REL 4173

Tech & Human Values

Section: U01

In Person

Spring Term 2027

Course Meeting Information

REL 4173

Spring 2027

Professor Whitney A. Bauman

MWF: 13:00-13:50

CP: 422

Course Prerequisites

Course prerequisites, if any, are listed below.

Course Description

From Apocalypse / doom and gloom, to salvation and utopian futures with no disease or even death, the hopes and fears of technological "progress" have drawn from and elicit all sorts of religious ideas and feelings. What role does technology play in thinking about the future of our planet? Advances in artificial Intelligence, cybernetics, renewable energies, biomimicry, quantum computing, and medicine, and plant and animal communication all create possibilities for the planetary future that harbor both positive and negative effects for the planetary community. Somewhere between "luddite thinking" (anti-technology) and "positivistic" thinking (technology will save us) lies the huge grey area surrounding most technological developments. This course will examine the nature-human-technology relationship as a continuum rather than as somehow distinct entities in relationship to one another. In examining the grey areas between nature-human-technology, it is important to look not only at the environmental and social-justice issues surrounding technology, but also at how technologies shape our very humanity, our meaning-making practices, our value-systems, and our imaginations. We will examine techno-spiritual visions for the future of humanity (or post-humanity) and the planet (or post planet) from various theoretical/philosophical/religious perspectives including: secular humanism, transhumanism, religious naturalism, religious nationalism, afro-

futurism, feminism, and posthumanism.

Textbook and Course Materials

Discovery and Revelation: Religion, Science, and Making Sense of Things Noble, David. The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention. (Penguin, 1999) (Book store) Singler, Beth. 2024. Religion and Artificial Intelligence: An Introduction Supplemental Readings Provided Online in the courses Online reading folder.

Required/Recommended: Recommended

Authors: Peter Manseau and Andrew Ali Aghapour

Publisher: Smithsonian Books

Publication Date: 2022

Copyright Date: 2022

ISBN 10: 158834701X

ISBN 13: 9781588347015

Chapters/Pages: 160

Religion and Artificial Intelligence: An Introduction (Engaging with Religion)

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Beth Singler

Publisher: Routledge

Publication Date: 2024

Copyright Date: 2024

ISBN 10: 1032187646

ISBN 13: 9781040121801

Chapters/Pages: 228

The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: David Nobel

Publisher: Penguin

Publication Date: 1999

Copyright Date: 1999

ISBN 10: 0140279164

ISBN 13: 9780140279160

Chapters/Pages: 289

Panther Book Pack

Get all required course materials for $22 per undergrad credit hour through Panther Book Pack. You'll be charged automatically unless you opt out within 3 days after the add/drop deadline.

For more details, to compare costs, and to learn how to access your course materials, visit the Panther Book Pack information page on FIU OneStop.

Readings, Materials, and Open Educational Resources (OER)

Supplemental Readings Provided **Online** in the courses **Canvas Page**.

Course Goals

This course will familiarize students with religious, ethical and philosophical debates surrounding technology and technological developments. It will provide students with the tools to think critically about the multiple issues raised by technology.

Student Learning Outcomes/ Objectives

- critically think about technology and ethical issues
- understand the basic historical connections between religion, ethics, and technology
- understand the ways in which technological advancement gives rise to important ethical challenges

Expectations of the Course

REQUIREMENTS

Recognizing that there are many different learning styles, these requirements are designed to provide you with a variety of ways in which you can demonstrate your engagement with the materials in the course.

1. Participation (20%)

The first step to doing well in this class is to keep up with the weekly modules and readings. Though the course is remote, it will be to your benefit to keep up with the weekly schedule and attend the zoom lectures and discussions.

The second step to doing well in this course is to read the materials. I trust that you will read the materials for each week's class. I will provide you with a set of reading notes that should be turned in on Fridays (online) and which we will discuss on Mondays.

The classroom (even the virtual one) is a community of learners. That is, we are all in the process of critically engaging the lectures and course materials together. Learning should be a collaborative process and it will take all of us to learn this semester. Periodically, there will be times for students in the course to comment on a reading, video clip, or issue, on-line. There are a few rules to follow in these online interactions.

1. Confidentiality: Sometimes we are exploring serious issues in the course that may be hard to speak about or give voice too. I expect that students will respect one another's privacy in this course and allow room for this type of exploration.

2. Trust and Respect: The classroom is a learning community and it is only as good as the relationships of the people that make up the classroom. Give your classmates the benefit of the doubt before jumping to conclusions about what is said. Also, be sure to state your opinions, questions, ideas and beliefs in a way that is not intentionally disrespectful to others in the class.
3. Academic Honesty. In all written materials, students will be expected to cite sources. Plagiarizing and "Copying" from other students may result in a failing grade. Grading for written assignments will follow the Rubric that is handed out on the first day and posted on Blackboard.
4. Students should be aware of everyone in the classroom and enable each person to contribute to the conversation. Likewise, each participant should refrain from dominating class discussion.
5. In order to facilitate dialogue, on discussion days we break out into small groups.

2. 5 Film Short Responses 20% (4% each) (see due dates in syllabus)

Throughout the semester, we will watch 5 short films that deal with specific issues within "Technology and Human Values." During

these weeks, instead of listening to a lecture and doing readings, students will do the readings, watch the film, and then answer a short question (200-250 words max) that brings the readings and the film together. As with the essays (below), you must reference specific parts of the film, and specific ideas within the readings in these short responses. You will find the prompts for the response in the appropriate module for the week.

3. Three Short, in class, Essays: 60% (20% each) (in class)
Each essay must use sources from course readings, lectures, and discussion materials; you *may* also use sources outside of the syllabus, but you *must* use sources from the syllabus. You should have around 3-5 citations for each essay. Any type of plagiarism will result in a referral to the board of academic misconduct (See plagiarism policy below.)

Essay 1 (20%) Due Feb 12: Our readings and course lectures thus far have addressed the ways in which technologies have been imagined in "narratives of progress" and "narratives of decline." Both are steeped in religious and philosophical ideas. In addition we described some alternative narratives. Describe the narratives of progress and decline using course readings and notes. What are some of the religious and philosophical underpinnings about "time" and "the human" and "nature" according to each of these narratives? Do you think that science and technology are bringing about a "better" world or a "worse" world or both? Do you think one of these narratives is accurate, or do we need one of the alternative narratives discussed?

Essay 2 (20%) Due March 12th: In this essay, I'd like you to choose a technology from your everyday life. It could be writing, it could be a cell phone, it could be a car or the computer you are looking at and typing on at this moment. In three different parts, provide me with 1) a brief overview of the historical development of your technology; 2) what your technology is made of, what resources are used to produce it, and where these resources come from (to the best of your ability as sourcing all parts of a given technology is impossible); and 3) answers to the ethical questions of how this technology changes my humanity, how it changes human-human relations, and how it changes human relationship to the rest of the natural word.

Essay 3 (20%) Due April 19th: Given that there are limited resources (economically, materially, and energetically), what are some ethical criteria by which to choose what technological innovations should be pursued? In other words, how do we decide to say "yes" or "no" to the development of new technologies? For example, should we pursue space exploration when we can't even solve the problem of starvation on this planet? Should we pursue "boutique" stem cell technologies when we can't even solve the problem of malaria? Should we pursue longevity technologies when the world is already overpopulated and humans are pushing the boundaries of our planet's carrying capacity? Should we pursue nuclear technology or the development of renewable/alternative energies given that human forcings of climate change are already changing the climate? How far should AI go? In this essay, be sure

to address the question of what / whom technology is for: just for some humans, all humans, or the planetary community?

Plagiarism Policy

This course adheres strictly to FIU's plagiarism policy:

This Policy views plagiarism as one form of academic misconduct, and adopts the definition of the university's Code of Academic Integrity, according to which plagiarism is:

the deliberate use and appropriation of another's works without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student's own. Any student who fails to give credit for the ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is guilty of plagiarism.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

1. Term papers acquired online or from other sources;
2. Copying of original material without attribution;
3. Use of other students' work;
4. Copying and pasting, verbatim, information from Internet sources, without quotation marks and correct citation.

The use of AI to write essays counts as plagiarism.

GRADING SCALE

A 96-100 C+ 76-79
A- 90-95 C 70-75
B+ 87-89 D 60-69
B 83-86 F 59 and below

B- 80-82

Assignments & Assessments

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A- 90-95 C 70-75
B+ 87-89 D 60-69
B 83-86 F 59 and below

B- 80-82

Grading

GRADING SCALE
A 96-100 C+ 76-79
A- 90-95 C 70-75
B+ 87-89 D 60-69
B 83-86 F 59 and below

B- 80-82

Proctored Exams

The course will include three in-class written essay exams. Student's will need to purchase blue books for

these exams.

Schedule of Topics

Schedule

(Please note: schedule and readings are subject to change!)

Week 1 (January 11-15): Introductions; Discussion of Syllabus and Requirements

Readings: Harding, Intro
Stolow Intro

What is Technology?

Week 2 (January 18-22): Narratives of Technology: Progress and Decline (Part 1)

Readings: Noble, Introduction through Chapter 3.

Week 3 (January 25-29): Narratives of Technology: Progress and Decline (Part 2)

Readings: Noble, chapters 4-7.

Week 4(February 1-5): Technology and Epistemology (Part 1)

Reading: Stolow, pg. 25-42;
Harding, chapter 3

Week 5 (February 8-12): Technology and Humanity (Part 2)

Reading: Stolow, pg. 43-60
Harding, chapters 5-6

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First in class Essay.

Week 6 (February 15-19): Technology: Who is Responsible?

Readings: Stolow, 143-158
Harding, chs 11-12.

Week 7 (February 22-26): Technology: For What/Whom are We Responsible?

Readings: Stolow, 159-182
Harding, ch. 13

Topics in Technology and Human Becoming

Week 8 (March 1-5): Energy and Transportation: The Planetary Community

Readings: Stolow, 83-116
Harding, chapter 2

Film: "Crude Impact" (On Kanopy; must be logged in to FIU library account: https://fiu.kanopy.com/video/crude-impact)

Film Reflection

Week 9 (March 8-12): Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, and the Post-Human

Readings: Stolow, 183-212
Harding, chapter 24

Film: "Fixed : The science/fiction of human enhancement" (via Kanopy; must be logged in to FIU library account: https://fiu.kanopy.com/video/fixed-sciencefiction-human-enhancement)

Film Reflection

Second in class Essay

Week 10 (March 15-19): Virtual Worlds Materializing: Is the Virtual the Real?

Readings: Stolow, 213-260

Film: "Waking Life" (Link to Film can be found here: https://

fsharetv.co/movie/waking-life-episode-1-tt0243017#)

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Film Reflection

Week 11 (22-26): Genetics and Stem Cells

Readings: Stolow, 159-182

Harding, chs, 18 and 19

Film: Blade Runner (original) (Must be logged on to FIU Library Account to watch: http://ezproxy.fiu.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fdigitalcampus.swankmp.net%2Ffiu313969%2Fwatch%3Ftoken%3Dc584a47a07808679e1a1f965c2a7b80dc65a89de4bd21a045e114d4c5447ccf8)

Film Reflection

Week 12 (March 29- April 2): Pharmaceuticals

Reading: Harding, chs 10 and 21

Film: "Fire in the Blood" (Must be logged on to FIU Library account: https://fiu.kanopy.com/video/fire-blood-0)

Film Reflection:

Week 13 (April 5-9): Nanotechnologies and Epigenetics

On-line Reading: nanotechnologies and epigenetics

Week 14 (April 12-16): Bio-Politics and Human Becoming

Readings Online: Harding, chs 14 and 15.

Reading/ Lecture

Week 15 (April 19-23): Finals Week

Final In Class Essay

Policies & Resources

Before starting this course, please review the Policies & Resources Page in Canvas, which includes comprehensive information on various University and Course Level Policies such as:

- University Policies
- Accessibility and Accommodations
- Online Etiquette
- Technical Requirements and Skills
- Computer & Digital Literacy Skills
- Course Technology Accessibility Statements and Privacy Policies
- Academic Integrity
- Copyright Statement
- Nondiscrimination Statement

- Panthers Care & Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
- Fair Use Policy

Nondiscrimination Statement

The **Office of Civil Rights (OCR)** is responsible for ensuring that FIU maintains a workplace and learning environment free from discrimination, where current and prospective faculty, staff, and students are treated equitably. If any student, employee, or applicant has a sincere and reasonable belief that they have been discriminated against or harassed based on age, color, disability, marital status, ethnic or national origin, race, religion, retaliation, sex, or any other protected category, they can report their concerns to the OCR team through report.fiu.edu.