At the beginning and at the end of the term, students were asked to rate 25 statements about technology and ethics on a scale of

0: strongly disagree  1: mostly disagree  2: mostly agree  3: strongly agree

N=37 students completed both questionnaires (although some students left one or more questions blank). Summary data follows.

I was interested in better understanding what are the students’ basic beliefs, and to what extent we observe plasticity in them. In general, I find the responses disappointing. At the same time, one can also see, sometimes, some reason for hope.

1. Technology has vastly improved the quality of most people’s lives.

2. Technologically-created problems are usually amenable to technological solutions.

3. Technology itself is value-neutral: it is what humans do with technology that is right/wrong.
4. It is impossible to accurately predict to what use a technology may be put, so it makes little sense to try.

5. Technology is driven primarily by human wants and needs, as expressed through the marketplace

6. There is a good chance that human society will collapse as a result of environmental degradation.

7. There is a good chance that human society will collapse from a man-made disaster (nuclear war, biotech/nanotech accident, etc.)

8. Because of technological advances, I will probably live longer than my same-gender parent.
9. I am generally optimistic about our collective future.

10. The work an engineer does is inherently political.

11. In making public-policy decisions involving technology, we should rely mostly on the expertise of experts.

12. It is morally acceptable to work at a US national laboratory that designs, modifies, or tests nuclear weapons.

13. It is morally acceptable to help develop software for a guidance system you expect to be used in a US "smart bomb".
14. It is morally acceptable to work on oil-field exploration/exploitation technology for BP/Chevron/Exxon.

15. It is morally acceptable to buy products from companies (e.g., Apple or Nike) if they exploit poor workers.

16. It is morally acceptable to eat beef.

17. There is no real "right" or "wrong" in this world; everything is relative to individual choices and cultural norms.

18. My ethical beliefs are closely tied to my religious beliefs.
19. Most people behave ethically most of the time.

20. Most corporations behave ethically most of the time.

21. It is important to me that my life have a net positive influence on the state of the world.

22. When considering my future employer, the societal impact of what they do will be a key consideration.

23. Abiding by the law is a key component of living an ethical life.
24. Educated people tend to be more ethical than uneducated people.

End of term

25. Major aspects of my moral perspective are unlikely to change by that point in time.

End of term