

Spring 2020

Course: Social Impacts of Emerging Technologies

Instructor: Bradley Gasser, Ph.D

Summary

In this course, we will primarily review emerging technologies and the intersections these have with various social interests. As an example, the course will take a deep-dive on the brain-inspired revolution in “AI”, looking at contemporary models of human problem-solving and reasoning. However, ample time will be given to the social impacts these technologies are and will continue to have, by looking at facial recognition technologies, the integration of “AI” systems in everything from home appliances to early-warning systems in militaries, to surveillance and control in the Uighur populations of Western China. For all topics, scholars are encouraged to develop an understanding of the science behind these emerging technologies, but also to confront deep social, ethical and political questions about their use and integration into contemporary societies.

Select topics include:

- Artificial intelligence, surveillance, and automated systems
- CRISPR and genetic engineering
- ‘Fake meat’ and animal rights
- Astronomy and indigenous rights in Hawaii
- Nuclear weapons
- Inter-planetary exploration
- Biological resistance and ‘super bugs’
- Psychedelic drug usage
- Solar geo-engineering
- Alternative and renewable energies
- Brain-machine interfaces

Selected Readings

Readings for this course will consist of textbook chapters on the neural and cognitive sciences, entries from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, peer-reviewed articles from *Nature*, *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, and *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, and longform articles from *The New Yorker*, *MIT Technology Review*, *Wired*, and more.