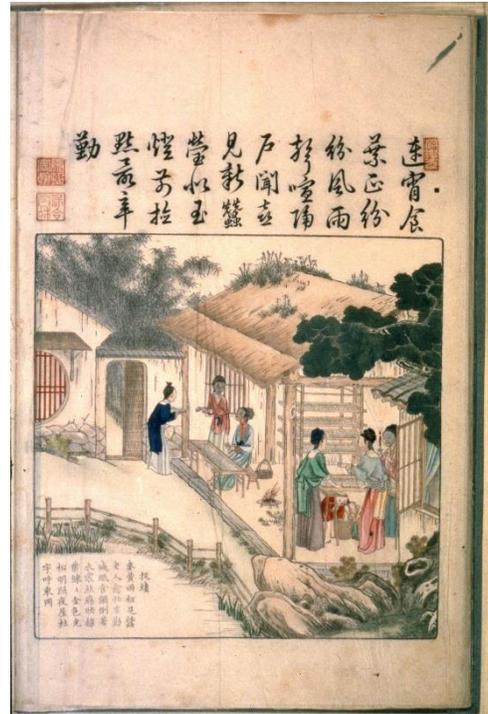
ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

The points available for the class break down as follows (no extra credit):

Reading responses	45%	A+ 100-97%	A 96-93%	A- 92-90%
Final paper	45%	B+ 89-87%	B 86-83%	B- 82-80%
Discussion questions	10%	C+ 79-77%	C 76-73%	C- 72-70%
TOTAL	100%	D 69-60%	F 59-0%	

Because this course satisfies a Critical Thinking through Writing (CTW) requirement, you will mainly be assessed through your written work:

1. **Reading responses** are brief (~250 word) analyses. These narrowly focused reflections center on small portions of the one of the assigned texts, or on close readings of selected passages. Their role is to help you develop attentive and critical reading habits and sensitivity to how philosophical arguments are crafted.
2. In the **paper** you will develop and defend a philosophical perspective drawing on the texts and our discussions. This will involve explaining how key concepts and arguments work, critiquing their shortcomings, modifying or improving them, and showing how they apply to thinking and acting in concrete cases.



2. Chinese silk production, *Yuzhi gengzhi tu*, 1696

3. **Discussion questions** will be submitted prior to our in-class meetings. Writing these out will help you to learn how to ask productive questions of texts. They will also help us to shape our conversations around the points that the group found most engaging and perplexing.

Honors students will in addition write a short **media analysis** focusing on how technology is represented in a particular work of imagination (including novels, films, comics, and TV series). This will be worth 10% of the final grade, with reading responses and the final paper being adjusted down to 40%.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

A few suggestions on how to prepare for success in the class:

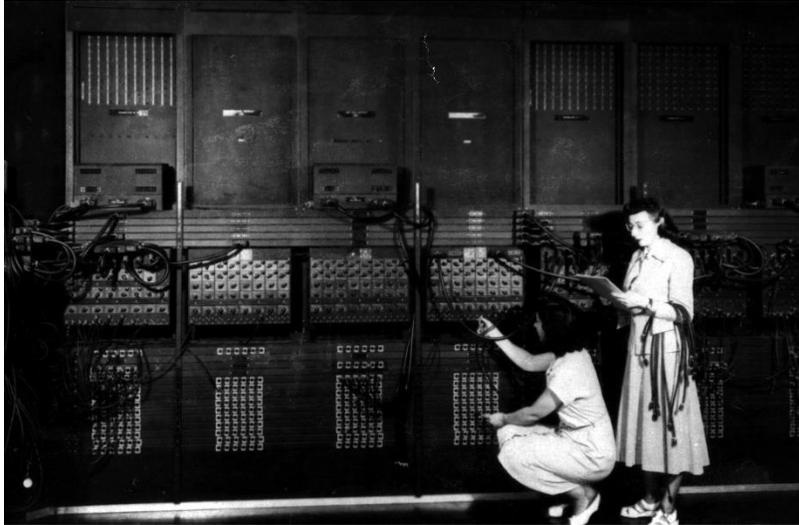
1. Successful students are **active learners**. This means being present and attentive in class, reading critically and taking notes, checking in on how well you are understanding the material, and asking questions when things aren't clear.
2. Successful students **make connections**. This means thinking about how what we are learning in this class connects with what you're learning in other classes, and how it fits in with your own experiences and beliefs and those of your peers.
3. Successful students **manage their time wisely**. This means keeping on top of the readings and assignments. If you fall behind, it will be much harder to catch up as the semester goes on.

I expect you to do your best to follow these guidelines. If you need more guidance on these points, please get in touch. You, meanwhile, can expect the following from me:

1. I will be **responsive and timely** in how I grade assignments and respond to messages. Assignments will be returned within a week, and I will answer emails and other communications within 48 hours.
2. I will be **clear** in all of my course communications. This includes setting deadlines, presenting material in lectures and discussion, explaining the purpose of assignments, and establishing grading standards.
3. I will be **fair**. This means that assignments will be graded according to set criteria, that discussions will be moderated in a way that gives everyone's views a respectful hearing, and that course guidelines will be applied equally to all participants.

Email (dweiskopf@gsu.edu) is the best way to contact me. Put the course name or number in the subject line of your message. I will respond reasonably quickly but if I haven't answered in 48 hours, re-send your message. I answer emails Mon. to Fri. but on the weekend generally reply only to urgent messages. I will send updates to your GSU email throughout the semester, so check it often.

I hold **virtual office hours** on WebEx, Fri. 9-12. Reserve a slot at least one day in advance if you want to chat. If you are unavailable in that time slot, email me and we can schedule another time. Also, if there are specific issues you'd like to discuss, let me know in advance.



3. Women programmers with the ENIAC computer, 1943

SCHEDULE OF READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS

There is no textbook for this class. The readings will be available on [iCollege](#). Our lectures and discussions will clarify and supplement the texts, but they presuppose that you have read them *at least* once already. After we've discussed the readings, go back over them to see how your understanding has improved.

Disclaimer: The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary.

INTRODUCTION

- M 1/10 Course introduction – read the syllabus and affirm your participation
- W 1/12 E. M. Forster, “The machine stops”
- M 1/17 ** No class; Martin Luther King, Jr. Day ****

KNOWING AND MAKING

- W 1/19 Francis Bacon, selections from *Novum Organon* and *The New Atlantis*
- M 1/24 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, selections from *Capital*, *The German Ideology*, etc.
- W 1/26 Hannah Arendt, selections from *The Human Condition*

TECHNOLOGICAL FIXES

- M 1/31 Alvin Weinberg, “Can technology replace social

engineering?”

W 2/2 John McDermott, “Technology: The opiate of the intellectuals”

RISK AND PRECAUTION

M 2/7 Sheila Jasanoff, “Risk and responsibility”

W 2/9 Andrew Stirling, “Science, precaution, and practice”

TECHNOLOGY IN SOCIETY

M 2/14 Albert Borgmann, selections from *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*

W 2/16 Bruno Latour, “A collective of humans and nonhumans”

M 2/21 Deborah Johnson, “Sorting out the question of feminist technology”

W 2/23 Kwame Gyekye, “Philosophy, culture, and technology in the postcolonial”

ETHICS, RESPONSIBILITY, AND GOVERNANCE

M 2/28 Hans Jonas, “Technology and responsibility”

W 3/2 Peter-Paul Verbeek, “Materializing morality: Design ethics and technological mediation”

M 3/7 Richard Sclove, “‘In every sense the experts’: Strong democracy and technology”

W 3/9 Park-Hang Wong, “Confucian environmental ethics, climate engineering, and the ‘Playing God’ argument”

M 3/14 ** Spring Break; No class **

W 3/16

MEDICINE, GENETICS, AND BIOTECHNOLOGIES

M 3/21 Dorothy Roberts, “Is race-based medicine good for us?: African American approaches to race, biomedicine, and equality”

W 3/23 Silja Samerski, “Genetic counseling and the fiction of choice: Taught self-determination as a new technique of social engineering”

M 3/28 Julian Savulescu, “Genetic interventions and the ethics of enhancement of human beings”

W 3/30 Kim TallBear, "The emergence, politics, and marketplace of Native American DNA"

COMPUTING, ROBOTICS, AND AI

M 4/4 Shannon Vallor, "Robots with guns"

**Final paper
proposal due**

W 4/6 Shoshana Zuboff, "Big other: Surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization"

M 4/11 Timnit Gebru, "Race and gender"

W 4/13 Ashley Shew, "Ableism, technoableism, and future AI"

U/dysTOPIA

M 4/18 Viewing and discussion of Adam Curtis, *All Watched Over
by Machines of Loving Grace*; course review and writing
workshop

M 4/25 No readings; Course wrap-up

Final paper due

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Diversity and inclusion

GSU is home to a highly diverse student body. In our classrooms this diversity is a source of strength and a resource for teaching and learning. The Department of Philosophy welcomes voices and viewpoints that have been historically marginalized or underrepresented within the discipline. Faculty and students in Philosophy courses commit to creating an intellectual environment that is inclusive of students' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives, regardless of their race, religion, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identification, ability status, socioeconomic status, national identity, or any other identity markers.

Respect and civility

All students in this course should be treated with respect and dignity and provided an equitable opportunity to participate, contribute, and succeed. Disagreement is part of philosophical discussion. But students should avoid language that is demeaning or stigmatizing, particularly when addressing other members of the class and responding to their views. Students who wish to use a name or pronoun other than what is available on the class roll or iCollege may introduce themselves to the class using it or inform the instructor via email. Students should use the names and pronouns preferred by students and faculty.

Attendance and conduct

Attendance is not graded, but it is both expected and necessary for you to understand the course material. On regular class days we will meet for the entire scheduled time unless otherwise noted.

You may not sell or distribute recordings or transcripts of lectures and discussions, although you may make such recordings for your own personal use. I expect you to adhere to normal standards of good classroom behavior: cell phones silent and put away, no loud personal conversations, snoring, etc.

COVID-19

If you become ill, you will need an excused absence. GSU has a new process for students seeking excused absences through the Dean of Students' Office. Please submit documentation to [their website](#). Should you test positive for COVID, any accommodations to the class attendance policy will be informed by evolving guidance from the CDC on quarantine. In most cases there will be no major change to mode of course delivery, so you will be responsible for collecting notes for missed in-person classes and making up any work missed during quarantine. Anyone who has a positive COVID test should [alert the university](#) so that appropriate contact tracing can be conducted. Other COVID FAQs are addressed [here](#).

Laptops and other electronic devices

Use of laptops and related electronic devices is permitted for course-related purposes only. Exercise courtesy towards your fellow students by not using these devices for

amusement during class. Disruptive or distracting use of personal electronics will first result in a warning, then in your being asked to leave the class.

Technical support

Online platforms like iCollege can be hard to use, and often break in weird ways. If you are having trouble getting iCollege to do what you want, documentation can be found [here](#). If the platform seems to be broken or inaccessible, tech support is provided by GSU's [IT department](#), who can be contacted via [email](#) with questions.

Lateness policy

In cases of illness, family medical emergency, or other extenuating circumstances I will accept late assignments. I don't require documentation for this, but please notify me when you are requesting permission to turn in an assignment late and we will work out a plan of accommodation. Late assignments handed in without permission will only be eligible for 75% of their full grade.

Special accommodations

All efforts will be made to accommodate students with special needs. Students who wish to request accommodations for a disability may do so by connecting with the Access and Accommodations Center (AAACE). Students may be accommodated upon instructor receipt of an accommodation notice from AAACE (see [How to Connect](#)).

Basic needs statement

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable us to provide resources that we may possess. The [Embark program at GSU](#) provides resources for students facing homelessness and [Panther's Pantry](#) provides resources for students facing food insecurity.

Academic honesty

Acceptable academic conduct is laid out in the GSU [Code of Conduct](#). All participants in the course are expected to abide by this code. **If you violate the academic conduct code, you fail the course.**

The most important aspect of the code is that the work that you submit should be your own. Having your name on what you create tells everyone who is speaking. This means that the work isn't just copied from elsewhere and rebranded with your name – that is, it isn't plagiarized. There are specific guidelines in the code on what makes something plagiarism. Please also note that using group chat programs (e.g., Slack, GroupMe, etc.) to complete assignments also counts as a violation unless the assignment is an explicitly collaborative one. Collaborating is important, but so is learning to think independently and take authorship of your work.

Department of Philosophy: General Syllabus Statement: Spring 2022

Diversity and Inclusion: GSU is home to a highly diverse student body. In our classrooms this diversity is a source of strength and a resource for teaching and learning. The Department of Philosophy welcomes voices and viewpoints that have been historically marginalized or underrepresented within the discipline. Faculty and students in Philosophy courses commit to creating an intellectual environment that is inclusive of students' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives, regardless of their race, religion, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identification, ability status, socioeconomic status, national identity, or any other identity markers.

Respect & Civility: All students in this course should be treated with respect and dignity and provided an equitable opportunity to participate, contribute, and succeed. Disagreement is part of philosophical discussion. But students should avoid language that is demeaning or stigmatizing, particularly when addressing other members of the class and responding to their views.

Students who wish to use a name or pronoun other than what is available on the class roll or iCollege may introduce themselves to the class using it or inform the instructor via email. Students should use the names and pronouns preferred by students and faculty.

- **This syllabus provides a general plan for the course. Deviations may be necessary.**
- The last day to **withdraw** from a course with the possibility of receiving a "W" for Spring 2022 is **March 1**. A student may be awarded a **W** no more than 6 times in their careers at Georgia State. After 6 Ws, a withdrawal is recorded as a WF, which counts as an F in a GPA.
- **The customary penalty for any violation of academic honesty is an "F" in the course, which cannot be replaced by repeating the course or with a withdrawal.** See selections from the University Policy on Academic Honesty below. **Copying or using any material from the internet in any way without proper citation is a violation of the policy.**
- Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the [Access and Accommodation Center \(AACE\)](#). Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by AACE of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which accommodations are sought.
- Students are responsible for confirming that they are attending the **course section** for which they are registered. Failure to do so may result in an F for the course.
- By University policy and to respect the confidentiality of all students, **final grades** may not be posted, emailed, or given out over the phone. To see your grades, use PAWS.
- Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State University. Upon completing the course, please take the time to fill out the online course evaluation on PAWS.

Please subscribe to one of our department listservs for current information and events:

<https://philosophy.gsu.edu/listserve-form/>

For more information on the philosophy program and the value of philosophy courses visit:

<http://philosophy.gsu.edu>

For more information on GSU Code of Conduct visit:

<https://codeofconduct.gsu.edu/>

For more information on student accommodations visit the AACE website:

<https://access.gsu.edu/>

For more information on assistance for students visit the Dean of Students website:

<https://deanofstudents.gsu.edu/student-assistance/>

Policy on Academic Honesty, from the GSU Student Code of Conduct

As members of the academic community, students are expected to recognize and uphold standards of intellectual and academic integrity. The university assumes as a basic and minimum standard of conduct in academic matters that students be honest and that they submit for credit only the products of their own efforts. Both the ideals of scholarship and the need for fairness require that all dishonest work be rejected as a basis for academic credit. They also require that students refrain from any and all forms of dishonorable or unethical conduct related to their academic work.

The university's policy on academic honesty is published in the *Faculty Handbook* and *On Campus: The Student Handbook* and is available to all members of the university community. The policy represents a core value of the university, and all members of the university community are responsible for abiding by its tenets. Lack of knowledge of this policy is not an acceptable defense to any charge of academic dishonesty. All members of the academic community—students, faculty, and staff—are expected to report violations of these standards of academic conduct to the appropriate authorities. The procedures for such reporting are on file in the offices of the deans of each college, the office of the dean of students, and the office of the provost.

Definitions and Examples

The examples and definitions given below are intended to clarify the standards by which academic honesty and academically honorable conduct are to be judged. The list is merely illustrative of the kinds of infractions that may occur, and it is not intended to be exhaustive. Moreover, the definitions and examples suggest conditions under which unacceptable behavior of the indicated types normally occurs; however, there may be unusual cases that fall outside these conditions that also will be judged unacceptable by the academic community.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is presenting another person's work as one's own. Plagiarism includes any para-phrasing or summarizing of the works of another person without acknowledgment, including the submitting of another student's work as one's own. Plagiarism frequently involves a failure to acknowledge in the text, notes, or footnotes the quotation of the paragraphs, sentences, or even a few phrases written or spoken by someone else. The submission of research or completed papers or projects by someone else is plagiarism, as is the unacknowledged use of research sources gathered by someone else when that use is specifically forbidden by the faculty member. Failure to indicate the extent and nature of one's reliance on other sources is also a form of plagiarism. Any work, in whole or in part, taken from the Internet or other computer-based resource without properly referencing the source (for example, the URL) is considered plagiarism. A complete reference is required in order that all parties may locate and view the original source. Finally, there may be forms of plagiarism that are unique to an individual discipline or course, examples of which should be provided in advance by the faculty member. The student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources, the appropriate ways of acknowledging academic, scholarly or creative indebtedness, and the consequences of violating this responsibility.

Multiple Submissions: It is a violation of academic honesty to submit substantial portions of the same work for credit more than once without the explicit consent of the faculty member(s) to whom the

material is submitted for additional credit. In cases in which there is a natural development of research or knowledge in a sequence of courses, use of prior work may be desirable, even required; however the student is responsible for indicating in writing, as a part of such use, that the current work submitted for credit is cumulative in nature.

Cheating on Examinations: Cheating on examinations involves giving or receiving unauthorized help before, during, or after an examination. Examples of unauthorized help include the use of notes, computer-based resources, texts, or "crib sheets" during an examination (unless specifically approved by the faculty member), or sharing information with another student during an examination (unless specifically approved by the faculty member). Other examples include intentionally allowing another student to view one's own examination and collaboration before or after an examination if such collaboration is specifically forbidden by the faculty member.

Unauthorized Collaboration: Submission for academic credit of a work product, or a part thereof, represented as its being one's own effort, which has been developed in substantial collaboration with another person or source or with a computer-based resource is a violation of academic honesty. It is also a violation of academic honesty knowingly to provide such assistance. Collaborative work specifically authorized by a faculty member is allowed.

Falsification: It is a violation of academic honesty to misrepresent material or fabricate information in an academic exercise, assignment or proceeding (e.g., false or misleading citation of sources, falsification of the results of experiments or computer data, false or misleading information in an academic context in order to gain an unfair advantage).