PHIL 352: The Ethics of Technology

Fall 2023
Location: PAHB 229
Time: 2:30-3:45

Instructor:	Blake Francis	**Email:**	bfrancis@umbc.edu
Office:	PAHB 467	**Office Hours:**	TTh 1-3 pm; by appt
		Webex room:	bfrancis@umbc.webex.com

University Requirements Satisfied by this Course

General Education Requirements Satisfied by this Course: Arts and Humanities (AH)

Functional Competency Satisfied by this Course: Critical Analysis and Reasoning

Course Description and Rationale

This course surveys ethical questions about the development, use, and regulation of technology. Topics to be discussed may include surveillance, big data, algorithmic bias, self-driving cars, social media, geoengineering, energy technologies, industrial and electronic waste, nanotechnology, genetically modified organisms, reproductive technology, and human enhancement. Ethical frameworks will be utilized to evaluate how technologies affect society and the environment. Critical reflection on the impacts of new technologies is emphasized.

We'll begin our inquiry this semester by challenging the common misconception that technology is merely a tool that we use to achieve our goals. We will consider the view that technology is a value-laden social phenomenon. Every aspect of our lives is mediated by technology. Technologies shape our physical environment, facilitate our social interactions, influence our points of view, alter the earth's ecosystems, and influence what we value. If technology plays this complex role, then "What technologies ought we create or use?" is not a technical question but an ethical one requiring critical reflection on the impacts of technology on individuals, society, and the environment.

After evaluating the role of technology in society, we will study particular technologies. Along the way, we will apply ethical theories, concepts, and frameworks to answer difficult questions about existing and emerging technologies. For example, can artificial intelligence be designed to behave morally? Do nanoscale surveillance devices pose new threats to privacy? Should we use emerging technology like geoengineering to help solve the climate change crisis? Is genetically engineering babies with preferred traits (e.g., gender, intelligence, personality, eye color) unfair? Is social media bad for democracy? We'll consider these questions and more in the context of the following technologies:

- Surveillance Technologies

- Artificial Intelligence

- Social Media

- Cloning and Reproductive Technologies

- Environmental and Agricultural Technologies

Learning Outcomes

The goal of the course is to expose students to debates in the Ethics of Technology. The course is also aimed at helping students hone their philosophical skills through reading professional articles, critically analyzing these articles, participating in class discussions, and writing essays.

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to:

- Describe some of the major issues, views, arguments, and debates in the ethics of technology, including the following:

    - views about the following values and concepts as applied to ethical evaluations of technology: forms of life, power, rights and liberties, equality, virtue ethics, meaningfulness, and responsibility
    - debates over the value of privacy and whether emerging surveillance technologies pose new threats to privacy
    - issues of fairness, distributive justice, and discrimination concerning the use of predictive algorithms by police departments and child protective services
    - debates over whether (and how) artificial intelligence can be designed to behave ethically
    - issues about whether social media is or could be conducive to democratic deliberation
    - debates over whether reproductive technologies like sex selection and "designer babies" perpetuate problematic expectations of sex and gender and other injustices
    - views about how global markets in genetically modified organisms interfere with local agricultural practices at women's expense
    - debates over whether society ought to geoengineer the climate to reduce global warming

- perform close readings of philosophical texts to identify the stated and unstated premises and conclusions of arguments and critically assess these arguments.

- construct cogent arguments by presenting explicit reasons to support your claims and anticipating objections

- write papers that clearly articulate your argument, respond to anticipated objections, and engage critically with course content.

Required Texts:

Most of the readings for our class are selected from three main texts. Readings from the main texts are indicated in the syllabus using the abbreviations in brackets below.

Two books are required and must be purchased by the student. They are available at the UMBC bookstore:

i. Virginia Eubanks. 2018. *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor.* St. Martin's Press [AIH]

ii. Ronald L. Sandler (ed.) 2014. *Ethics and Emerging Technologies.* Palgrave MacMillan [EET]

The third main textbook is available digitally on library reserves. Students may optionally purchase a physical copy at the bookstore:

   iii. Matthew S. Liao (ed.) 2020. *Ethics and Artificial Intelligence*. Oxford University Press [AAI]

In addition, articles and links will be posted on Blackboard in the Course Materials folder.

Methods of Evaluation:

Assessment in this class will be based on participation, "Philosophy Practice" assignments, and papers. Writing is the primary mode of evaluation for this class.

Participation:

Your **participation** grade includes both attendance and preparation. In order to be a full participant in our class, it is important that you (1) show up to class on time, having read and reflected on the readings assigned, and (2) give your undivided attention to the lectures, discussions, and class activities. Keep in mind that material will be presented in class that is not in the readings. If you must be late or miss a class, ask another student for notes, and you are always encouraged to discuss course materials with me.

Attendance will be taken using Qwickly. **Each student has three "freebie" unexcused absences.** You may use your freebies at your discretion (There's no need to be in touch with me for permission!). Your three freebies will be marked "excused" at the end of the semester. After the three freebies are used up, unexcused absences count negatively toward your participation grade. If you have any concerns about participation, please get in touch with me. (See also "Attendance Policies" below.) **Please don't come to class if you feel ill. Contact me to make arrangements.**

Philosophy Practice Assignments:

Tourist: "Excuse me, how do you get to Carnegie Hall?"
New Yorker: "Practice, practice, practice."

Everyone knows that if you want to learn how to play a musical instrument, you have to practice. The same goes for thinking about ethics in a philosophical way. Over the semester, I will assign short assignments over Blackboard that ask you to respond to readings and practice philosophical skills like working with arguments or analyzing concepts. These "Philosophy Practices" (PhilPracs) provide opportunities to practice and receive feedback as you apply the skills and tools of philosophy to questions about technology. PhilPracs will set the stage for our discussion on Wednesdays and must be completed on time.

A total of **11 PhilPracs** will be assigned as homework over the course of the semester and are worth 20 points each. Only 10 PhilPracs will count toward your final grade, so the lowest score is dropped. On the weeks they are assigned, PhilPracs are **due Wednesday mornings at 9 a.m. sharp**. PhilPracs submitted late will receive 0 credit. PhilPracs are graded on a three-point scale (Full Credit, Half Credit, No Credit). See Blackboard/Assignments/PhilPracs for more details.

Papers:

The **three paper assignments** give you the opportunity to write philosophically, develop argumentative skills as well as develop and defend your own position on an issue. For the first two papers, you will be given a list of prompts to choose from and asked to defend a thesis. We will spend time in class learning about philosophical writing to prepare for the paper assignments. For the final paper, you will write an ethical evaluation of a *new or emerging* technology using ethical tools (theories, concepts, frameworks) studied during class. A short prospectus for the final paper will be due a few weeks before the final due date.

Papers will be submitted in .docx or .pdf format over Blackboard. Please prepare your papers for blind grading by not putting your name anywhere on the assignment.

All papers for this class must be submitted with an academic integrity pledge signed by the student. In the pledge, students will testify that their writing and ideas are their own, that they have not appealed to the ideas or work of others without proper citation, and that they have not utilized large language models (e.g., ChatGPT) to compile their work. Please see UMBC's Statement of Values for Academic Integrity Below and on the Academic Integrity Website.

Grading:

This course will be graded on a 1,000-point scale.
1000 - 900	=A
899 - 800	=B
799 - 700	=C
699 - 600	=D
599 - 0	=F

Evaluation of Assignments:

Participation	= 100 points
Philosophy Practices	= 200 points
Paper 1 (750 words)	= 100 points
Paper 2 (1000 words)	= 250 points
Final Paper Prospectus (500 words)	= 50 points
Final Paper (1500-2000 words)	= 300 points
Total	= 1,000 points

Course Policies and Expectations:

Classroom Culture:

A positive learning environment is an atmosphere where diverse perspectives can be expressed. It is especially important that we foster a positive environment in this course, which focuses on several controversial topics that we are bound to disagree strongly about. Each of us is expected to respectfully engage with points of view that we strongly disagree with during in-class discussions and in written assignments. Learning how to do philosophy requires learning how to engage openly, respectfully,

reasonably, and critically with ideas that challenge. The range of views you hold and the experiences you bring into the classroom will make our learning experiences much more interesting and enriching.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is required for this class. Attendance will be taken using Qwickly. Students will log in to Blackboard to register their attendance. If you arrive late to class and the check-in period has closed, approach me after class to inform me that you were tardy but in attendance. If you arrive late, you will be given partial participation points for the day. Tardiness is a disruption to the rest of the class and is discouraged.

Use of your **cell phone or laptop** for non-class purposes is a distraction to you and other students. If you use your devices for non-class purposes, you will be marked absent that day. If you **sleep** in class, you will be marked absent for that day.

Late Assignments:

Unless you have a valid excuse (serious illness, religious observance, death in the family, etc.) and you notify me before the assignment is due, late papers will be graded down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late. For example, if your work earns an A-, but you submit the paper one day late, you will receive a B+.

PhilPracs cannot be made up or submitted late except under rare and serious circumstances. With few exceptions, late PhilPracs receive 0 credit.

Office Hours:

I encourage all students to come to office hours to discuss any aspect of this course. I hold office hours in person twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 1 p.m. **Please stop by in person on Tuesdays or Thursdays between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. No appointment is needed!** You can also make an in-person or virtual appointment by emailing me. Webex room: (https://umbc.webex.com/meet/bfrancis).

Plagiarism and Cheating

Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of others without proper citation. Plagiarism and other kinds of cheating will not be tolerated. The penalty for this kind of dishonesty could be severe. If you are caught violating the UMBC honor code, you will receive a failing grade on the assignment in question and be reported to the Academic Misconduct Management Database. For more information, see UMBC's Statement of Values for Academic Integrity below.

EET: Reading is available in our textbook: *Ethics and Emerging Technologies* by R. Sandler
AIH: Reading is available in our textbook:*Automating Inequality* by V. Eubanks
EAI: Reading is available in our textbook: *Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* by S.M. Liao.
LR: Reading is available on Blackboard: Course Materials/Library Reserves.
Links: Reading is available on Blackboard: Course Materials/Links.

Reading Assignment Schedule

Wed., Aug. 30   Ronald Sandler, Introduction: Technology and Ethics [Optional] (EET 1-24)

TECHNOLOGY, SOCIETY, AND MEANING

Mon., Sep. 4   No Class - Labor Day

Wed., Sep. 6   Arnold Pacey. Technology, Practice, and Culture (EET 27-36)
Mary Midgley (1981) "Trying Out One's New Sword," in *Heart and Mind: The Varieties of Moral Experience*, pp. 80-87 (LR)
PhilPrac 1 due @ 9am

Mon., Sep. 11   Langdon Winner. Technologies as Forms of Life (EET 48-60)

Wed., Sep. 13   Tiger Roholt (2023) Smartphones and Meaningfulness, Blog of the American Philosophical Association (Links)
Tiger Roholt (2023) *Distracted from Meaning: A Philosophy of Smartphones*. Chapter 6 "Identity Work" (skim or skip Section 6.4) pp. 163-170 and 175-183 (LR)
PhilPrac 2 due @ 9am

SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGIES

Mon., Sep. 18   Jan Stanley and Barry Steinhardt. Bigger Monster, Weaker Chains: The Growth of an American Surveillance Society (EET 269-284)

Wed., Sep. 20   Judith Jarvis Thomson (1975) The Right to Privacy. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 4(4): 295-314 (LR)
PhilPrac 3 due @ 9am

Mon., Sep. 25   Jeron Van den Hoven. Nanotechnology and Privacy: The Instructive Case of RFID (EET 285-299)
Jeron Van den Hoven (2019). Privacy and Information Technology, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Links)

Wed., Sep. 27   Simon Coghlan, Tim Miller & Jeanie Paterson (2021) Good Proctor or "Big Brother"? Ethics of Online Exam Supervision Technologies. *Philosophy of Technology*. 34: 1581–1606 (LR)
PhilPrac 4 due @ 9am

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Mon., Oct. 2   Matthew Liao, A Short Introduction to the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (EAI 1-24)(LR)

Algorithmic Bias

Wed., Oct. 4   O'Neil and Gunn, Near-Term Artificial Intelligence and the Ethical Matrix (EAI 237-266)(LR)
No PhilPrac Due.

Paper 1 due midnight Sunday, Oct. 8

Mon., Oct. 9   Virginia Eubanks, Chapter 2 Automating Eligibility in the Heartland (AIH 39-69)

Wed., Oct. 11   Eubanks, Chapter 2 Automating Eligibility in the Heartland (cont) (AIH 70-82)
Eubanks, Chapter 4 The Allegheny Algorithm (pp. 127-145). (AIH))
PhilPrac 5 due @ 9am

Mon., Oct. 16   Eubanks, Chapter 4 The Allegheny Algorithm (cont.) (AIH 145-172)

Can AI Be Designed to Behave Ethically?

Wed., Oct. 18   Wendell Wallach and Shannon Vallor. Moral Machines From Value Alignment to Embodied Virtue (EAI 383-407) (LR)
PhilPrac 6 due @ 9am

Mon., Oct. 23   Frances M. Kamm. The Use and Abuse of the Trolley Problem: Self-Driving Cars, Innocent Threats, and the Distribution of Harm. (EAI 79-95)(LR)

Wed., Oct. 25   Frances M. Kamm. The Use and Abuse of the Trolley Problem: Self-Driving Cars, Innocent Threats, and the Distribution of Harm. (cont.) (EAI 95-108) (LR)
PhilPrac 7 due @ 9am

Moral Responsibility, Moral Status, and AI

Mon. Oct. 30   Peter Asaro. Autonomous Weapons and the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (EAI 212-232)(LR)

Wed., Nov. 1   S. Matthew Liao, The Moral Status and Rights of Artificial Intelligence. (EAI 480-504)(LR)
PhilPrac 8 due @ 9am

SOCIAL MEDIA

Mon., Nov. 6   Joshua Cohen and Archon Fung (2021) "The Digital Public Sphere." in Lucy Bernholz, Héléne Landemore, Rob Reich (eds.). *Digital Technology and Democratic Theory*. Chicago. (23-35) (LR)

Wed., Nov. 8   Joshua Cohen and Archon Fung (2021) "The Digital Public Sphere." (35-61) (cont.) (LR)
No PhilPrac due

Paper 2 due midnight Sunday, Nov. 12

CLONING AND REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Mon., Nov. 13   Lucy Frith. Reproductive Technologies (EET 63-75)

Wed., Nov. 15   Leon Kass. Preventing a Brave New World (EET 76-89)
PhilPrac 9 due @ 9am

Mon., Nov. 20   Inmaculada de Melo-Martin. The Ethics of Sex Selection (EET 90-103)

Wed., Nov. 22   S. Matthew Liao. Selecting Children: The Ethics of Reproductive Genetic Engineering (EET 104-119)
PhilPrac 10 due @ 9am

ENVIRONMENTAL AND AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGIES

Mon., Nov. 27   Gary Comstock, Ethics and Genetically Modified Foods (EET 473-485)

Wed., Nov. 29   Vandana Shiva. Women and the Gendered Politics of Food (EET 486-501)
No PhilPrac Due

Final Paper Prospectus Due Sunday, Dec. 3

Mon., Dec. 4   Philip Cafaro. Avoiding Catastrophic Climate Change: Why Technological Innovation is Necessary but Not Sufficient (EET 424-439)

Wed., Dec. 6   Clive Hamilton. Ethical Anxieties about Geoengineering (EET 439-456)
PhilPrac 11 due @ 9am

Mon., Dec. 11   Conclusions

Paper 3 due midnight Wednesday, Dec. 20

University Policies and Resources:

UMBC Statement of Values for Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. For additional information, please see the Academic Integrity website or consult the UMBC Student Handbook, the Faculty Handbook, or the UMBC Policies section of the UMBC Directory.

Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, and Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination

UMBC Policy and Federal law (Title IX) prohibit discrimination and harassment on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in University programs and activities. Any student who is impacted by sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, gender discrimination, pregnancy discrimination, gender-based harassment, or related retaliation should contact the University's Title IX Coordinator to make a report and/or access support and resources. The Title IX Coordinator can be reached at:

titleixcoordinator@umbc.edu   or 410-455-1717

You can access support and resources even if you do not want to take any further action. You will not be forced to file a formal complaint or police report. Please be aware that the University may take action on its own if essential to protect the safety of the community.

If you are interested in or thinking about making a report, please use the Online Reporting/Referral Form. Please note that if you report anonymously, the University's ability to respond will be limited.

Notice that Faculty are Responsible Employees with Mandatory Reporting Obligations. All faculty members are considered Responsible Employees, per UMBC's Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Sexual Harassment, and Gender Discrimination. Faculty are therefore required to report any/ all available information regarding conduct falling under the Policy and violations of the Policy to the Title IX Coordinator, even if a student discloses an experience that occurred before attending UMBC and/or an incident that only involves people not affiliated with UMBC. Reports are required regardless of the amount of detail provided and even in instances where support has already been offered or received.

While faculty members encourage you to share information related to your life experiences through discussion and written work, students should understand that faculty are required to report past and present sexual assault, domestic and interpersonal violence, stalking, and gender discrimination that is shared with them to the Title IX Coordinator so that the University can inform students of their rights, resources and support. While you are encouraged to do so, you are not obligated to respond to outreach conducted as a result of a report to the Title IX Coordinator.

If you need to speak with someone in confidence, who does not have an obligation to report to the Title IX Coordinator, UMBC has a number of Confidential Resources available to support you:

- Retriever Integrated Health (Main Campus): 410-455-2472; Monday-Friday; 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.; For After-Hours Support 410-455-3230

- Center for Counseling and Well-being (Shady Grove Campus): 301-738-6273; Monday-Thursday 10:00 a.m.-7 p.m. (virtual) Online Appointment Request Form

- Pastoral Counseling via The Gathering Space for Spiritual Well-being: 410-455-3657; i3b@umbc.edu; Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m.–10:00 p.m.

Other Resources:

- Women's Center (for students of all genders): 410-455-2714; womenscenter@umbc.edu. [Monday–Thursday 10:00am-5:30pm and Friday 10:00am-4pm]

- Shady Grove Student Resources, Maryland Resources, National Resources.

Child Abuse and Neglect:
Please note that Maryland law and UMBC policy require that faculty report all disclosures or suspicions of child abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Services and/or the police even if the person who experienced the abuse or neglect is now over 18.

Accessibility and Disability Accommodations, Guidance and Resources

Accommodations for students with disabilities are provided for all students with a qualified disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA & ADAAA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act who request and are eligible for accommodations. The Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) is the UMBC department designated to coordinate accommodations that creates equal access for students when barriers to participation exist in University courses, programs, or activities.

If you have a documented disability and need to request academic accommodations in your courses, please refer to the SDS website at sds.umbc.edu for registration information and office procedures.

SDS email: disAbility@umbc.edu
SDS phone: (410) 455-2459.

If you will be using SDS approved accommodations in this class, please contact the instructor to discuss implementation of the accommodations. During remote instruction requirements due to COVID, communication and flexibility will be essential for success.

Pregnant and Parenting Students

UMBC's Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Sexual Harassment, and Gender Discrimination expressly prohibits all forms of discrimination and harassment on the basis of sex, including pregnancy. Resources for pregnant, parenting and breastfeeding students are available through the University's Office of Equity and Civil Rights. Pregnant and parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator to discuss plans and ensure ongoing access to their academic program with respect to a leave of absence – returning following leave, or any other accommodation that may be needed related to pregnancy, childbirth, adoption, breastfeeding, and/or the early months of parenting.

In addition, students who are pregnant and have an impairment related to their pregnancy that qualifies

as disability under the ADA may be entitled to accommodations through the Office of Student Disability Services at sds.umbc.edu.

Religious Observances & Accommodations

UMBC Policy provides that students should not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs, and that students shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances. It is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor of any intended absences or requested modifications for religious observances in advance, and as early as possible. For questions or guidance regarding religious observances and accommodations, please contact the Office of Equity and Civil Rights at ecr@umbc.edu.

Hate, Bias, Discrimination and Harrassment

UMBC values safety, cultural and ethnic diversity, social responsibility, lifelong learning, equity, and civic engagement. Consistent with these principles, UMBC Policy prohibits discrimination and harassment in its educational programs and activities or with respect to employment terms and conditions based on race, creed, color, religion, sex, gender, pregnancy, ancestry, age, gender identity or expression, national origin, veterans status, marital status, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, or genetic information.

Students (and faculty and staff) who experience discrimination, harassment, hate, or bias based upon a protected status or who have such matters reported to them should use the online reporting/referral form to report discrimination, hate, or bias incidents. You may report incidents that happen to you anonymously. Please note that, if you report anonymously, the University's ability to respond may be limited.

Retriever Essentials - FREE FOOD ESSENTIALS FOR EVERYONE IN THE UMBC COMMUNITY!

Retriever Essentials is a faculty, staff, and student-led partnership that promotes food access in the UMBC community. We offer FREE groceries, toiletries, baby items, and meal swipes, and have opportunities to engage and volunteer:

- Pick up items from our free store, The Essential Space located in RAC 235

- Receive fresh food every Thursday 2:15-2:45pm @ the Library (email or see IG for exact location)

- Stop by one of our Food Zones to pick up a pre-assembled bag of non-perishable food items and personal care products

- Pick up snacks and food from our Free Corner Stores at the Campus Police Station or Library Atrium

- Email us at retrieveressentials@umbc.edu if you need free meal swipes

- To donate food, see instructions here!

Also email us if you would like to join our team or volunteer with us! Free