Data Ethics \ Fall 2017
Syllabus

Instructor: Elizabeth Edenberg, PhD
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Class: TRF 10:00-10:50am in 201 Healy Hall

Office Hours: 405 Healy Hall
Tuesdays 3:00-5:00 pm
and by appointment

Course Description:
This course explores the rapidly changing landscape of data ethics. Big data is revolutionizing practices in commerce, education, policing, national security, and medicine. Rapid advances in machine learning and artificial intelligence ensure that the pace and scope of change will only accelerate, even as ethical and legal frameworks lag far behind. Developing adequate ethical frameworks involves tackling difficult questions. How can big data be used for the public good? Does the use of predictive analytics in employment and policing decisions reduce or reinforce bias? Is privacy dead—and should we care? What does truth mean in the age of information bubbles?

This course takes place in Georgetown’s Ethics Lab, which is part of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics. We take a practical approach to applied ethics, tackling complex contemporary moral problems using a mix of philosophical tools and design thinking. The goal is to help students identify ethical issues and make progress in addressing them.

Course Requirements:
In this course, students will learn how to engage critically with the readings and articulate well-supported views about the various philosophical problems we encounter. You will also engage in an Ethics Lab “ethics in action challenge” designed to help you move your analysis of the ethical issues towards a plan of action for engaging in the world.

To succeed in this course, you should consider the following questions as we go through each text: What is the author’s position and how is it supported within the argument? Consider how you could critique the argument and the impact of your critique on the overall aims of the text. How could the author respond? I also encourage you to think about each view in light of your own considered judgments about the philosophical questions we discuss.

Participation: Come to class having read the day’s assignment closely and carefully, fully prepared to discuss the material. (5%)

Weekly Skills-Building Exercises: Each week, there will be a short exercise designed to help you cultivate the key skills needed for the larger assignments. They will frequently take the form of short in-class written responses to a question posed by the readings, but occasionally will focus on oral presentation and peer critique. (10%)

Papers: You will write three papers in this class. These are designed as opportunities to delve further into a philosophical problem we encounter and develop an original critical engagement with the relevant texts. You will be expected to have a clearly stated thesis statement and prove the thesis in your paper by drawing on the scholarly works we have
studied. The final paper takes the place of the final exam and will be due at the beginning of the exam period scheduled for this course by the university registrar. (Paper 1: 15%; Paper 2: 20%; Final Paper 25%)

**Ethics in Action Challenge Portfolio:** In this course you will be building key skills for tackling complex moral problems. The Ethics in Action Challenge is centrally about learning to effectively communicate your own argument about a contemporary issue in data ethics to a lay audience. You will be graded on a portfolio of your work, including your presentation and critique of your peers’ work. Further details will be provided with the assignment. (25%)

**Grading Criteria:**
To excel in this course, you need to be able to do more than just reiterate what various authors have said in your reading or what was said in class. An "A" indicates a sophisticated understanding of the material, delving into the subtleties and implications of the texts assigned. A "B" reflects an above-average understanding of the material and reflects a good level of analysis. "C" suggests an average comprehension but is either flawed by misunderstandings or by reliance on summary rather than independent analysis of the works. A "D" indicates a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. You must complete all assignments in order to pass the class.

**Required Texts:**
All course documents can be found on Canvas. Please note, the readings are provided for the purpose of this class only and remain subject to all the rights and restrictions of the publisher.

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**Policies:**

**Academic Integrity:** Georgetown’s honor system governs every assignment in the course. Plagiarism (submitting for credit work you did not do yourself) or any form of cheating is unacceptable. Students will receive a zero on assignments that violate this policy.

**Disability Services:** All students are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities at Georgetown University. If you require any special accommodations to enable you to complete this course, please schedule a meeting with the Academic Resource Center (ARC). In addition to contacting the ARC, please discuss your situation with Elizabeth so that I can best help you succeed in this course.

**Electronics:** Computers, tablets, and cell phones may not be used during class without explicit permission from the instructor.

**Late Work:** All of the deadlines are listed on the syllabus, plan your time accordingly.

*Papers:* A penalty of 1/3 letter grade per day will be deducted for late papers (e.g., if your paper earns a B but is 1 day late, you will receive a B-). If there is an extenuating circumstance preventing you from completing the paper on time, you must receive an extension from Elizabeth, in writing, at least 24 hours before the deadline.

**Open Lab Hours:** Ethics Lab will be open for study and group work outside of class. Check the calendar [here](#) for available times.
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Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Readings are listed according to the date they are due to be completed.

What is Data Ethics?

Thurs., August 31: Introduction to Data Ethics

Fri., September 1: David Foster Wallace, *This is Water*
                        Bertrand Russell, *The Value of Philosophy*

Tues., September 5: Cathy O’Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction*, Ch. 1

Thurs., September 7: danah boyd and Kate Crawford, *Critical Questions for Big Data*


Tues., Sept. 12: Discussion: What is Data Ethics?

The Status & Authority of Morality


Fri., Sept. 15: James Rachels, *The Challenge of Cultural Relativism*

Tues., Sept. 19: Julia Annas, *Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing*


Fri., Sept. 22: Discussion: The Status & Authority of Morality
                      Writing Workshop: Bring Full Draft of Paper 1 to Class

Sun., October 1: Paper 1 Due Via Canvas TurnItIn at Noon

Core Values in Data Ethics


Thurs., Sept. 28: Michael P. Lynch, *Who Wants to Know: Privacy and Autonomy*

Fri., September 29: Alessandro Acquisti, Laura Brandimarte, and George Lowenstein, *Privacy and Human Behavior in the Age of the Internet*
                      Discussion: Privacy

Tues., October 3: Tom L. Beauchamp, *Autonomy and Consent*

Thurs., October 5: Franklin G. Miller and Alan Wertheimer, *Preface to a Theory of Consent Transactions: Beyond Valid Consent*
Fri., October 6: Salon Barocas & Helen Nissenbaum, *Big Data’s End Run Around Anonymity and Consent*
Discussion: Consent

Tues., October 10: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapters 1 & 4

Thurs., October 12: Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*

Fri., October 13: Cass Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*, Chapter 6 “Citizens”
Discussion: Liberty

Tues., October 17: Robert Paul Wolff, *The Conflict Between Authority and Autonomy*


Fri., October 20: Discussion: Authority & Legitimacy
Writing Workshop for Paper 2: Bring Full Draft to Class

Sun., October 22: **Paper 2 Due Via Canvas TurnItIn at Noon**

Tues., October 24: Cass Sunstein, *#Republic*, Chapter 3 “Polarization”

Thurs., October 26: Michael P. Lynch, *The Internet of Us: Knowing More and Understanding Less in the Age of Big Data*, Chapters 8-9

Fri., October 27: Regina Rini, *Fake News and Partisan Epistemology*

Tues., October 31: Discussion: Epistemology
Writing Workshop for Paper 2: Bring Full Draft to Class

Thurs., November 2: Guest Speaker: Michael P. Lynch

Fri., November 3: John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, selections

Tues., Nov. 7: Erin Kelly & Lionel McPherson, *On Tolerating the Unreasonable*

Thurs., Nov. 9: Discussion: Respect, Toleration, & Disagreement

**Ethics In Action Challenge**
*For this challenge, see detailed instructions for homework each day posted on Canvas*

Fri., Nov. 10: Introduction to the Ethics in Action Challenge
Homework Due: Bring in 3 contemporary issues related to data ethics

Tues., Nov. 14: Mary Flanagan, Daniel C. Howe, and Helen Nissenbaum, *Embodying Values in Technology*
Ethics In Action Challenge Homework Due: Storyboards A & B

Thurs., Nov. 16: Ethics In Action Challenge Homework Due: 2 user tests
Fri., Nov. 17: Ethics in Action Challenge Homework Due: Prototype 1

Tues., Nov. 21: Ethics in Action Challenge Homework Due: Prototype 2 & 2 new user tests

November 23-24: Thanksgiving Break, No Class

Tues., Nov. 28: Presentation Workshop
Ethics in Action Challenge Homework Due: Prototype 3 Due & 3 user tests

Thurs., Nov. 30: Ethics in Action Challenge Presentations

Fri., December 1 Ethics in Action Challenge Presentations

Tues., December 5: Debrief on Ethics in Action Challenge
Final Paper Assigned

Thurs., December 7: Course Conclusion & Wrap Up

Tues., December 19: **Final Papers are Due Via Canvas TurnItIn by 9:00 am**
The final paper takes the place of a final exam for this class and is due at the time the university scheduled the final exam for this course.