Ethics and Emerging Technologies

Phil 153/2024 Summer Session C
Lecture: MW 1-3.05
Location: Dodd Hall 167
Office Hours: TBD

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Course Description

We live in an age of rapid technological development. Data is collected and processed at unparalleled levels. Significant genetic enhancement of existing and future persons is already possible. A considerable and consequential portion of decision-making is left to algorithms. Social media exerts a substantial influence on public and political discourse. These developments raise new and pressing moral questions. How should we view the increasing loss of privacy? What are the limits of acceptable genetic enhancement? Are there decisions that shouldn't be left to algorithms? How should we regulate social media? Should we regard emerging technologies as moral agents—as entities that can be responsible and accountable for their speech and actions? Along the way we will also read classic papers which, although do not directly tackle these questions, give us resources to think critically about them.

Course objectives

Besides considering the answers given to these questions and others, a major objective of this course is to get you some exposure to philosophical writing and argumentation. Learning and identifying basic philosophical skills will serve you in a variety of settings, within academia and outside it. The only way to learn these skills is by practicing, and you will be asked to read, write, and discuss regularly.

Course Requirements

Reading responses: 30%
Course participation: 10%
Paper 1: 25% (3-4 pages, submission due date TBD (week 4 Wednesday))
Paper 2: 35% (5-6 pages, optional draft due date TBD (Week 5 Friday), submission due date TBD (Week 6 Friday))

Responses:

I will post questions for each new reading on the course website. These will (generally) include a few interpretive questions about the text and one more open ended question for you to engage with the text critically. You are expected to submit one response every week. It is up to you whether you want to submit the response on Monday or Wednesday. The responses are due at 8 am on the day of class. They will be graded on a check-plus/check/check-minus scale (corresponding to an A, a B, or a C).

Course Participation: I expect that you will do the required reading and actively take part in the discussion of the reading. This usually includes regular attendance and engagement in class and section, but also can be accomplished by other methods such as coming to office hours, writing discussion posts, highlighting relevant news articles, etc. Raising thoughts, questions, concerns, confusions are all possible (and helpful!) ways of participating.

Papers: Please remove all identifying information other than a student ID number from your submission. There will be a deduction of 1/3 a letter grade for every day the paper is late. Except for emergencies, extensions will not be granted in the last 48 hours.

Readings

All readings will be posted online.

Tentative Schedule
- Week I — Introduction to the topic
    - M: Jasanoff, *Ethics of Invention,* ch.1
    - W: Winner, "Do Artifacts have Politics?", "Technologies as Forms of Life"
- Week II: Genetic Enhancement
    - M: Savulescu, "New Breeds of Humans;" Jasanoff, *Ethics of Invention (ch.5)* OR Savulescu and Bostrom, *Human Enhancement* (selections)
    - W: Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection* (selections)
        - Optional: Tannenbaum, "The Promise and Peril of the Pharmacological Enhancer Modafinil"
- Week III — Moral Agency
    - M: Williams, "The Human Prejudice"
    - W: Veliz, "Moral Zombies: Why Algorithms are not Moral Agents"
- Week IV — Algorithmic Decision-Making
    - M: Shiffrin, "Inducing Moral Deliberation"
    - W: Eubanks, *Automating Inequality* (selections)

- Optional: Zerilli, Knott, Maclaurin, Gavaghan "Transparency in Algorithmic and Human Decision-Making"
- Week V— Privacy
    - M: Thomson, "The Right to Privacy"
        - Optional: Toobin, "The Solace of Oblivion"
    - W: Veliz, *Privacy is Power* (selections from chs. 3 and 5)*;* Hidalgo "A Bold Idea to Replace Politicians" (Ted talk)
        - Optional: Jasanoff, *Ethics of Invention (ch.6)*
- Week VI: Social Media
    - M: Vallor, "Flourishing of Facebook;" Ronson, *So You've been Publicly Shamed* (selections)
    - W: Williams, *Stand Out of Your Light* (selections); Nguyen "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to know and comply with University policies regarding academic integrity. All students should be familiar with the Student Conduct Code which can be found here: https://deanofstudents.ucla.edu/student-conduct-code. Please pay special attention to Section 102 on academic dishonestly. Without exception, any work suspected to be in violation of University policies will be reported to The Office of the Dean of Students for Investigation. If you have any questions, please come talk to me.

Accommodations

Students needing academic accommodations should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310) 825-1501 or in person at A255 Murphy Hall. For more information visit www.cae.ucla.edu.

Additional Resources

The Center for Accessible Education (CAE): https://www.cae.ucla.edu/ or (310) 825-1501.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): https://www.caps.ucla.edu/ or (310) 825-0768

CARE: Advocacy Office for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Misconduct: https://careprogram.ucla.edu/ or (310) 206-2465 (24 Hour Crisis Counseling (888) 200-6665)

UCLA Writing Programs: http://www.wp.ucla.edu/