

PHIL235/335-18S1

DIGI202-302-18S1 Cyberspace, Cyborgs and the Meaning of Life

## Syllabus and Course Outline - 2019

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### I. Course details

#### Description:

This course investigates a raft of questions - concerning mind, metaphysics, knowledge and human nature - thrown up by the ongoing revolution in information technology. These include: Might I attain immortality by porting myself into cyberspace? Am I already in cyberspace? Is the universe nothing but a computer? Should we fear a forthcoming Age of Robots? Is my iPhone part of my mind? Could a computer ever be programmed to be creative and intelligent, and to equal or exceed the problem solving capacities of the human brain?

#### **PHIL235 / DIGI202 learning outcomes:**

1. The ability to demonstrate in-depth understanding of key philosophical concepts, and familiarity with a series of landmark ideas in the Philosophy of Technology.
2. An enhanced capacity to use logic and conceptual analysis to diagnose flaws in arguments, and a heightened appreciation for the importance of critical thinking.
3. An enhanced ability to work collaboratively with others in evaluating arguments.
4. The ability to develop independent research interests and goals.
5. An ability to write an essay that explains the key philosophical positions in a given area, which summarizes the principal arguments for and against each position, and which presents the writer's own point of view.

#### **PHIL335 / DIGI302 learning outcomes:**

1. Familiarity with a range of philosophical problems and puzzles that arise in relation to new technologies.
2. An enhanced capacity to diagnose flaws in arguments and a heightened appreciation for

- the importance of critical thinking.
3. The ability to develop independent research interests and goals.
  4. An enhanced ability to work collaboratively with others in evaluating arguments.
  5. Communication of cogent summaries and analyses in written form.
  6. An ability to write an essay that explains the key philosophical positions in a given area, which summarizes the principal arguments for and against each position, and which defends the writer's own point of view.

**Course credit:** 15 points, 0.125 EFTS

**PHIL235/DIGI202 Contact hours:** Three lecture hours per week (36 hours total).

**PHIL335/DIGI302 Contact hours:** As above.

**Lecturer and Course Coordinator**

Dr. Douglas Campbell, Karl Popper Building, Room 618, Phone (03) 364 2385 ext. 6859

[douglas.campbell@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:douglas.campbell@canterbury.ac.nz)

Office Hour: 10am Tuesday.

**Required text:**

Bostrom, Nick 2014. *Superintelligence: paths, dangers, strategies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Learn:**

There is a website for this course on Learn. The course outline, lecture hand-outs, reading materials, and similar materials, are posted on the site: <http://learn.canterbury.ac.nz>

**II. Topics and Readings**

Week	Topics and Readings
1 & 2	The control problem Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bostrom, <i>Superintelligence—the whole book</i>.</li> </ul>
3 & 4	On “Why the Future Doesn’t Need Us” Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bill Joy, “<i>Why the future doesn’t need us</i>” (on Learn).</li> </ul>
5 & 6	De-extinction—ethics and authenticity. Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• D. Campbell, ‘A case for resurrecting lost species’, on Learn</li> </ul>
7 & 8	On Dennett’s “ <i>Where am I?</i> ” Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daniel Dennett, <i>Where am I?</i> (on Learn)</li> </ul>
9 & 10	The Matrix as Metaphysics, The Simulation Argument and the Doomsday

	Argument. Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chalmers, <i>The matrix as metaphysics</i>, (on Learn);</li> <li>• Bostrom, <i>Why Make a Matrix? And Why You Might Be In One</i> (on Learn).</li> <li>• Dieks, <i>Reasoning about the Future: Doom and Beauty</i> (on Learn)</li> </ul>
11 & 12	The Extended Mind Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Andy Clark, <i>Natural Born Cyborgs</i>.</li> <li>• Clark and Chalmers, <i>The Extended Mind</i>, (on Learn).</li> </ul>

### III. Assessment

#### A. Breakdown

	Item	Length	Weight	Due Date
PHIL235	Essay 1	1800 words	35%	Midnight last Friday of term 1. (5 April 2019)
DIGI202	Essay 2	1800 words	35%	Midnight last Friday of term 2. (31 May 2019)
	Six bi-weekly mini-assessment tasks		5% each. 30% total.	Midnight of every second Sunday of term time.
	Attendance		Up to negative 5% if poor.	

	Item	Length	Weight	Due Date
PHIL335	Essay 1	2500 words	35%	Midnight last Friday of term 1. (5 April 2019)
PHIL302	Essay 2	2500 words	35%	Midnight last Friday of term 2. (31 May 2019)
	Exam	2 hours	30%	TBA
	Attendance		Up to negative 5% if	

		poor	
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## B. Attendance

Attendance will be taken. If you are prevented by, e.g., illness, from attending, then please email the lecturer to explain. If you are unable to attend due to a clash, then make arrangements with the lecturer to complete alternative work.

## C. Essay topics

You can write your two essays on any topics discussed in class. You are welcome to make up your own essay question / topic, but you are also strongly encouraged to check your proposed topic with the lecturer. Possible essay topics include the following. (A good essay is narrow in scope—so if you chose one of the following topics feel free to narrow its scope as much as you like.)

1. What are the relative merits and demerits of ‘Oracles’, ‘Genies’ and Sovereigns’ where the existential threat they pose to humanity is concerned?
2. In his article, *Why the Future Doesn't Need Us*, Bill Joy argues that GNR technologies (genetics, nanotechnology and robotics) are likely, in the twenty first century, to yield weapons of mass destruction even more dangerous than the weapons yielded by the NBC (nuclear, biological and chemical) technologies of the twentieth century. Describe why Joy thinks GNR technologies are especially dangerous, describe his proposed response to the threats they pose, and critically assess whether it is response that a well-informed person should support, or whether some other response is to be preferred.
3. In this essay-- <https://aeon.co/essays/true-ai-is-both-logically-possible-and-utterly-implausible> -- Luciano Floridi attack both what he calls *the Church of Singularitarians* and *the Church of Altheists*, by arguing that there is unlikely to be a technological singularity any time soon. Explain and evaluate his position.
4. Which applications of de-extinction technology to wildlife conservation are, and are not, ethical?
5. Would a de-extinct mammoth be an authentic mammoth?
6. In an article entitled “Where am I?”, Daniel Dennett uses a brain-in-a-vat argument to defend an instrumentalist theory about the self. Is his argument convincing? Carefully explain and justify your answer.
7. Critically examine the position advanced by David Chalmers in his paper, *The Matrix as Metaphysics*.
8. Critically examine Nick Bostrom’s ‘simulation argument’.
9. Critically examine John Leslie’s ‘doomsday argument’.
10. What does Andy Clark mean when he says that humans are “natural born cyborgs”, and is he correct?
11. What is the “extended mind” theory, and is it plausible?

## D. Essay Submission

Essays are to be submitted on the Course’s learn site. All essays will be scanned by TurnItIn.

## E. Extensions

Essays submitted after the due date, without an official extension, will be penalised (see below). Other than in exceptional circumstances, extensions must be sought before the due date.

### **F. Penalties for Late Essays**

Essays submitted after the due date and without an extension will attract a penalty of two percentage points per day or part thereof. Other than in exceptional circumstances, no essays submitted more than 14 days after the due date will be marked.

### **G. Grades**

The University of Canterbury uses the following scale to relate grades to marks and GPAs:

<b>Grade</b>	A +	A	A -	B +	B	B -	C +	C	C-	D	E
<b>Marks</b>	90-100	85-89	80-84	75-79	70-74	65-69	60-64	55-59	50-54	40-49	0-39
<b>GPA</b>	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	-1

Any grade over 50 is a pass.

### **H. Plagiarism and Other Forms of Dishonest Practice**

Plagiarism occurs when passages of text are copied into an essay without being included in quotation marks and without sufficient acknowledgement of the source for the quotation. Minor variations to the wording of the original are not sufficient to avoid the charge of plagiarism. Plagiarism is regarded very seriously in the university, and may result in disciplinary action. Any essay in which significant plagiarism occurs will not be given a passing grade. If a substantial proportion of the essay is plagiarised, it will receive a zero grade. The Philosophy Department's policy is as follows:

Under no circumstances may you copy the words of an article or book without acknowledging it as a quotation. Nor may you copy or borrow extensively from the essays of other students, or have any other person write an essay for you. Be aware that we view these forms of cheating very seriously, and that we regularly take steps to detect plagiarism in work submitted by students. If we find that that you have engaged in dishonest practice, you may be subject to disciplinary action. Penalties range from a failing grade on the specific item of assessment or the course as a whole to expulsion from the university.

If you have any doubts about whether you are appropriately referencing sources and material, the onus is on you to check your approach with lecturer or the Learning Skills Centre.

### **I. Aegrotats**

If you feel that illness, injury, bereavement or other critical circumstances has prevented you from completing an item of assessment or affected your performance, you should complete an aegrotat application form, available from the Registry or the Student Health and Counselling Service. This should be within seven days of the due date for the required work or the date of the examination. In the case of illness or injury, medical consultation should normally have taken place shortly before or within 24 hours after the due date for the required work, or the date of the

test or examination. For further details on aegrotat applications, please refer to the *University of Canterbury Enrolment Handbook*. You have the right to appeal any decision made, including aegrotat decisions. Further information is available here:

[www.canterbury.ac.nz/ucpolicy/GetPolicy.aspx?file=aegrotatconsiderationprocedure.pdf](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/ucpolicy/GetPolicy.aspx?file=aegrotatconsiderationprocedure.pdf)

#### **IV. General information**

##### **Student Representative**

Your class will appoint a student representative at the start of the semester. Further information is available here: <http://ucsa.org.nz/support/>

##### **Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities should speak with someone at the Disability Support Service.

Webpage: <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/disability/index.shtml>

Ext. 6350

Email: [disabilities@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:disabilities@canterbury.ac.nz)