**Phil 6300/Theo 6930**

**Technology, Anthropology, Ethics**

Tuesdays 2.30-5.15PM

**Course Description**

In contemporary society, the ethical (as well as the political) assessment of science and technology is overtly utilitarian in nature, and proceeds as if ethics is something superadded onto the fact of technology. The process for the ethical assessment of a technology goes something like this: 1) add the imagined positives of the technology, and 2) subtract any imagined negative outcomes if they cannot be prevented; 3) make sure the scientific and technological goods are fairly distributed and deployed, and that the burdens don’t fall unduly on the backs of the less fortunate. If the science or technology is deemed to have enough positive consequences and the risks can be minimized, then deploy the technology. On the contemporary ethics of technology, technology is imagined to be passive and morally neutral, a mere fact of reality, where the ethics depends on the intended goods, the just distribution of those goods, and the circumscription of any risks.

This calculative way of thinking leaves a lot about technology unexamined. More seems to be at stake as we drive toward the post-human future than a mere utilitarian calculus can account for. Indeed, the calculative way of thinking obscures the most important factors about the nature of our being and the being of technological tools, the being of the things upon which technology hopes to intervene, and upon the being of the things we hope to achieve.

According to other thinkers, technology is not merely the toys and tools that we develop and deploy. Technology, the tools we use, help us to understand the world around us. In this way, technology is more of a lens through which we see and interact with the world. In other words, the world is mediated to us through technology. Technology is not the products we produce, but rather it is the condition for the possibility of how we take up with reality in order to produce the toys and tools, and even our ethical assessments.

On this reading, technology is a way of thinking, a logic of technique; it is primarily epistemological in that it structures our knowing and our anticipation of what ought to be studied, and what we ought to enact. Thus, the logic of technique is more of a stance we strike toward reality, or perhaps even better, it is a technique or a set of techniques we use in order to coax reality into conforming to our techniques and our forms of knowledge. And it also manipulates reality into becoming what we would like it to become.

Thus, technology is also about beings, about reality, about metaphysics. It is about the being of humans and the being of the machines that we make and the being of the stuff out of which we build our world. At some level, then, technology changes us as we anticipate what we hope to find and to do with it. An example might be that mind is imagined as a wax tablet, or a blank slate, or a steam engine, or a computer processor. While the old saying, “If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail,” is somewhat simplistic, there is some truth in it. That means technology shapes what we imagine reality to be. The human mind is imagined as a computer; or our techniques of logic make it such that the wind, the ocean, the sun, the mountain, the seas are seen as a source of power, a source of energy; it does not appear as nature *per se*, existing apart from us. It becomes something in service to the human; it becomes a source of energy. In other words, we are changed such that we see what the technologically industrious imagination permits us to see. Technology changes the human being.

Put differently, the being of the human and the being of the world is in part entailed in the toys and tools we build. We build human intentionality into our toys and tools, and into our material culture. This material culture then comes to build its identity into us. Technology then is not merely a way of thinking and taking up with reality, it is also about the being of humans.

This course will explore the relationship of technology to human beings, and human beings to technology. It will explore what we put into our toys and tools, but also how those toys and tools come to shape recursively the human being.

The overarching thesis of this course is that technology is not merely the tools we work with or the toys we play with, but that technology carries with it a fundamental ontology, an anthropology, a teleology, and even a theology. It is a human creation, but it participates in creating what the human hopes to become. From novel biotechnologies to machine learning, contemporary technology may now be in the lead.

Students will be expected to engage technology through the insights of the thinkers we will engage.

**Course Objectives**

1. To understand the relationship of technology and science.
2. To understand the relationship of ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics to technology.
3. To understand the relationship of technology to material culture.
4. To understand the relationship of technology to human being and human identity.

**Required Books**

Bishop, Jeffrey P. *Divining the Spirits: Technics, Cultics, and the Work of Human Hands*. In Progress.

Kapp, Ernst. *Elements of a Philosophy of Technology: On the Evolutionary History of Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Heidegger, Martin. Basic Writings, edited by David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993.

Thomson, Iain, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Chapters 1 and 2.

Stiegler, Bernard. *Technics and Time*, *Vol. 1: The Fault of Epimethius*, translated by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Stiegler, Bernard. *The Age of Disruption: Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism*, New York: Polity, 2019.

**Student Led Book Discussions:**

A student or group of students will lead class discussion for first 30 minutes of class in weeks on the following books.

Brock, Brian. *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman’s Press, 2010.

Burdett, Michael. *Eschatology and the Technological Future*, London: Routledge, 2017.

Idhe, Don*, Postphenomenology and Technoscience*, Chapters 1 and 2, PDFs provided.

Idhe, Don, *Embodied Technics*, Chapters 2-4, PDFs provided.

Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy*. New York: Routledge, 2012. Originally published 1982.

Vallor, Shannon. *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Verbeek, Peter-Paul. *Moralizing Technology: Understanding and Designing the Morality of Things*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

August 31 Kapp, Preface, Chapters 1-3, pp. 3-53, Chapter 9, pp. 115-120, Chapter 12-13, pp. 204-250.

Sept 7 Heidegger’s “Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics,” and “The Letter on Humanism.”

Sept 14

Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, pp. 1-77; Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, pp. 307-341.

Sept 21 Student leader: Idhe summary;

Stiegler: *Technics and Time, Vol 1*

Sept 28 (TBD) Student leader: Brock summary;

Stiegler: *Technics and Time, Vol 1*

Oct 5 (TBD) Student leader: Verbeek summary;

Stiegler: *Age of Disruption*, Part One

Oct 12 Student leaders: Burdett summary;

Stiegler: *Age of Disruption*, Part Two

Oct 19 Student leaders: Vallor summary;

Stiegler: *Age of Disruption*, Part Three

Oct 26 Student leaders: Ong summary

Bishop, Intro, Chapter 1

Nov 2 (Zoom Class) Bishop, Chapters 2-3

Nov 9 Bishop, Chapters 4-5

Nov 16 Bishop, Chapter 6-7

Nov 23 Bishop, 8-9

Nov 30 Bishop, 10-11

Dec 7 Paper Presentations; drinks after class at Scottish Arms

**Assessment**

There are two major domains of assessment: a paper and class participation.

***Paper***

The goal of this course is to help PhD students move toward a publishable paper. Each student will be required to write a 20-25 page paper. Since there are 15 students in the course, please try to not go over 25 pages. Many different approaches can be taken to the paper. Here are a few non-exhaustive examples: students can deconstruct the contemporary work on the moral permissibility of a contemporary technology, attempting to understand what implicit anthropology or theology animates the claims of the author; students may engage contemporary apologists of technology by tracing the historical and political conditions that shape the ontological or moral claims of contemporary apologists; students may engage the popular literature and the moral imagination that shapes the claims of popularizers of a technology; students may trace the implicit philosophical (or even quasi-theological) commitments that animate the contemporary apologists for a technological interventions. There are a myriad of other approaches that the student may take in consultation with the instructor.

Since this course is meant to promote student scholarly agendas, there are two writing assignments that will be assessed:

1) Students will turn in a **complete** first draft of the paper to the instructor on November 8, by 11:59:59 PM. That means a full paper, with a substantive thesis and argument should be submitted (i.e. not an outline, not an incomplete paper). The professor will then send the paper to two student-reviewers, who will assess the paper and submit his or her assessment back to the professor by 12 Noon on November 15. The professor will read the student paper making substantive comments and returning both the student-reviewer’s comments and the professor’s comments by November 20, assigning a draft grade. Students will then be expected to revise their papers based on the feedback given by the professor and by the student-reviewers.

2) The final draft of the paper, which will have been revised in light of student-reviewers and faculty feedback, will be due on Friday, December 10, by 11:59:59 PM. Students will be expected to submit not only the paper, but a narrative of what revisions were made. If the student chooses not to make all of the suggested revisions, the narrative should explain that decision. This process mimics a journal review process. It should be noted that it is possible to get an A+ on the draft and still get a C- on the final paper. The point of this exercise is to see if students can respond to feedback and more robustly rewrite their papers accordingly. A final paper grade will be assigned at that time.

***Class Participation***

Class participation is also graded and has three components:

1) Students are expected to have all the reading done by class time and to engage in seminar conversations.

2) Students will be required to serve as a blinded student-reviewer on two papers. Those reviews will be sent to the professor, and the professor will forward the student-reviews to the student-author. The student-reviewer will be assessed on their assessement, based on the critical and constructive feedback.

3) Each student will present his or her paper on the last day of class. There are 150 minutes to each seminar session, and 15 students in the course. Each student will have 7 minutes to present, leaving 2.5 minutes for questions and a 30 second transition between students. This will be a rapid session, and students must prepare accordingly. Most peole can read about 100 words per minute. So write up a 750 word abstract to read, with energy and passion, in class.

**Grade Contributors:**

Class Participation: 20%

Draft Paper: 30%

Final Paper: 50%

**Important Dates**

November 8: First draft of paper due at 23:59:59.

November 15: Student referee feedback returned to Instructor by 12N.

November 20: Instructor evaluation and student feedback will be returned to student.

December 7: Student presentations

December 10: Final draft of paper due

Course Policies

Discussion and activities will be central to the learning process in this course. Active participation in class is therefore necessary, both for your benefit and for your fellow students. At the same time, the issues we will be discussing can be both controversial and personal for many of us. As a result, I expect a lively debate will arise on various topics. Many of you will have personal expertise or experience that will enrich our discussions and I hope that you will share it with us when it is appropriate. This also means that all participation must be **respectful of other viewpoints and beliefs.** You need not accept or endorse other views, but you must give all points of view a charitable hearing and careful consideration. Lack of respect for other students will be reflected in a decrease in your participation grade. Likewise, if your participation does not reflect a reading of the assigned material, it will not count towards your participation grade. We will strive to foster a safe classroom environment that is conducive to the open exchange of ideas, and reserve the right to take measures in order to accomplish this goal (up to and including removing those elements that prove to be obstacles for fulfilling this goal).

Asking for Help or Clarification

You may contact the instructor at any time with questions regarding the course or course requirements. Please do not hesitate to ask for guidance. You may contact me by email ([jeffrey.bishop@slu.edu](mailto:jeffrey.bishop@slu.edu)) or stop by the office.

Changes to Syllabus

The instructor expects to follow this syllabus throughout the semester. It is possible that the instructor may make changes to the syllabus during the semester. These changes will be communicated during class OR by email. It is the responsibility of all students to keep up to date with changes. If a student misses class, it is the student’s responsibility to find out whether any announcements were made in class.

Class Attendance

Attendance at all class meetings (both large and small group) and any individual meetings scheduled between the instructor and student is expected.

## Disability Accommodations

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations must formally register their disability with the University. Once successfully registered, students also must notify their course instructor that they wish to use their approved accommodations in the course.

Please contact Disability Services to schedule an appointment to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Most students on the St. Louis campus will contact Disability Services, located in the Student Success Center and available by email at [Disability\_services@slu.edu](mailto:Disability_services@slu.edu) or by phone at [314.977.3484](tel:314.977.3484). Once approved, information about a student’s eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors by email from Disability Services and within the instructor’s official course roster. Students who do not have a documented disability but who think they may have one also are encouraged to contact to Disability Services. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

## Academic Integrity

*Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors.* The mission of Saint Louis University is “the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity.” Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service through which SLU fulfills its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern. The full University-level Academic Integrity Policy can be found on the Provost's Office website at: <https://www.slu.edu/provost/policies/academic-and-course/policy_academic-integrity_6-26-2015.pdf>.

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites.

## Title IX

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g., sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident that involves a Title IX matter, **that faculty member must notify SLU’s Title IX coordinator (or that person’s equivalent on your campus) and share the basic facts of your experience**. This is true even if you ask the faculty member not to disclose the incident. The Title IX contact will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

For most students on the St. Louis campus, the appropriate contact is Anna R. Kratky (DuBourg Hall, room 36; [anna.kratky@slu.edu](mailto:anna.kratky@slu.edu); 314-977-3886). If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK. To view SLU’s sexual misconduct policy, and for resources, please visit the following web addresses: <https://www.slu.edu/here4you> and <https://www.slu.edu/general-counsel>.

Student Success Center Syllabus Statement  
In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. The Student Success Center, a one-stop shop, which assists students with academic and career related services, is located in the Busch Student Center (Suite, 331) and the School of Nursing (Suite, 114). Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

* Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.
* University-level support (e.g., tutoring services, university writing services, disability services, academic coaching, career services, and/or facets of curriculum planning) by visiting the Student Success Center or by going to [www.slu.edu/success](http://www.slu.edu/success).

Disability Services Academic Accommodations Syllabus Statement  
Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Please contact Disability Services, located within the Student Success Center, at [Disability\_services@slu.edu](mailto:Disability_services@slu.edu) or 314.977.3484 to schedule an appointment. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services and viewed within Banner via the instructor’s course roster.

Classroom Etiquette Policy  
As aspiring citizens, students need to approach this course as professionals at all times. Consistent with the course requirements and expectations, as well as the competencies the course is designed to help students develop, you will be expected to submit all assignments by their due dates, attend all required class sessions, arrive to class prepared and on time, remain for the full class time, dress appropriately, pay attention, contribute thoughtfully to class discussions, be respectful of and courteous to others, refrain from eating, and use technology appropriately. You are welcome to use your laptop or tablet computer to enhance your education while in class; however, computers that become distractions from engaged participation in discussions either to the operator or others will not be tolerated. Distractions include (but are not limited to) reading your email, surfing the net or using your cell phone. Surely you can wait until a break or the end of class to indulge in these vices of modern life.