

Sustainability in "Computers and Ethics" Phil 214
Spring 2007
Kevin Nordberg

"Computers and Ethics" is a philosophy elective open to any student who has completed the two basic pre-requisites of Introduction to Philosophy and Ethics. Additionally, it is a required course for Computer Science majors due to the program's accreditation by the Computing Sciences Accreditation Board (CSAB). It is also required or recommended for several other related majors such as Media Information Technology.

The objective of the course is to acquaint students with the major ethical, social, and legal issues arising from the use of information technology and to give them a familiarity with the ethical analysis of typical situations in the application of computer technology.

In terms of the syllabus, the explicit mention of sustainability appears only in classes #24 and #34. However, the course actually lent itself fairly well to a more pervasive (= "infused") treatment of sustainability-related issues. Among the issues I treated are the following: (1) Disposal of computer hardware. (2) Use of computer technology to minimize energy usage and waste. (3) The use of computer technology to maximize the ability to generate energy from alternative sources (i.e. non-fossil fuel sources) of power such as wind generation. (4) Digital rights management. The increasing control over digitally recorded or stored creative material threatens to deprive artists of the freedom to use material from the creative commons and thus to threaten the sustainability of artistic creation. (5) Finally with so much reliance on information technology we are seeing the deskilling of our work-force in some areas with the danger that some industries or services may no longer be sustainable or may come to depend on so few "experts" that a computer crash or network problem may threaten the sustainability of these industries and produce a paralysis in certain sectors of the economy for lack of people who can perform the services or exercise the skills independently of computers. People no longer understand how things work or the reasoning that goes into conclusions in their field. Rather they only know how to read the screen and repeat what the computer tells them.

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Office Hours: To be announced. But any mutually agreeable time is always a possibility.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Computer Ethics, Deborah Johnson (3rd Edition)

The Impact of the Internet on Our Moral Lives, edited by Robert J. Cavalier

WRITTEN WORK REQUIRED Four (4) exams; one (1) book review; one (1) research paper or field project. The paper/project counts as 2 exams and the book review counts the same as one exam. No assignments will be accepted via email or internet.

DUE DATES

Monday 2/12/07 Due Date for your choices of project type and subject.

Monday 2/26/07 Due Date for preliminary bibliography for research paper

Friday 3/23/07 Due date for Book Review

Monday 4/30/07 Due date for Papers or Field Projects

APPROXIMATE SCHEDULE

ORIENTATION AND INTRODUCTION

Class 1 Introduction to the course
Project/Paper ideas and timetable

Class 2 Computer Ethics, Ch.1 "Why Computer Ethics?"

Class 3 "What Is Computer Ethics", James Moor (Handout)

Class 4 The Impact, Ch. 10 "Do We Need a New Framework of Ethics?" Tavani

Class 5 " " " "

REVIEW OF ETHICAL THEORIES

Class 6 Computer Ethics, Ch.2 "Philosophical Ethics"

Class 7 " " " "

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Class 8 Computer Ethics, Ch.3 "Professional Ethics"

Class 9 " " " "

Class 10 ***** FIRST EXAM *****

VIRUSES, ABUSE, AND HACKER ETHICS

Class 11 Computer Ethics, Ch. 4 "Ethics and the Internet I: Ethics Online"

Class 12 " " " "

Class 13 " " " "

PRIVACY AND SECURITY

Class 14 Computer Ethics, Ch.5 "Privacy"

- Class 15 " " " "
- Class 16 Why Privacy Is Important
- Class 17 "RFID: The Doomsday Scenario" Albrecht (Handout)
- Class 18 ***** SECOND EXAM *****

SOFTWARE AS PROPERTY

- Class 19 Computer Ethics, Ch. 6 "Property Rights in Computer Software"
- Class 20 " " " "
- Class 21 Philosophical theories of ownership
- Class 22 "Why Software Should Be Free", Stallman (Handout)
- Class 23 The Impact, Ch.2, "Beyond Copyright", Spinello
- Class 24 Sustainability: Digital Rights Management and the Survival of Culture
- Class 25 ***** THIRD EXAM *****

RESPONSIBILITY / LIABILITY

- Class 26 Computer Ethics Ch. 7 "Accountability and Computer and Information Technology"
- Class 27 " " " "
- Class 28 "Liability for Defective Electronic Information", Samuelson (Handout)
- Class 29 "Are There Decisions Computers Should Never Make?", Moor (Handout)
- Class 30 Impact, Ch. 5, "Trust in Cyberspace", Weckert

COMPUTERS, POWER, AND ALIENATION

- Class 31 Computer Ethics, Ch. 8 "Ethics and the Internet II: Social Implications and Social Values"
- Class 32 " " " "
- Class 33 Impact Ch. 6, "Should we let computers get under our skin?" Moor
- Class 34 Computers and Sustainability: Hardware Obsolescence, Energy Generation and Consumption
- Class 35 Impact, Ch.4, "Enter Here – At Your Own Risk: The Moral Dangers of Cyberporn" Dwyer
- Other classes To Be Announced
- Last Class REVIEW, WRAP UP, DISCUSSION
- Final ***** FINAL EXAM *****