The Summer Institute in Technology Ethics at Santa Clara University

On July 12, 2022, 24 graduate students and academics, and industry professionals converged on Santa Clara University to begin an intensive course on technology ethics from both philosophical and practical perspectives. This was SITE – the Summer Institute in Technology Ethics – created by Shannon Vallor of the University of Edinburgh (formerly of Santa Clara University) and John Sullins of Sonoma State University, in collaboration with the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, and supported by generous funding from Templeton World Charity Foundation.

SITE consisted of three main parts: a day-time program, an evening program, and a one-day conference.

The daytime program was run by professors Vallor and Sullins who taught modules on such key figures in the philosophy of technology as Carl Mitcham, Jacques Ellul, Langdon Winner, Hans Jonas, Abeba Birhane, Anna Lauren Hoffman, Safiya Noble, Ruha Benjamin, and many others. These key figures and their works form some of the intellectual backbone of the philosophy and ethics of technology. Beyond the main instructors and their readings, there were six guest speakers who each spoke on their own work as deeply experienced professionals from leading technology firms: David Danks, Margaret Mitchell, Alex Hanna, Julie Owono, Colin Allen, and Alan Winfield. These guest speakers brought additional diversity to the Summer Institute, helping to create a well-rounded curriculum.

In the evening program, led by the Ethics Center's Irina Raicu and Brian Green (directors of

internet ethics and technology ethics, respectively), the same guest faculty from the daytime program presented their work to an audience of both SITE students and technology professionals from some of Silicon Valley's most innovative companies. After a brief presentation, the session then turned to small-group work, partnering professionals and students to analyze cases of real or proposed technologies, using the Markkula Center Framework for Ethical Decision Making as their guide. Groups then shared what they had discovered in the cases and thoughts on how these cases might be resolved.

The evening program concluded on July 19, and the daytime program on July 20, leaving July 21 for a conference, titled "The Character of AI." At this conference, three panels representing industry and academia, discussed issues including AI and character, DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), and "human-in-the-loop" control over AI. Shannon Vallor also contributed the keynote speech for the conference, and a fourth panel of SITE students, moderated by Vallor, recounted their experiences over the previous nine days.

Altogether, the Summer Institute in Technology Ethics was a massive undertaking, representing thousands of hours of work from many people. SITE also received substantial praise from its participants, receiving comments such as, "The program provided an incredible and well-organized overview of the field of technology ethics. I cannot overstate how well done the lectures were, clearly identifying the major questions in the field, highlighting some of the main scholars, and providing an excellent reading list to pursue during and after the program," as well as briefer praise such as, "so wonderful" and "really worthwhile."

Judging by the comments and praise from those involved, SITE is likely to leave a lasting positive impact on its participants as they explore their future opportunities in the field of technology ethics.

Sep 19, 2022

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