

Living in a Digital World (PHIL 55)

Fall 2024

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Lecture: 12:00 – 12:50 pm, Monday/Wednesday/Friday, Pepper Canyon 121

Danks office hours: Fridays, 11:00 am – 12:00 pm either in-person (HDSI 306) or Zoom (link on Canvas). Please use Canvas to sign-up for a timeslot (or to check about drop-in)

Course TA: Shelly Shi <vis007@ucsd.edu>

TA office hours: Wednesdays, 1:00 – 2:00 pm (RWAC 0436)

Course materials: Everything will be on the course Canvas site (<http://canvas.ucsd.edu>)

Course communication: All course announcements will be posted on Canvas. If you need to contact Prof. Danks or the TA, then you *must* use your UCSD email address with ‘PHIL 55’ in the subject line. Replies can be expected within 24-48 hours. Please note that grade disputes will be discussed and resolved in-person (or via Zoom), not via email.

Learning objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe present-day issues and challenges in terms of core philosophical concepts
- Use philosophical ideas to identify ethically relevant elements of a situation
- Analyze ways by which digital spaces (re)shape social and political discourse
- Explain how human knowledge is shaped by different digital technologies

Course requirements

Assignments: This course uses “specifications grading”: each assignment will be graded only as Satisfactory (roughly, B+ level performance) or Unsatisfactory, rather than the more traditional A/B/C/D/F scale. Your overall course grade will be based on the number (& type) of assignments that you complete satisfactorily. More precisely, the course requirements are:

- 4 longer writing assignments (*due dates listed on the schedule*)
- 8 shorter writing assignments (*due dates listed on the schedule*)

and the Satisfactory assignments required for particular final letter grades are:

	A	B	C	D
<i>Longer writing</i>	4/4	3/4	2/4	2/4
<i>Shorter writing</i>	7/8	6/8	5/8	3/8

You will receive a ‘+’ on the letter grade if you satisfactorily complete one additional shorter writing assignment, and a ‘-’ on the letter grade if you complete one fewer shorter writing assignment. This grading system means that “points” you see in Canvas will *not* be informative about your final grade!

- *Example:* Satisfactorily complete 4-of-4 longer writing assignments, and 8-of-8 shorter writing assignments ⇒ Receive an A+
- *Example:* 2-of-4 longer writing assignments, 4-of-8 shorter writing assignments ⇒ C-

You may have the opportunity to rewrite/resubmit if you receive an Unsatisfactory. Specifically:

- If you submit on-time: You can rewrite/resubmit within 4 days (96 hours) of the assignment being returned. You must also provide a brief (~1 paragraph) reflection about how you have changed your submission in light of feedback.

- If you submit 0-47.99 hours late: Your submission will still be graded, but you will not have an opportunity to rewrite/resubmit (if it receives an Unsatisfactory)
- If you submit 48+ hours late: The submission will receive an Unsatisfactory.

Extensions/late submission: Due dates & times for all assignments are listed below. **Please plan ahead, as no extensions will be granted and no late submissions will be accepted, except in truly exceptional circumstances** (e.g., Canvas going offline or documented medical emergency). If you think that an exception is warranted, then you must email Prof. Danks (not the TA) as soon as feasible. All relevant materials will be provided in a timely manner so that you can complete assignments significantly before their due dates, if you are concerned about finishing on time.

Lecture attendance: This course will be exploring ethical & societal issues involving digital technologies, including AI, data science, and other algorithms. Some parts of this class will likely take you outside of your intellectual comfort zone. So although attendance during lectures is *not* required, I strongly urge you to consider attending them. There will be opportunities for questions and discussion in every lecture, which can play a helpful role in building your understanding of key concepts. I realize that you may sometimes need to miss lecture, so podcasts will be provided, but there will *not* be a synchronous Zoom option.

Plagiarism

The representation of other people's ideas as though they were your own is plagiarism, and a violation of academic integrity. I have an absolutely zero tolerance policy about plagiarism. Plagiarism is *not* restricted to verbatim copying of other people's words. Basically, you should cite anything that (a) you got from someone else; and (b) a reasonable person would not know ahead of time. For proper citation, you should cite any ideas and quotes that are due to other people. (Your choice about citation format, but please be consistent.)

I realize that the vast majority of you will never consider cheating. However, a few of you may (for a variety of reasons) be tempted to plagiarize others' work. Do not take chances with plagiarism: **if you are uncertain whether you are doing something acceptable, please just ask.** We are happy to answer questions about whether something constitutes plagiarism. And if you are ever tempted to present someone else's ideas as your own, then please come talk to me so that we can address the underlying challenges that are pushing you to that point.

Generative AI policy: In this course, you are permitted to use generative AI systems. However, you should be aware that these systems can sometimes reproduce exact text that was in their training corpus. Such a submission will be treated as a case of plagiarism, as you are presenting someone else's words as your own. I also reserve the right to request an in-person conversation about an assignment, if I have concerns about your comprehension of the material.

Statement of support for your well-being

We as a community have to support one another. If you, or anyone you know, experiences academic stresses, difficult life events, or feelings of anxiety or depression, then we strongly encourage you to seek support. Take care of yourself. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this quarter by eating well, exercising, getting enough sleep, and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress. More generally, all of us benefit from support during times of struggle. There are many helpful resources available on campus and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is almost always helpful. If you need it, please consider reaching out to a friend, faculty, or family member you trust for help getting connected to support that can help.

Schedule

(subject to revision – Canvas will always have the most up-to-date information)
(all times are Pacific Time / San Diego)

Date	Lecture topic
Sep 27	Course overview
Sep 30	Introduction to data, AI, & society
Oct 2	AI systems as ethical decision-makers?
Oct 2	Short Writing Assignment (SWA) #1 due at 9:00 pm
Oct 4	Rethinking human moral responsibility
Oct 7	Digital technologies & human rights
Oct 9	Reshaping political obligations
Oct 9	Short Writing Assignment (SWA) #2 due at 9:00 pm
Oct 11	Data-fication of society
Oct 11	Short Writing Assignment (SWA) #3 due at 9:00 pm
Oct 14	Digital technologies & our social commitments
Oct 16	Reshaping political communities
Oct 18	Impacts on economic systems
Oct 18	Long Writing Assignment (LWA) #1 due at 9:00 pm
Oct 21	Taxonomy of AI systems
Oct 23	Could an AI do science?
Oct 23	Short Writing Assignment (SWA) #4 due at 9:00 pm
Oct 25	Rethinking science due to digital technologies
Oct 28	Human mathematicians in a digital future
Oct 30	Should we trust an AI proof?
Nov 1	Intro to LLMs and other foundation models
Nov 1	Long Writing Assignment (LWA) #2 due at 9:00 pm
Nov 4	Does a computer <i>know</i> anything?
Nov 6	Justification and AI/model outputs
Nov 6	Short Writing Assignment (SWA) #5 due at 9:00 pm
Nov 8	Does a computer <i>understand</i> language?
Nov 11	No class – Veterans' Day
Nov 13	LLMs and human communication <i>Guest lecture: Prof. Leon Bergen</i>
Nov 13	Short Writing Assignment (SWA) #6 due at 9:00 pm
Nov 15	Implications of democratization of knowledge (Zoom)
Nov 18	Robotic and other agentic systems
Nov 20	Machines with minds?

<i>Date</i>	<i>Lecture topic</i>
Nov 22	Consciousness: Humans & machines
<i>Nov 22</i>	<i>Long Writing Assignment (LWA) #3 due at 9:00 pm</i>
Nov 25	Perception: Humans & machines (Zoom)
Nov 27	<i>No class (but an assignment is due!)</i>
<i>Nov 27</i>	<i>Short Writing Assignment (SWA) #7 due at 9:00 pm</i>
Nov 29	<i>No class – Thanksgiving Holiday</i>
Dec 2	Action & reaction in AI systems
Dec 4	Could an AI have free will? Do we? Does it matter?
<i>Dec 4</i>	<i>Short Writing Assignment (SWA) #8 due at 9:00 pm</i>
Dec 6	Final thoughts, summaries, and ideas
<i>Dec 9</i>	<i>Long Writing Assignment (SWA) #4 due at 9:00 pm</i>