PHIL 140: Technology and Human Behavior

Course Description: How are we to understand the interaction of science and technology with human nature and the natural environment? What can technology tell us about what is natural and what is artificial, what is human and what is nonhuman? Is technology value laden or value neutral? Is it gendered or gender neutral? How does technology alter, for better or for worse, our social relations as citizens, consumers, patients, and workers? In this introductory course, we explore the multiple ways in which human beings are shaped and affected by the very technologies they produce. We also seek to understand the ways in which technology transforms nonhuman life and the environment. Major themes include deep ecology, eco-feminism, ethics, democracy, enhancement technologies (e.g., cloning), robotics, and artificial intelligence. We will acquaint ourselves with these themes at the beginning of the course by reading Aldous Huxley’s classic dystopian novel, Brave New World, first published in 1932.

GE Course Objectives: This course fulfills the Lifelong Learning and Self-Development portion of the Foundations section of the General Education (GE) Requirements. Among the “seven essential capacities” that the GE program emphasizes, this course develops in the student the following in particular:

1. Construct, analyze, and communicate arguments.
2. Apply theoretical models to the real world.
3. Contextualize phenomena.

Among the “Goals” for GE Courses in the Lifelong Learning and Self-Development, this course aims to fulfill three of them:

Goal 1: Develop cognitive, physical, and affective skills to become more integrated and well-rounded individuals in society.
Goal 2: Comprehend various behaviors conducive to physiological health and development.
Goal 3: Identify and apply strategies leading to psychological well-being.

Catalog Description
Nature of technology. Ethical and behavioral aspects of social, political, and environmental problems associated with rapid development of technology over the last century. Responses to these problems by various philosophers and writers.

Student Learning Outcomes: The course is designed to enable students to

• Interpret a significant body of classic and contemporary texts in the philosophy of technology
• Describe and explain major questions and traditions in the philosophy of technology
• Articulate, compare and contrast the socially responsible creation and uses of technology
• Analyze and discuss the nature of, value of, and challenges to technology as an intellectual and cultural institution.
• Relate their own particular lived experiences to universal philosophical concepts that illuminate the human relationship to technology.

Organization: Classes will be held TTH.

Office Hours:
Tue 9:45-10:45 and 2:00-3:00
Thu 2:00-3:00 and by appointment

Required Course Texts:
Scharff and Dusek, Philosophy of Technology (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014; Second Edition)
Huxley, Brave New World (HarperPerennial)

Course Requirements: (1) Regular attendance at lecture, (2) completion of one 4-6 page paper, (3) a midterm, and (4) a final exam. In order to pass this course, the midterm, paper, and the final exam must be completed. Grades will be broken down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Requirement</th>
<th>Grade Calculation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Quizzes</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6-Page Essay</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

SDSU Grading Guidelines

Outstanding achievement; available only for the highest accomplishment.
Praiseworthy performance; definitely above average.
Average; awarded for satisfactory performance; the most common grade.
Minimally passing; less than average achievement for undergraduate students.
Failing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93 – 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83 – 89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73 – 79.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63 – 69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0 – 59.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grade calculations. All scores in this course are converted to percentages. (PLEASE IGNORE THE POINTS IN BLACKBOARD. IN THIS COURSE WE SHALL ONLY BE USING PERCENTAGES AS LAID DOWN IN THIS SYLLABUS,) The table here shows how we move from a percentage to a letter grade and then a grade point figure. This process is applied not only to the tests, projects, and accrued activity point totals but to the final grade as a whole. Please be advised that I do not automatically round up (e.g., 79.83% = C+ while 80% = B-).

Grade posting and feedback. Grades are posted on Blackboard as soon as they are available. Students may confidentially view them by clicking on Tools (on the Home page of Blackboard), then clicking on My Grades.
A link will also be made available on the menu on the left in Blackboard. Grades on tests that are scored and graded automatically by Blackboard are posted as soon as everybody has completed the test and the instructor has had a chance to examine the results. Usually, the test scores are posted a few hours after the test closes. However, for other types of assignments (e.g., your summaries and essays), the process can take a much longer. (Please be patient as this is very large class and it is just not possible to have a quick turnaround of written work.) On an as-needed basis, I will send you a personal email or use the Grade Center (My Grades) comments function to highlight areas for improvement and make any necessary explanations or clarifications. We can also discuss assessed work (or any other work) during online office hours or in private consultation in my office.

With the percentage system, as opposed to the curve system, it is possible for every student who knows the material to earn an A. However, I reserve the right to alter the grading method on the off chance that the percentage system is not adequately differentiating students.

**Grade queries.** Grades are very carefully determined and checked prior to being accepted into or entered in the Grade Book record. I take assessment of student performance very seriously and would rather we get it right the first time than rush and make errors. But if you do find an error or have a question, please feel free to ask about it. It pleases me greatly to raise grades when warranted. **On the flip side, it irritates me when students push for points when they are not warranted; this is disrespectful to me and your fellow students—so please avoid it. Reconsideration, if requested, will take your entire record into account and may result in lower as well as higher grades.**

Note that you must submit your writing assignment and take the exams at the scheduled time. Make-ups will only be allowed for compelling reasons (illness, bereavement, etc.). I must be notified of an intended absence in advance, and I will be the judge of whether your reasons are compelling. In the case of illness, a medical note will be required. There will be no retakes of the exams. There are no opportunities for extra-credit. Grades are based solely on the student’s performance as judged by the instructor.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that I cannot provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated. To learn more, visit the Student Disability Services website.

**Academic Misconduct:** All students are expected to follow the administrative rules and standards of conduct detailed in the San Diego State University catalog. Students are expected to submit only their own work on papers and examinations. While you may discuss the assignments with others in the class, collaboration on the preparation of a paper is not permitted.
It is your responsibility to know and observe all the SDSU rules concerning academic integrity and plagiarism. You should familiarize yourself with the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities website: http://csrr.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/srr/academic-dishonesty.aspx. Here are some definitions:

2.0 Definitions

2.1 Cheating shall be defined as the act of obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for academic work by the use of dishonest, deceptive, or fraudulent means. Examples of cheating include, but are not limited to (a) copying, in part or in whole, from another’s test or other examination; (b) discussing answers or ideas relating to the answers on a test or other examination without the permission of the instructor; (c) obtaining copies of a test, an examination, or other course material without the permission of the instructor; (d) using notes, cheat sheets, or other devices considered inappropriate under the prescribed testing condition; (e) collaborating with another or others in work to be presented without the permission of the instructor; (f) falsifying records, laboratory work, or other course data; (g) submitting work previously presented in another course, if contrary to the rules of the course; (h) altering or interfering with the grading procedures; (i) plagiarizing, as defined; and (j) knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above.

2.2 Plagiarism shall be defined as the act of incorporating ideas, words, or specific substance of another, whether purchased, borrowed, or otherwise obtained, and submitting same to the University as one’s own work to fulfill academic requirements without giving credit to the appropriate source. Plagiarism shall include but not be limited to (a) submitting work, either in part or in whole, completed by another; (b) omitting footnotes for ideas, statements, facts, or conclusions that belong to another; (c) omitting quotation marks when quoting directly from another, whether it be a paragraph, sentence, or part thereof; (d) close and lengthy paraphrasing of the writings of another; (e) submitting another person’s artistic works, such as musical compositions, photographs, paintings, drawings, or sculptures; and (f) submitting as one’s own work papers purchased from research companies.

The University may warrant two separate and distinct courses of disciplinary action that may be applied concurrently in response to a violation of this policy: (a) academic sanctions, such as grade modifications; and (b) punitive sanctions, such as probation, suspension, or expulsion. Grade modification is left to the discretion of the instructor and may include (a) a zero or F (or reduction of points) on the assignment, or examination, (b) a reduction in one letter grade (e.g., C to D in the course), or (c) an F in the course. Punitive sanctions are concerned with the student’s records and status on campus and shall be the responsibility of the University President or designated representative. The Coordinator of Judiciary Procedures shall be the President’s representative in matters of student discipline.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, how to credit the work and ideas of others properly, how to evaluate sources for quality and reliability, or any other related issues, please feel free to see me to discuss the matter.

Religious Observances: The University Policy File includes the following statement on Absence for Religious Observances: By the end of the second week of classes, students should notify the instructors of affected courses of planned absences for religious observances. Instructors shall reasonably accommodate students who notify them in advance of planned absences for religious observances. California Education Code 89320 states: The Trustees of the California State University shall require that each state university, in administering any test or examination, to permit any student who is eligible to undergo the test or examination to do so, without penalty, at a time when that activity would not
violate the student’s religious creed. Please notify me by the end of the second week of classes if you plan to be absent for religious observance.

**Attendance:** You are reminded that attendance is mandatory—and that cumulative absence is the best recipe for academic disaster. A written register of attendance will be maintained, which you are asked to sign at the beginning of each class.

**Blackboard:** Periodically I may send important course announcements to the class via SDSU’s Blackboard service. Only officially registered students can access the Blackboard website. If you are registered, go to http://blackboard.sdsu.edu and log into the system for further course information.

**Email:** Please use e-mail only for scheduling and other very brief communications. Otherwise, come to speak with me in person in office hours or by setting up a separate meeting with me if you can’t make those times. I do want to talk to you, so please stop by.

**Schedule:** The course outline given below is divided according to topics, and roughly on the principle that each reading links up with the previous reading. It is therefore vitally important that the reading be done in the order assigned, and that it be done before arriving at the class. Note that the schedule is subject to change should we require more time on a particular topic. In addition to the below, see the course “Schedule” (in the left-hand course menu in Blackboard) listing all course resources and activities (and relevant due dates). The Schedule therefore serves not only as an overall tool to help keep us on track but also as a study guide for the course as a whole. Take some time now to have a look at the Schedule and to acquaint yourself with how it works.

### Introduction

#### Week 1

**Thu** Conflicting Visions of Technology  
Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932)

#### Week 2

**Tue** Schadewaldt, “The Greek Concepts of “Nature” and “Technique”  
*Scharff*, 25-32

*Scharff*, 33-46

#### Week 3

**Tue** Comte, “The Nature and Importance of Positive Philosophy”  
*Scharff*, 54-67

**Thu** Marx, “Capitalism and the Modern Labor Process”  
*Scharff*, 74-87
Is Technology Autonomous?

Week 4

Tue  Heilbroner, “Do Machines Make History”?
     *Scharff, 442-448*

Thu  Marcuse, “New Forms of Control”
     *Scharff, 449-455*

Week 5

Tue  Ellul, “The ‘Autonomy’ of the Technological Phenomenon”
     *Scharff, 430-441*

Thu  Midterm

Heidegger on Technology

Week 6

Tue  Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”
     *Scharff, 305-317*

Thu  Heidegger (Continued)

Note: Heidegger’s famous and influential essay is challenging, and needs to be read more than once.

Week 7

     *Scharff, 318-328*

Thu  Borgmann, “Focal Things and Practices”
     *Scharff, 329-347*

Week 8

Tue  Dreyfus and Spinosa, “Heidegger and Borgmann on How to Affirm Technology”
     *Scharff, 350-361*

Women, Eco-feminism, and Technology

Thu  Merchant, “Mining the Earth’s Womb”
     *Scharff, 471-481*

Week 9

Tue  Devall, “The Deep Ecology Movement”
Scharff, 482-490

Thu  Salleh, “Deeper than Deep Ecology: The Eco-Feminist Connection”
Scharff, 491-494

Technology as Social Practice

Week 10

Tue  White, “Cultural Climates and Technological Advance in the Middle Ages”
Scharff, 511-522

Thu  Mitcham, “Three Ways of Being-With Technology”
Scharff, 523-538

Technology, Knowledge, and Power

Week 11

Tue  Paper Assignment Due in Class
Foucault, “Panopticism”
Scharff, 654-667

Thu  Winner, “Do Artifacts Have Politics?”
Scharff, 668-679

Week 12

Tue  Mesthene, “The Social Impact of Technological Change”
Scharff, 680-692

Thu  McDermott, “Technology: The Opiate of the Intellectuals”
Scharff, 693-705

Week 13

Tue  Feenberg, “Democratic Rationalization: Technology, Power, and Freedom”
Scharff, 706-719

Thu  Thanksgiving—no class

Technology, Cyberspace, and Human Nature

Week 14

Tue  Dennett, “Consciousness in Human and Robot Minds”
Scharff, 588-596

Thu  Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”
Week 15

Tue
Selinger, “A Moratorium on Cyborgs: Computation, Cognition, and Commerce
Scharff, 631-640

Thu
Dreyfus, “Anonymity versus Commitment: The Dangers of Education on the Internet”
Scharff, 641-647

Atterton, “‘More Human than Human’: Blade Runner and Being-Toward-Death”
Instructor will provide pdf

Film: Ridley Scott (Director): Blade Runner (1982). IT IS A COURSE REQUIREMENT THAT YOU VIEW THIS FILM, BUT YOU MAY RENT IT AND VIEW IT AT HOME, OR VIEW IT IN THE LIBRARY