PHILOSOPHY, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

PHIL6319

COURSE SYLLABUS

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General course information

Course basic information			
Course Name	Philosophy, technology, and society		
Credits	2	Teaching Hours	32 hours
Semester	Fall	Cross-semester?	No
Course Category	Specialized course	Course Type	Full-time students
Instruction Language	英文 English	Teaching Method	In-class teaching
Grade	Letter grading	Exam Method	Oral exam, written exam, and participation in class
Prerequisites	None		
School	School of Humanities		
Subject	Philosophy		
Person in charge	Name	School and Department	Contact
	Nicola Liberati	School of Humanities; Department of Philosophy	Nicola2020@sjtu.edu.cn

1 Course description

This course endeavors to empower students with the ability to approach topics from diverse angles, guided by a philosophical framework. Its primary objective lies in providing an introductory exploration of the philosophy of technology, serving as a gateway to comprehending the evolution of novel digital advancements within our modern society.

By presenting diverse perspectives on the implementation of technologies, this course equips students with a range of analytical frameworks. These frameworks enable students to critically examine and make sense of the complex societal landscape in which they reside from different perspectives and attitudes.

The lectures within this course have been thoughtfully crafted to cultivate dynamic interactions between the professor and the students, nurturing an environment conducive to the development of their critical perspectives. Through engaging discussions with both the instructor and their peers, students will have ample opportunities to refine their ability to analyze and evaluate, enabling them to pose thought-provoking questions and offer well-founded responses.

By the culmination of this course, students will have honed their capacity for systematic and critical thinking, equipping them with the skills necessary to navigate intellectual inquiries with

depth and precision. Moreover, they will have gained familiarity with the prominent themes and notable figures within the realm of philosophy of technology, thereby empowering them to discern the societal implications that underlie the application of these ideas.

Ultimately, this transformative educational journey will bestow upon students the capability to view the world through an informed and contemplative lens. Armed with an enhanced understanding of the philosophy of technology, they will possess a discerning perspective, capable of shedding light on the intricate connections between technology, humanity, and the broader social fabric.

2 References

The course is based on three texts:

- Fallman, D. A different way of seeing: Albert Borgmann's philosophy of technology and human-computer interaction. AI & Soc 25, 53–60 (2010). https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-009-0234-1
- Ihde, Don. 1990. Technology and the Lifeworld. From Garden to Earth. Bloomington: Indiana University.
- Turkle, Sherry. 2015. Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age. Penguin Press.

Additional reference for more information about the empirical turn with relation to postphenomenology:

- Verbeek, P.P. (2021). The Empirical Turn. In: S. Vallor (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Technology. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190851187.013.4)

Additional texts will be provided in relation to the interest of the students in order to focus on specific aspects.

3 Course objectives

This course sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. Familiarize students with fundamental concepts in the field of philosophy of technology by exploring the ideas put forth by esteemed scholars such as Borgmann, Turkle, and postphenomenology. Through a comprehensive study of their works, students will gain a solid grounding in the foundational principles that underpin this discipline.
2. Develop a basic proficiency in analyzing and critically assessing digital technologies, including virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence (AI), and robotics, from a philosophical standpoint. By employing a philosophical lens, students will

acquire the necessary tools to evaluate the implications and impacts of these technologies, allowing for a deeper understanding of their societal and ethical dimensions.

3. Equip students with the skills to articulate and defend their own perspectives while engaging in meaningful and fruitful discussions with individuals who hold differing viewpoints. This objective seeks to foster an environment where respectful dialogue and intellectual exchange flourish, enabling students to refine their ability to communicate and advocate for their positions effectively.

4. Enable students to employ philosophical concepts as a lens through which they can examine and address the complex challenges present in society. By applying philosophical frameworks to real-world scenarios, students will cultivate a capacity for critical analysis and gain insights into the profound interplay between technology and societal dynamics.

By attaining these objectives, students will emerge from this course with a solid foundation in the philosophy of technology, enabling them to navigate the intricate landscape of digital advancements with a nuanced and discerning perspective. They will possess the necessary skills to engage in informed discussions, offer compelling arguments, and apply philosophical concepts to grapple with the complex issues that shape our rapidly evolving society.

4 Assessment

The assessment for this course is comprised of the following components: 35% will be allocated to class participation, evaluating students' active engagement and involvement in discussions. An additional 35% will be dedicated to a comprehensive written exam, testing their understanding of course materials. The remaining 30% will be based on an oral presentation, allowing students to showcase their knowledge and communication skills.

4.1 Participation

Participation is essential since the course is meant to generate discussion. For this reason, participation is evaluated for 35% of the final grade.

4.2 Written exam

The written exam will be a set of a few open questions to be answered. More information on the exam will be provided during the course.

4.3 Oral presentation

The class will be divided into groups, and each group will have to present a topic to the class. The quality of the presentation and the discussion that emerge are the criteria used to evaluate the exam. More information on the exam will be provided during the course.

5 Structure of the course

Introduction	Phil framework 1	Phil framework 2	Phil framework 3	Applications	Conclusions	Exams

5.1 Section 1: Introduction

The initial session will commence with introductions, providing an opportunity for both students and the professor to acquaint themselves. A comprehensive overview of the course will follow, encompassing its key topics, methodology, syllabus, exams, and grading system. Emphasis will be placed on the paramount significance of active participation throughout the course. Students will be encouraged to actively engage in discussions, contributing their unique perspectives and insights. The significance of their involvement will be underscored, highlighting how active participation fosters a dynamic and enriching learning environment.

Hours: 2

5.2 Section 2: Philosophical framework 1 - Borgmann

The course commences with an introduction to the philosophy of technology, approaching it from a critical standpoint regarding the utilization of digital technologies. The initial focus centers on the works of Albert Borgmann, which will be examined in a sequential manner, unveiling his ideas in a step-by-step fashion. Borgmann's insights serve as a foundation for exploring the philosophical underpinnings surrounding technology and its societal implications. By delving into his writings, students will gain a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between humanity and the digital landscape, laying the groundwork for further philosophical exploration in the realm of technology.

Hours: 6

5.3 Section 3: Philosophical framework 2 - Turkle

The course now proceeds to introduce the second thinker, Sherry Turkle, who adopts a highly critical stance towards "social" technologies. These two forthcoming lessons will be dedicated to a comprehensive exploration of Turkle's ideas. With a keen focus on the implications of digital technologies on social interactions and human relationships, Turkle's insights provide valuable perspectives for critical analysis. Through these lessons, students will delve deeper into the intricate landscape of "social" technologies, uncovering the complexities and nuances that underlie their impact on society. By examining Turkle's work, a richer understanding of the multifaceted dynamics between technology and human connection will be fostered.

Hours: 6

5.4   Section 4: Philosophical framework 3 - Postphenomenology

The course now transitions to the introduction of a second group of philosophers who hold a more optimistic perspective on the utilization of technologies through the introduction of phenomenology and postphenomennology. In particular, the focus shifts towards postphenomenologists such as Don Ihde and Peter-Paul Verbeek. These philosophers provide valuable insights into the intricate relationship between humans and technology, exploring the ways in which technologies mediate our perception and interactions with the world. Through an in-depth examination of their work, students will gain a nuanced understanding of the positive aspects and ethical considerations surrounding technology use. By engaging with the philosophies of Ihde and Verbeek, the course aims to present a balanced and comprehensive exploration of the philosophy of technology.

Hours: 6

5.5   Section 5: Analysis of specific digital technologies

Introduction to digital technologies like ChatGPT, AR, and Metaverse and the applications of the philosophies of Borgmann, Turkle, and postphenomenology to these technologies.

Hours: 4

5.6   Section 6: Concluding remarks

This section is related to the concluding remarks connecting the different philosophers and the kind of approach which is possible to have in philosophy of technology in relation to the implementation of digital technologies in society.

Hours: 2

5.7   Section 7: Oral exam

The oral exam is related to the presentations and the discussion which emerges.

Hours: 4

5.8   Section 7: Written exam

Two hours for the written exam.

Hours: 2