



Ethics and the Internet
PHIL 225/COMP 154

Fall 2014
MWF 10:50-11:50
Main 011

Professor Diane Michelfelder

Office: Main 110

Office hours: W 12-1; F 9:40 to 10:40, and by appointment

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What this course is about

The focus of this first year course is on the relationship between ethics and technological change—in particular the ethical issues and impacts connected with the Internet. In this class we will be looking at these issues and impacts from two perspectives. The first is the perspective of the Internet as we know it today: an online environment where content is generated and shared through user activities such as blogging, media sharing, social networking, tagging, tweeting, virtual world gaming, wiki developing, and the like. In this environment, we interact with others through the mediation of devices with screens—laptops, tablet computers, iPhones, and the like. The second is the perspective of the Internet as we are beginning to see it in action and how we can reasonably expect to see it in the near and farther-out future. The number of Internet-connected or “smart” devices, such as wearable computers, will presumably increase in the near future. In the far

future, many of these devices may be networked with one another so as to create a “smart” environment. In such an environment, under some circumstances, we may be able to interact with the Internet by virtue of our presence alone.

Since it is impossible to cover all the ethical issues associated with the Internet in one semester, we will let some news articles from the summer about the Internet provide a jumping-off point for reflection and discussion. And so, we’ll be talking about ethical questions, controversies, and debates associated with Google Glass, Facebook, Twitter, self-driving cars, non-military drones, and “smart” clothing. We’ll be looking at issues related to rights that pre-date the Internet, such as freedom of expression and privacy, as well as rights stemming from the Internet’s existence, including the “right to be forgotten.” We will also be considering questions connected to the integration of the Internet with devices other than the personal computer or mobile phone and which open the prospect of “the Internet of things.” What might some of the impacts of such a world be on our everyday ethical relations with others and on the overall quality of our lives? How does being networked affect what it is to be human, and how does it put into question our traditional understandings of ethical concepts such as agency and moral responsibility? How might we design “smart” technologies, and public policies associated with them, to make our lives go for the better rather than for the worse?

Course learning goals

The learning goals for this FYC can be simply expressed. Content-wise, it is designed to help you acquire a critical understanding of cutting-edge philosophical and philosophically-minded views and approaches to ethical debates associated with the Internet, and to assist you in developing your own thoughts and positions about them. Skill-wise, it is intended to help you practice philosophy as an activity—in other words, to “do philosophy”—beginning with forming a philosophical question and ending with the structured presentation of philosophical ideas. It is also intended to better your skills at close reading, innovative and critical thinking, analytic writing, and the use of library and Internet resources to support your scholarly work. A final purpose of the course is to give you an opportunity for self-reflection—reflection on your own habits and practices related to the Internet and how these impact your life as a whole.

What you’ll be reading

Your readings will include four books:

Alexander Halavais, *Search Engine Society* (Polity, 2009)

Helen Nissenbaum, *Privacy in Context: Technology, Policy, and the Integrity of Social Life* (Stanford University Press, 2010)

Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton University Press, 2009)

Luciano Floridi, *The 4th Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality* (Oxford, 2014).

There will also be a number of journal articles and some reports. These readings will be sent to you via e-mail the week prior to our discussing them in class.

For us to have good (lively and substantive) discussions about our reading selections, you'll need to be able to have access to these selections while in class, and to be able to take notes right on the texts themselves, if you so desire. So, when you come to class, please bring the reading/readings for the day with you in a "hard copy" format.

What you'll be working on in this class

This FYC will have different kinds of writing assignments, both in terms of length and of kind.

Mini-writing assignments: You will have short (250 word) writing assignments nearly every week. The purpose of these brief writing assignments is for you to practice your academic writing skills. The focus of these assignments will vary. You may be asked to clarify a point raised in class, explain an argument, critique an argument, or develop an argument of your own.

In general, I will e-mail you the question for the writing assignment on Friday or Saturday. Please bring a hard copy of your response on Monday. It will be returned to you that week. Assignments will be graded on a check plus (A)/check (B)/check minus (C) basis. *Assignments turned in late will not be accepted.*

Philosophy "position" paper: For this paper, you'll have an opportunity to develop a stance on a particular ethical issue that we'll be discussing in class. For example, a recent headline in the *Wall Street Journal* read: "Twitter Faces Free-Speech Dilemma." How do you think Twitter ought to resolve it? You'll have a choice of 4-5 topics such as this one on which to write. The topics will be distributed in class; your paper should be 5 pages long.

"Public philosophy" paper: In this assignment, you'll be writing a piece of "public philosophy"—that is, an essay written in the form of an op-ed piece in a newspaper or an essay for something like the *BBC News Magazine*. Here, you'll be taking your "position" paper and "re-purposing" it for a general public, rather than an academic, audience. This paper should be 4 pages long.

Both these papers can be revised for an improved grade.

Joint research paper: For this paper, you'll be working with another student in the class to write a joint research paper. As far as a direction goes for your paper, you'll have two general options from which to choose. You can write it on a

policy that either an Internet-related company or the US should have with respect to a particular “smart” technology; or you can defend the idea that the Internet gives rise to a new right which ought to be publically acknowledged and enforced.

You will be writing this joint paper, which should be about 12 pages long, in different stages. Here is the general breakdown of due dates over the course of the semester; you’ll find more specific dates later in the syllabus:

- Week 4 Submit a brief statement (250 words) about your topic, identifying the topic and the (provisional) approach you’ll be taking to it.
- Week 7 You should turn in an extended outline, roughly three pages long, for your paper. The outline should clearly specify the issue you’ll be addressing, what two of your sources have said about this issue, what your analysis is of these viewpoints, and what the shape of your own argument will be.
- Week 10 The first draft of your complete research paper is due. In this draft, you should include a discussion of three sources.
- In between Week 10 and Week 13, you’ll receive comments on your first draft.
- Week 14 Oral presentations of research papers will start. Presentations will be scheduled so as to allow time for questions
- Week 15 Final papers are due.

A late paper will be accepted without penalty if you have a good reason for turning it in late and you let me know in advance of the due date that you will not be turning it in on time. Unexcused late papers will be accepted up to one week after the due date, but you will lose half a grade (eg your grade will go from A- to B+) on the first day your paper is late, and every two days thereafter. An extension for your final paper will be given only in the case of illness or family emergency.

I am committed to providing assistance to help you succeed in this course. Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. If you have an accommodation through the Dean of Students Office, or any other learning need, please let me know as soon as you can.

Academic Integrity

You can consider this class to be a micro-environment. Just as sustaining the natural environment is important to facilitate growth, so is sustaining this micro-environment in order to promote your own growth in learning. One sustaining force in this environment is honesty. In this course, it is anticipated that the work you do will be honestly presented. That's not simply because this is an ethics course, any course at Mac would have the same expectation. In writing your papers, if you draw upon sources other than your own, original ideas I anticipate you will cite these contributions, not only as a matter of good academic practice but more importantly as a matter of academic integrity. If you are haven't yet read the College's *Academic Integrity Policy*, please take a moment to look at it. You can find it in the *Student Handbook*. I will adhere to this policy in considering your work for this class.

Devices

The best device you can bring to this class is your own attentive mind. Through the gift of your attention, you help support the integrity of the learning environment. While it is OK to use a laptop to take notes, for the sake of your own learning and out of respect for others please refrain from googling, tweeting, doing Facebook, checking incoming e-mails, etc. And, of course, please do put your cell phones on a setting so they will not make an audible sound if someone calls or texts you. Try to pretend that you do not have them with you for the time we are together.

Taking this class implies your acceptance of this policy. Repeated violations will result in a lowered class participation grade. I recognize of course that if there is an emergency you may need to take a call. If that's the case, please let me know before the class period starts.

How your work will be evaluated

Your final grade for this class will be based on the following percentages:

Mini writing assignments	15%
Position paper	15%
"Public philosophy" paper	15%
First draft of research paper	15%
Final research paper	20%
Research paper class presentation	10%
Class participation	10%

Since this is a philosophy course, there will be ample opportunity for you to contribute to class discussions. Your class participation grade will be based primarily on the quality of your contributions to these discussions, not on how

often you talk. Regular attendance will also be taken into account in your course participation grade.

Schedule of readings, assignments, and activities

Please come to class meetings prepared to talk about the reading assignment for that particular day. Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and e-mailed to the class distribution list.

Week One

3 September Introduction to the course: the moral geography of the Internet

No reading assignment for today

Root beer floats in Marvin Plaza from 11:30 until 1:00

5 September Continuing with the moral geography of the Internet (and disturbing the picture just drawn)

Reading: Luciano Floridi, Chapter 1

Week Two

8 September Understanding search engines

Reading: Halavi, Chapters 1 through 3

Mini-Writing Assignment (WA) #1 due

10 September “Unpacking” search engines; some ethical issues

Reading: Halavi, Chapters 4 through 6; M. Zimmer, “The Gaze of the Perfect Search Engine: Google as an Infrastructure of Dataveillance”

12 September Wikipedia and the responsibilities of knowledge generation

Readings: Adele Santana and Donna Wood, “Transparency and Social Responsibility issues for Wikipedia”; Shilad Sen and others, “WP: Clubhouse? An Exploration of Wikipedia’s Gender Imbalance”

Week Three

15 September Facebook, consequentialism, and the ethics of duty

No reading assignment for today's discussion. Begin reading for 17 September

WA #2 due

17 September

Privacy issues on the Internet

Reading: Nissenbaum, Chapters 1 through 3

18 September

**Philosophy Department Picnic in Marvin Plaza
4:30—6:00**

19 September

We will be meeting in Main 010 with Prof. Schmidt's FYC for a joint discussion of the film *Terms and Conditions*.

Please make sure you have seen this film, which is an hour long, prior to today's class. We will announce times/viewing locations at a later date.

Week Four

22 September

Why does privacy matter?

Reading: Nissenbaum, Chapter 4 through 6

WA #3 due

24 September

Nissenbaum's theory of privacy as contextual integrity

Reading: Nissenbaum, Chapter 7, Chapter 8 (to p.174)

26 September

Tips for writing a philosophy paper

No reading assignment for today

Research paper topic/thesis statement due

Week Five

29 September

In a joint meeting of Prof. Schmidt's FYC and our own class, Prof. Schmidt will present on legal cases in tracking and locational privacy. For this class, we will be meeting in the Harmon Room (Library, first floor)

Reading: Katina Michael and Roger Clarke, "Location and Tracking of Mobile Devices: Überveillance Stalks the Streets"

WA #4 due

- 1 October Returning to Facebook
- Reading:** Gordon Hull, Heather Richter Lipford, and Celine Latulipe: “Contextual Gaps: Privacy Issues on Facebook”
- 3 October We will be meeting in the library for an information session on how to use the resources of the library as you write your research paper
- Philosophy position paper due**
- Week Six**
- 6 October The moral and legal value of freedom of expression; an overview of Internet freedom of expression issues
- Reading:** John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 2; several brief essays from philosophy blogs
WA #5 due
- 8 October Tips on how to write a “public philosophy” paper
- Reading:** Several essays in “public philosophy” (online)
- 10 October Computer Science Professor Marty Wolf (Bemidji State) will speak to our class and Prof. Schmidt’s on ethical and regulatory issues involved with Google Glass. For this class, we will meet in Main 010.
- Week Seven**
- 13 October The impact of digitization on forgetting
- Reading:** Mayer-Schönberger, Chapters 1 and 2
WA #6 due
- 15 October Why forgetting is a “virtue” (and what a virtue is)
- Reading:** Mayer-Schönberger, Chapters 3 and 4
- 17 October The “right to be forgotten”
- Reading:** Mayer-Schönberger, Chapters 6, 7, and the

Afterword; European Commission Factsheet on the “Right to be Forgotten” Ruling

Research paper outline due

Week Eight

Transition to looking at the “Internet of Things (IoT)”

20 October

Aristotelian friendship, Facebook, and Skype

Readings: J.H. Søraker, “How Shall I Compare Thee? Comparing the Prudential Value of Actual Virtual Friendship”; Barbro Fröding and Martin Peterson, “Why Virtual Friendship is no Genuine Friendship,” Michael McFall, “Real character-friends: Aristotelian friendship, living together and technology”

WA #7 due

22 October

Aristotelian ethical theory and social media

Readings: Shannon Vallor, “Social Networking Technologies and the Virtues”

24 October

No class meeting—Fall break

Week Nine

27 October

The octocopter and other “everyday” drones: emerging ethical issues

Reading: The future of drones in America: Law enforcement and privacy considerations (online--skim)

29 October

Carebots: can they really care?

Reading: Sharkey and Sharkey: “Granny and the Robots: Ethical Issues in Robot Care for the Elderly”

Prior to today’s class, please take time to watch “The Most Awesome Robots” (until 2014)” on YouTube. This is about a half-hour long.

31 October

How to do footnotes, cite sources, and other helpful tips for writing your research paper in philosophy

No reading assignment for today

“Public Philosophy” paper due

Week Ten

3 November The difference between “ethics and the Internet” and “ethics and the ‘Internet of Things’”
Reading: Ângela Guimarães Pereria, Alice Benessia, Paula Curvelo, “Agency in the Internet of Things”

WA #8 due

5 November Ethics for a world of constant innovation and high uncertainty
Reading: Philip Brey, “Anticipatory Ethics for Emerging Technologies”

7 November “The self as an app”
Reading: Floridi, Chapters Two through Four

First Draft of Research Papers Due

Week Eleven

10 November When “smart” is more than an adjective to describe your mind
Reading: David Smith, “Smart Clothes and Wearable Technology”

WA #9 due

12 November I will “testdrive” a presentation I’ll be making on Friday as part of a panel on driverless cars at the University of Portland. We will meet again with Prof. Schmidt’s FYC in Main 010.

No reading assignment for today

14 November Megan Renslow will share her own research with you and lead class discussion

Reading to be arranged

Week Twelve

17 November The “infosphere,” privacy, intelligence, and agency

Reading: Floridi, Chapters Four through Six

WA #10 due

19 November Inclusivity as a value of IoT

Reading: Daniel Goncalves, “Ubiquitous Computing and AI: Towards an Inclusive Society”

21 November Class discussion on *The 4th Revolution*—what makes sense, what might be missing

No reading assignment for today

Week Thirteen

24 November Will the world of the Internet of Things be “micro-ethical”? and other difficult questions

Reading: Mirko Presser and Rob van Kranenburg, IoT Forum Societal WG Report

26 November **No class meeting—Thanksgiving break**

29 November **No class meeting—Thanksgiving break**

Week Fourteen

1 December First round of oral presentations

3 December Second round of oral presentations

5 December Third round of oral presentations

Week Fifteen

8 December Fourth round of oral presentations

Pizza lunch right after class to celebrate your first semester at Mac

10 December
(Wednesday)

Final Version of Research Paper Due

I will be in my office from 12-1; please bring
your research paper by during this time

Acknowledgment: the image on the front of this syllabus can be found at
http://www.nd.edu/~networks/Image%20Gallery/Large%20Images/cheswick1_lg.gif