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Author(s): Paul Conway, PhD, 2010

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SI 410 Ethics and Information Technology

Reading and Discussion Guide 1
Foundations

This reading and discussion guide covers the first three weeks of the course. The intersection of ethics and new information technologies is a vibrant and emerging field of study in which people float lots of interesting ideas about evolving ethics but where there is not a lot of concrete engagement with the technologies themselves. The first three weeks of the class will focus on the foundational ideas animating the course. The guide lists the required readings, suggests thinks to look for while reading them, and poses some questions that could be raised during the lecture session. The guide also describes briefly the purpose of lab/discussion section.

Week 1: History and Key Ideas

- Tuesday September 7 Topic: Course Logistics and Big Picture

Required Readings:

- Moor, J. H., "Why We Need Better Ethics for Emerging Technologies," *Ethics and Information Technology* (2005) 7:111-119.

What to look for:

Moor defines emerging technologies rather broadly and then makes a bold claim about why better ethics are needed now. Read this article for the heart of his argument, rather than for his definitions.

Discussion questions:

1. Why is there a "policy gap" between technology and ethical norms?

- Wednesday September 8

Lab/Discussion

The lab session will focus on how to use the University Library to gain access to information resources that you will need for your writing assignments. Scott Dennis, a librarian who specializes in philosophy and general reference tools, will demonstrate the library's many useful databases and search tools.

- Thursday September 9 Topic: Computer Ethics

Required Readings:

- Bynum, T. W., "Milestones in the History of Information Ethics," in *Himma and Tavani* (2008), pp. 25-48.
- Tavani, H., "The Uniqueness Debate in Computer Ethics: What Exactly Is at Issue, and Why Does it Matter?" *Ethics and Information Technology* 4 (2002), pp. 37-54.

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What to read for:
For Bynum, read the article as a sort of history lesson, paying attention to the author's terminology and how the definitions of computer ethics change over time.

Tavani's article goes to the heart of the question for the first assignment. Read the article for his central argument and be prepared to summarize the two sides of his argument.

Discussion questions:
1. Is computer ethics a new field of study or an ancient area of scholarship faced with new challenges?
2. Is there anything special about new technologies that challenges our ethical foundations?

Week 2: Philosophy of Ethics

- Tuesday September 14 Topic: Models

Required Readings:
- Turilli, M and Floridi, L., "The Ethics of Information Transparency," *Ethics and Information Technology* 11 (2009): 105-112.
- Vallor, S. (2010). "Social Networking Technology and the Virtues." *Ethics and Information Technology* 12 (June): 157-170.

What to look for:

Turilli and Floridi define transparency in two distinctive ways. Read the article for clarity on those two ways.

Vallor contexualizes new social technologies (e.g. Facebook) in terms of four distinctive societal values. Read the article to identify those values and how they are defined (by a particular author).

Discussion questions:

- Wednesday September 15

Lab/Discussion

The lab session will feature a briefing on writing effective essays by a member of the Sweetland Writing Center, which is located on the first floor of the new North Quad.

- Thursday September 16 Topic: Infosphere

Required Readings:
- Ess, C., "Luciano Floridi's Philosophy of Information and Information Ethics: Critical Reflections and the State of the Art," *Ethics and Information Technology* 10 (2008), pp. 89-96.
- Floridi, L., "Information Ethics: Its Nature and Scope," in *Information Technology and Moral Philosophy* (2008), edited by Jeroen van den Hoven and John Weckert, p. 3-24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

What to read for:

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These articles are at the heart of this part of the course. Read Ess for an explanation of why Floridi is important. Read Floridi for his concept of Infosphere.

Discussion questions:

Why do you think that Floridi might be at the center of an important philosophical movement and how is that relevant to the course?

Week 3: Programming and Ethics

- Tuesday September 21 Topic: Philosophy and Object Oriented Programming

Required Reading:

- Floridi, L. and Sanders, J.W. (2004). "On the Morality of Artificial Agents," Mind and Machine 14: 349-379.

What to look for:

This is one of Luciano Floridi's most important article, in which he speculates on the possibility that information objects have ethical properties. He bases his assertions, in part, on the concepts of objects, properties, and relationships that underpin object oriented programming and discrete math. His argument is dense, but you will be rewarded by careful reading and rereading of the article.

Discussion questions:

Do information objects have ethical properties?

- Wednesday September 22

Lab/Discussion

This week's lab will involve discussion of the results of the surveys conducted on the first day of class, with the goal of opening discussion on values and ethical behavior.

- Thursday September 23 Topic: Back to the Really Big Picture

Required Readings:

- Capurro, R., "Towards an ontological foundation of information ethics," *Ethics and Information Technology* 8 (2006): 175-186.

What to read for:

Capurro is focused on the nature of Being in an information environment. Read this article for his definitions of Being. Also, read carefully for his perspective on the rights of information in the digital environment. His thinking complements, but is different from Floridi. Together, Floridi and Capurro provide the deep philosophical basis for our consideration of values and ethical properties in new information technologies.

Paul Conway