

Instructor: Kevin Patton
Course: PHIL 106
Time: MTWRF 1020 - 1320
Location: Avery Hall - 119
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UNL Philosophy
Office Hours: T/R 1330-1430

Philosophy & Current Issues

The Ethics of Big Data

“I believe that at the end of the century the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted.” - Alan Turing in *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*

Course Overview

The purpose of this class is to focus on a number of ethical considerations surrounding the growing area known as ‘Big Data’. The issues will be explored from a Government-Civilian and Company-Consumer standpoint (e.g. as citizens and consumers what kind of transparency can we expect from the government and companies which store and analyze data about us - especially if they monetize this data?) Additionally, the topics in the third week of class will be determined in part by input from students about what issues they want to discuss.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course students should be able to (i) find the argument of a text and restate it clearly in their own words; (ii) clearly explain viewpoints that are not their own; (iii) think critically about the philosophical and social issues discussed in the course; (iv) write papers using theses, organization, arguments, evidence, and language suitable to analytic writing in general, and in the discipline of philosophy in particular.

Required Materials

Readings will be posted to BlackBoard under ‘Course Readings’. There is only one required book.

Book: Solove, Daniel J. *Nothing to Hide: The False Tradeoff between Privacy and Security*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011

Students are expected to bring all relevant materials to class.

Course Requirements

Preparation: You are expected to attend every class meeting fully prepared to discuss each assigned reading, to submit written work punctually, and to offer thoughtful and constructive responses to the remarks of your instructor and your classmates. Make sure that you bring the relevant readings with you to every lecture class. I further expect you to treat both the texts at hand and your classmates' ideas with openness and respect.

Attendance: Attendance is required. You are also expected to attend every section meeting. 1/2 a letter grade will be deducted from your final course grade for every absence from section after your second.

BlackBoard: All non-book readings will be available on BlackBoard. Paper submissions and grades will be handled via BlackBoard as well.

Format for Papers: Please submit work in .doc, .rtf, or PDF format. All work must be typed. I will not accept any handwritten work aside from that we do in class. Your papers should be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced with margins set to one inch on all sides. Your name, my name, the date and assignment should appear in the top left hand corner of the first page. Your last name and page number must appear in the top right hand corner on each subsequent page. You are responsible for the presentation of your papers. **Late Work:** Late papers and assignments will standardly be marked down by 1/3 of a letter grade for each day the work is late (for example, from A- to B+, from B+ to B, and so on).

Evaluation

Essay 1: 15% Explain and examine an argument. Approximately 1 ½ pages. Details to come.

Essay 2: 20% Explain, compare, and contrast two authors from that week's readings AND defend one against the other. Approximately 3 pages. Details to come.

Essay 3: 25% Explain, compare, and contrast one author from that week's readings with another author researched independently, and defend one. Approximately 3-5 pages. Details to come. Part of the grade for this paper incorporates a presentation.

Quizzes: 20% Brief review quizzes held during section. Your two lowest grades will be dropped and your highest counted twice.

Participation Grade: 20% The participation grade takes into account your attendance in lecture and section as well as the quantity, and quality of your participation.

Policies

- **Academic Integrity:** All the work you turn in (including papers, drafts, and discussion board posts) must be written by you specifically for this course. It must originate with you in form and content with all contributory sources fully and specifically acknowledged. Make yourself familiar with UNL's Student Code of Conduct and Academic Integrity Code, available [online](#). **In this course, the normal penalty for any violation of the code is an "F" for the semester.** Violations may have additional consequences including expulsion from the university. Don't plagiarize – it just isn't worth it.

- **University Policies:** This instructor respects and upholds University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired students; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor.

ADA: In compliance with University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

- **Misc.:** Please turn off cell phones, beeping watches, and other gadgets that make noise before entering our classroom. Absolutely no texting is permitted during class. I will subtract up to five points from your participation grade each and every time your phone rings or I see you texting during class.

Further Resources

Jargon: It's important to be on top of the technical terms used by philosophers. Please ask for clarification of terms in class. You can also consult Jim Pryor's online "[Philosophical Terms and Methods](#)."

- **Writing a Philosophy paper:** Papers should adhere to some consistent practice of footnoting and citation (Chicago, MLA, etc.). I don't really mind which one you use as long as you are consistent. On writing a philosophy paper, there is no better online guide than [Jim Pryor's](#). Please consult it. Hacker's [A Writer's Reference](#) is also extremely helpful. Useful online writing help may be found at the [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#).

- **Help with writing:** The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Writing Center can provide you with meaningful support as you write for this class as well as for every course in which you enroll. Trained peer consultants are available to talk with you as you plan, draft, and revise your

writing. Please check the [Writing Center website](#) for locations, hours, and information about scheduling appointments.

- Reference: The [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) is an excellent online resource, though entries can be l-o-o-o-n-g. The [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) has shorter (more encyclopedia-like) entries, but is not as professional.

Tentative Assignment Calendar

Week 1: Government - Citizen

May 18: Basic first day stuff (syllabus, general questions/answers, ice breakers, etc).

Additionally, we will do some in class research into why Big Data is an appropriate topic for an ethics class.

May 19: Reading: Solove: 1-18 / 182-198

May 20: Reading: Solove: 21-37

May 21: Reading: Solove: 55-70

May 22: Reading: Solove: 93-110 / 146 - 154. **First paper due by 11:59pm on BlackBoard.**

Week 2: Corporation - Consumer

May 25: Memorial day. **No class!**

May 26: Reading: Richards & King: Big Data Ethics 397-432

May 27: Reading: Lynch: Privacy and the Threat to Self / Richards & King: Three Paradoxes of Big Data

May 28: Reading: Hardt: How Big Data is Unfair / Alistair: Big Data and Civil Rights

May 29: Workshop papers. **Second paper due by 11:59pm on BlackBoard.**

Week 3: Potpourri

June 1: Reading: Student voted topics and readings.

June 2: Reading: Student voted topics and readings.

June 3: No Reading. Student Presentations on third paper.

June 4: No Reading. Student Presentations on third paper.

June 5: Reading: TBD. **Third paper due by 11:59pm on BlackBoard.**