

Philosophy of Technology¹

What is technology and how should we understand our relationship to it? For example, consider social media. It's been argued that technological platforms like Facebook and Twitter are value neutral. This would mean that ideological patterns of engagement on social media reflect the values of users and not the platform. However, it's also been argued that the structure of technological platforms shapes how we use these technologies, influencing what information we have access to and who we socially engage with. In this course, we'll consider the value neutrality question as it relates to (1) the ways technology affects our social and epistemic agency (e.g., what information we see on search engines, whose posts we see online, etc.) and (2) the ways our social and epistemic behaviors affect our technologies (e.g., algorithmic bias, automation, surveillance, etc).

Week 1: Introductory week

Val Dusek "What is Technology?" in "Philosophy of Technology"

Week 2: The Functions of Technology

Ruth Millikan "Wings, Spoons, Pills, and Quills: A Pluralist Theory of Function"

Beth Preston "Why is a Wing Like a Spoon? A Pluralist Theory of Function"

Week 3: Epistemology of technology

Bruno Latour, Chapter 1 of "We have Never Been Modern"

Davis Baird, Chapter 1 of "Think Knowledge: A Philosophy of Scientific Instruments"

Week 4: Artifact Politics

Langdon Winner "Do Artifacts Have Politics?"

Boaz Miller "Is Technology Value-Neutral?"

Trevor Punch & Wiebe Bijker "The Social construction of Facts and Artifacts"

Week 5: Technology and Human Behavior

C. Thi Nguyen "How Twitter Gamifies Communication"

Nicolas Carr "Is Google Making us Stupid?"

Week 6: Automation

Daron Acemoglu & Pascual Restrepo "Artificial Intelligence, Automation, and Work."

John Danaher & Sven Syholm "Automation, Work and the Achievement Gap"

Ryan Jenkins "Autonomous Vehicles, Ethics, and Law: Toward an Overlapping Consensus"

Week 7: Artificial intelligence I

¹ Optional readings in italics

Cameron Buckner “Deep Learning: A Philosophical Introduction”

Emily Bender “On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models be too Big?”

Week 8: Artificial intelligence II

Patrick Butlin “Reinforcement Learning and Artificial Agency”

Fintan Mallory “Fictionalism about Chatbots”

Week 9: Surveillance

Shoshanna Zuboff “The age of Surveillance Capitalism”

Abeba Birhane et al. “The Surveillance AI pipeline”

Judith Jarvis Thomson “The right to privacy”

Week 10: Machine learning and Bias

Gabbrielle Johnson “Algorithmic Bias: On the Implicit Biases of Social Technology”

Abeba Birhane “Algorithmic Injustice: A Relational Ethics Approach”

Week 11: Art and technology

Walter Benjamin *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

Raphaël Millière “Deep Learning and Synthetic Media”

Week 12: Epistemology and the Internet

Jessie Munton “Answering Machines: How to (Epistemically) Evaluate a Search Engine”

Glenn Anderau “Fake News and Epistemic Flooding”

Richard Heersmink “A Virtue Epistemology of the Internet: Search Engines, Intellectual Virtues and Education”

Week 13: Technology and the Human image

Martin Heidegger “The Question Concerning Technology”

Hubert Dreyfus “Heidegger on Gaining a Free Relation to Technology”

Wilfrid Sellars “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man”