

ECS 188

Ethics and the Information Age

Welcome — Introduction to ECS 188

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We're All Very Good?

"I've never met a person who didn't believe he was acting ethically." — Phil's friend Mihir

And yet ... if we're all acting so well, how come there's so much bad stuff going on? Some possible explanations ...

- It's not true; overall, society conducts itself in a highly moral way.
- Immorality is an emergent process, not born from our individual behaviors. Maybe it stems from the existing social structure that we fall into and support...
- We only *think* that we behave well; really we do not.

What's this Course About?

I'm Going to Take a **Very** Broad View

"Ethics and the **Information Age**"

Not just computer technology. First, computing technology is now a **part** of most complex technologies. Second, computers may introduce a new "wrinkle" into basic ethical questions, but the questions rarely respect the "boundary" of the computing-portion of the technology. Finally, many of you will end up working as technologists outside of the traditional "computer" artifact.

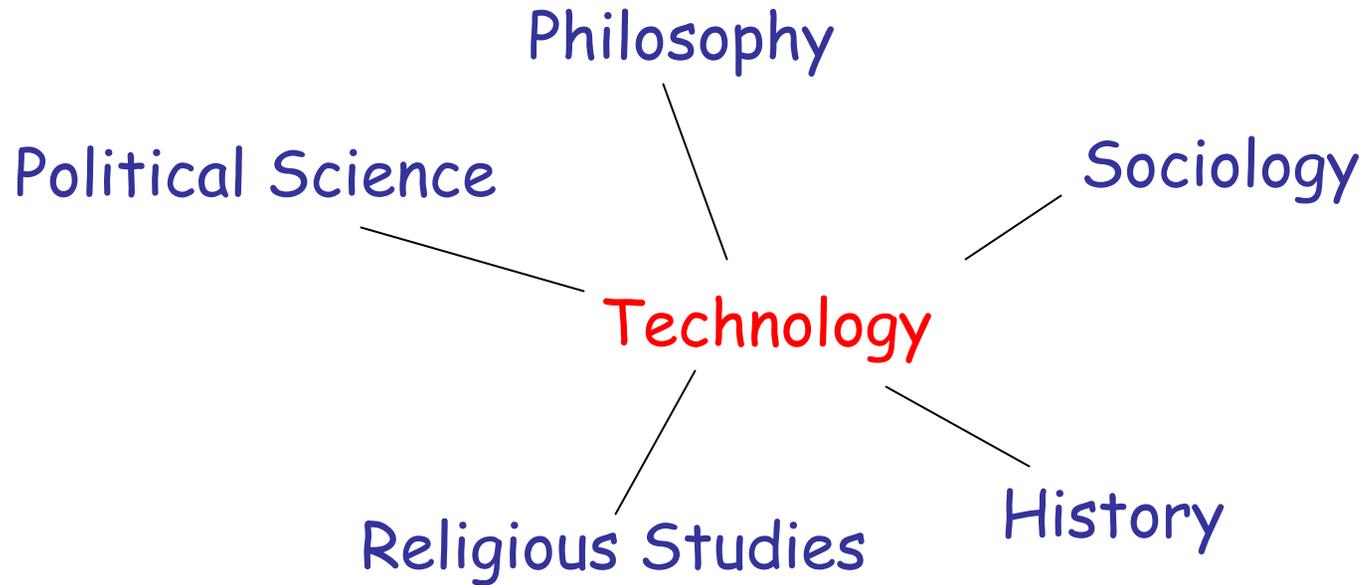
Fundamental sociological questions about who controls technology, why technology evolves as it does, what is the character of funding for technology... these are *inherently* ethical questions: they reflect the values (by choice or by default!) of individuals and societies.

I am Interested in "Big" Questions...

- Who determines, and how, the shape and course of technological development?
- How does technology influence who has power in societies—who "wins" and who "loses"?
- When you go to work as computer scientists/software engineer/etc, who benefits from your labors, and what is the structure of the social system that is extracting those labors?
- ...

... frighteningly big and difficult questions

Not Your Standard CSE Class!



Too Broad?

- You may come to feel that the viewpoint is “too” broad—that we’d do well to focus more on computers and the ethical questions directly tied up to them in the context of contemporary (mostly US) society.
- I appreciate that viewpoint.
- But I’d rather err by taking too broad a view than too narrow a one.

Should the CS Department be Teaching This Course?

- Perhaps not ... but we are! (There is also ENG 190, *Professional Responsibilities of Engineers*, an alternative for CSE majors.)

Goals for This Class

In this class, I want to get you:

- To *think* about the ethical implications of your *personal* and *professional* choices (and I hope you will *act* on those thoughts!);
- To *think* about the ethical implications of our *collective work* as technologists;
- To think in a *different way* from what you are used to;
- To *read* a lot (and to read critically);
- To *write* a fair amount;
- To become more comfortable participating in *oral discussions* and giving an *oral presentation*.

My Questionable Qualifications

- I have never taught this course before.
- I have no training in philosophy, sociology, history, ...
- I lack a broad perspective on technology (I'm a cryptographer, and that's really the only area I know well.)

Nonetheless, I *asked* to teach this class (this wasn't punishment for some past wrong!)

Why did I Ask to Teach this Class?

- I believe that we “technologists” spend too little effort thinking about (and acting on) the ethical questions of what we do.
- I think that we (me, UCD, the US educational system) are reasonably good at teaching narrow technical skills, but make no serious attempt to foster the wisdom about how, and if, to use these skills.
- I suspect we’re producing “morally-challenged” students.
- This course has not been taught by a faculty member in years.

I'd like to change these things. I'm getting old.

Our Texts: We Won't Be Using D. Johnson, *Computer Ethics*

- I reviewed this book (the book usually used for this class) and did not like its emphasis.
- I reviewed similar, "standard" books by computer scientists and thought that they had similarly misplaced emphasis.
- My impression: typical books on ethics by U.S. computer scientists focus too much on "small" issues motivated by changing technology; they look too little at big sociological questions; and they implicitly assume the reader supports the *status quo* structure of our society for finding answers.

Getting Stuck in the Small

- Example: Is it wrong to “lend” your copy of Microsoft Office to a friend? To download copyrighted music from a file-sharing service? To anonymously “flame” on a newsgroup? ...
- My take: We can talk about these things—and it is important for you to figure out how *you* want to resolve “narrow” questions like these that you constantly face. But I’d like to focus on “big” moral issues. At a time when the US has been particularly busy dropping bombs and replacing foreign governments, there are “fundamental” ethical questions about *how* technology is developed, *what* it’s used for, *who* benefits, and what role *you* want to play in all this.

What We'll Read Together

1. M. David Ermann and Michele Shauf. *Computers, Ethics, and Society* (Third Edition)
2. Ian Barbour. *Ethics in an Age of Technology*
3. Jeff Schmidt. *Disciplined Minds—A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System that Shapes their Lives*

(I also ordered: Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel—The Fates of Human Societies*, and Ian Noble, *The Religion of Technology—The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*. But we won't have time for so many books, I now realize. You don't need to get these last two.)

And One You'll Read on Your Own

4. *One more book.* I'll provide a list of some possibilities. You can choose from this list—or off this list. You'll need my approval for your choice.

Plus: there will be additional short readings that I assign, either from the Internet or from books.

Four books, plus additional readings,
in ten weeks (a challenging pace)

This is **Not** a Value-Neutral Topic

- Deals with how people *should* behave (as well as how they do behave). (“normative subject matter”)
- A class like this is *inherently* taught from some personal perspective. One can pretend to be objective, but I think it would be a farce.
- I prefer to “put on the table” where I’m coming from.
- You are most definitely **not** required or expected to share any of my beliefs. You will never be penalized for the personal beliefs that you hold and express...

Where I'm Coming From

- White, upper-middle class, US-born. Went to “the best” schools: affluent public high school, UCB, MIT.
- Politically left—indeed a “radical” or “dissident” by US standards.
- “Internationalist” perspective. Travel a lot. Have lived half-time in northern Thailand for the last few years.
- Jewish mother, atheist father, I myself have beliefs that I consider Buddhist.
- Workaholic. Area of research—cryptography.
- Highly skeptical disposition.

I Expect You To...

- Do all the readings, read with comprehension, think about the readings.
- Do all the written assignments.
- Attend the lectures. Come on time. Pay attention in class. Participate in class discussions.
- Respect each other's rights and personal dignity. Listen to each other. Disagree in a courteous way. Give others a chance to speak.

Course Work and Grading

- 17% — Attendance.
- 17% — Quizzes. Unannounced. Mostly to test that you did the readings. Closed book, but you may bring notes if you like. About four of them.
- 17% — Writing assignments (short essays, 1–2 pages, about four of them),
- 17% — Midterm
- 16% — Oral presentation on the book you read.
- 16% — Term-paper on the book you read (about 5 pages)

About the Writing for this Class

- Writing assignments should not be long, but should be careful, thoughtful, and well written.
- Do more than one draft. Carefully organize and present your ideas.
- If you have problems with English “mechanics”, make sure to have your papers proofread by someone else.
- Must be typeset. I prefer LaTeX, but will accept MS Word or other typesetting programs.
- No late assignments will be accepted.
- Do all your own work (no friends or writing services) and credit all sources; academic dishonesty will be taken very seriously.

About the Oral Presentation You'll Do

- A lecture, followed by a discussion, based on the book that you've read
- The book you will lecture on will come either from a list I provide, or it will need to be approved.
- You will be responsible for getting the book.
- 25 minutes.
- You will want to practice before giving your presentation.
- PowerPoint recommended.
- The presentation should mostly focus on what the author thinks, not what you think.
- One person for one book. (I will consider exceptions—pairs of students doing a single book—if the division of labor is clearly defined and the book is interesting and broad enough to support this.)

About the Final Project You'll Do

- A paper, about five pages, based on the book that you read and presented to class.
- Typeset.
- While the presentation should mostly focus on what the author thinks, not what you think, the paper may be the reverse.
- The paper is due two days after your presentation.

Over-Enrollment?

- If this class isn't for you, please drop *quickly* (10 day drop deadline, but please don't wait that long)
- I'll give priority for filling-in emptied slots to students who have not missed any lectures.

Course Web Page

Pretty much everything we do will be put on-line: navigate from my web page, www.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway , in the obvious way.

First Assignment

- It's on the web!
- In general, check the web for assignments.