

Fall 2020

PHIL 334-003: Engineering Ethics

Robert Cormier

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ENGINEERING IN THE END TIMES

Syllabus

PHI 334
Engineering Ethics
Fall 2020

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DESCRIPTION

Recent events have exposed many weaknesses of our modern way of life. Catastrophes force us to confront the project of building a more humane world in their wake, and engineers have a crucial role in imagining and realizing the future. How can they ensure that their services serve the interests of humanity at large rather than narrow personal and political interests? This course will approach this question through a brief survey of ethical and political philosophy and a selection of special topics and case studies related to the field of engineering.

The subject matter of this course is admittedly heavy, but this should not be mistaken for pessimism. The goal of this course is to overcome pessimism or nihilism in the face of catastrophe by examining the principles that make our lives and work meaningful, as opposed to blindly embracing the optimistic hype of technological utopianism. Students will be asked to reflect systematically on their values and provide rational justification for their views.

FORMAT

All required **readings** and other media will be posted on Canvas every **Monday**. You are not required to purchase any books.

Lectures will be delivered in two formats each week. I will post a **video** to Canvas every **Tuesday**, and I will host and record a **podcast**-style WebEx conference every **Thursday**, which you can also access through Canvas. Please watch the video before the podcast, as it will help frame the discussion for the week. You are welcome to sit in on the podcast as it is recorded (i.e. synchronously), and I encourage you to join me live to ask any questions you may have about the readings for the benefit of the rest of the class; otherwise, please access the recordings after they are posted (i.e. asynchronously) and before you attempt the quizzes. Beginning in week two, lectures will include a **panel discussion** featuring students as **guest experts**.

This is an online course, so you are expected to have a relatively stable internet connection. I understand that these are volatile times, however, and if you anticipate any technical hurdles to accessing course materials each day, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work around it. **If you cannot access WebEx by internet for a scheduled appointment or panel appearance, you are expected to call me for instructions on how to join the call by phone.** Penalties for unexcused missed appearances and late assignments will be enforced.

Quizzes will be posted on **Friday** every two weeks. You will have until the following **Sunday** at midnight to complete them. Please see the schedule below for other assignment deadlines.

CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTOR

Taking a course online can be an alienating experience, even under the best of circumstances. If you would like to talk face-to-face or via audio chat, we can arrange a Zoom chat. Please send me an email and we'll work something out.

EVALUATION

- **Quizzes** — 30% total = 6 x 5% each
Please submit Canvas quizzes by midnight on Wednesday and Friday each week. Each quiz will include several multiple-choice questions based on the readings. Late submissions will incur a penalty unless you contact me in advance to ask for an extension. Only your top six (out of seven) quiz scores count toward your final grade.
- **Guest Expert** — 25% total = 10% prep + 5% appearance + 10% reflection
*You will make one guest appearance on my weekly podcast. I will hold virtual office hours every Wednesday so we can meet to discuss your guest appearance the day before. I will ask you a few questions related to the readings, and you and your co-panelist will develop questions to ask each other during the podcast. You will subsequently submit your notes and a short reflection. **If connection issues arise during your scheduled appearance, we can arrange to subsequently record a supplementary interview. If you miss your scheduled appearance entirely, you may still submit your notes on Canvas for partial credit.***
- **Essay Plan** — 45% total = 15% pitch + 15% bibliography + 15% storyboard
The essay plan will be divided into three parts: (a) an essay pitch, (b) an annotated bibliography, and (c) an essay storyboard. Please note the corresponding deadlines listed on the Course Schedule and submit your assignment on Canvas by midnight on the due date. Late submissions will incur a penalty unless you contact me in advance to ask for an extension.

PARTICIPATORY LEARNING (PL)

In collaboration with people from the Information Systems department at NJIT, we will be testing an alternative approach to teaching and evaluation known as Participatory Learning. You can learn more about this approach [here](#). You will complete some of your assignments using their online portal. A representative from the department will explain the system in our first podcast.

ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (Kupfrian Hall 201) at 973-596-5417. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Academic dishonesty includes any act that is designed to obtain fraudulently, either for oneself or for someone else, academic credit, grades, or other recognition that is not properly earned or that adversely affects another's grade. The following list of examples is not exhaustive:

- Cheating on exams or assignments by the use of books, electronic devices, notes, or other aids when these are not permitted, or by copying from another student
- Collusion: two or more students helping one another on an exam or assignment
- Ringers: taking an exam for someone else, or permitting someone else to take one's exam
- Plagiarizing: copying someone else's writing or paraphrasing it too closely, even if it constitutes only some of your written assignment, without proper citation
- Falsifying documents or records related to credit, grades, status (e.g., adds and drops, grading, transcripts), or other academic matters
- Altering an exam or paper after it has been graded in order to request a grade change

“HELP ME HELP YOU”

Jerry Maguire said it best. Every year I am flooded with emails at the end of the semester from students requesting this or that grade. Very often they are disappointed when I tell them that there is little I can do for them so late in the semester. To avoid this, set your goals early and reevaluate them often. Email me to schedule a meeting to discuss your progress and what you can do to improve your learning outcomes.

PHI 334

Schedule

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
AUGUST 30	Readings 1 31	SEPTEMBER 01 Video 1	Office hours 02	Podcast 1 03	Quiz 1 04
06	R2 07	V2: Argument I 08	OH 09	P2: Fallacy 10	11
13	R3 14	V3: Virtue 15	OH 16	P3: Eudaimonia 17	Q2 (PL) 18
20	R4 21	V4: Utility 22	OH 23	P4: Trolleys 24	25
27	R5 28	V5: Duty 29	OH 30	OCTOBER 01 P5: Will	Q3 02
04	R6 05	V6: Argument II 06	OH 07	P6: Thesis 08	09
11	R7 12	V7: Engineering 13	OH 14	P7: Codes 15	Q4 16
Assignment 1: Pitch 18	R8 19	V8: Bioengineering 20	OH 21	P8: CRISPR-Cas9 22	23
25	R9 26	V9: Geoengineering 27	OH 28	P9: Aerosols 29	Q5 30
NOVEMBER 01	R10 02	V10: Argument III 03	OH 04	P10: Justice 05	06
08	R11 09	V11: Whistleblowing 10	OH 11	P11: Pinto 12	Q6 13
A2: Bibliography 15	R12 16	V12: Disobedience 17	OH 18	P12: Topf 19	20
22	R13 23	V13: Warfare 24	OH 25	P13: Drones 26	Thanksgiving 27
29	R14 30	DECEMBER 01 V14: Pandemic	OH 02	P14: COVID-19 03	04
06	R15 07	V15: Automation 08	OH 09	P15: UBI 10	Q7 (PL) 11
A3: Storyboard 13	14	15	16	17	18