



AI and Social Flourishing

Meeting Information

March 16 - 20, 5pm - 7pm

Instructors

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Course Summary

This course is intended to help students think more deeply about the intersection of flourishing and technology. Our focus will be on the ways that artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming how we relate to and socialize with each other. We will look closely at four “places of sociality”: family, friendship, work, and religious community, each of which is an important determinant of various aspects of flourishing in its own right. Drawing on the research of the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard as well as some recent interdisciplinary scholarship on flourishing and wellbeing, we aim to equip students with the analytical and practical tools to build and maintain social flourishing in the age of AI.

Course Procedure

Each session will be divided between lecture, guided discussion, and interaction with classmates. Readings will be distributed in advance. There are no assessments for this course, nor any outside work aside from readings. The only expectation for students is that they attend lectures and participate in discussions and activities.

Course Schedule and Readings

1. *Flourishing and AI* (16 March)

What does it mean to flourish? How might AI and other emerging technologies promote or diminish flourishing? In this introductory session, we will discuss the Human Flourishing Program's framework for empirical work on flourishing, including an overview of its historical context, and introduce some considerations which AI brings into the conversation.

Readings:

"Human Flourishing: An Introductory Framework": [webpage](#); [download](#).

Tyler Vanderweele and Jonathan D. Teubner, "Flourishing Considerations for AI," *Information* 17.1 (2026): [webpage](#); [download](#).

2. *AI and the Family* (17 March)

Although not universal, participation in family life is a very common experience across time and cultures. Empirical studies have found that the effects of family life and marriage on wellbeing are profound. Traditionally, children have been formed by the face-to-face care and instruction of adults in their life. But how might the introduction of technology transform the life of the family? Does AI pose a special or unique challenge to family life?

Readings:

Kevin Roose, "Can a Chatbot be Blamed for a Teen's Suicide?" *New York Times*, 23 October 2024: [webpage](#); [download](#).

Brendan Case et al., "Reconnecting our communities: Social flourishing on the far side of 'our epidemic of loneliness and isolation'," *International Journal of Wellbeing* 15(4) (2025): [webpage](#); [download](#).

Ian Marcus Corbin, "Family Culture in the Age of TikTok": [download](#).

3. *AI and Friendship* (18 March)

We are deeply shaped by our friendships. For many today, friends are a vital source of support, replacing the traditional role of the extended family in some cases. But, friendship is hard. To one extent, then, it is no surprise that an increasing number of young people report having no friends, but what do we make of the fact that many

are experimenting with AI chatbots that purport to be a “friend”? Can a computer program be a “friend”? What do we mean by “friend” in any case? We will discuss what is classically meant by friendship and whether and to what extent AI chatbots can truly be a friend.

Readings:

Neera Badhwar and Russell Jones, “Aristotle on the Love of Friends”: [download](#).

How Social Isolation, Loneliness Can Shorten Life by Tyler J. VanderWeele: [webpage](#); [download](#).

William Hasselberger and Micah Lott, “Crazy Close to the Real Thing: Questioning the Value of AI Companions,” *The Palgrave Handbook on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* (forthcoming 2026): [download](#).

4. AI and the Workplace (19 March)

Another important driver of wellbeing and flourishing is employment. Most adults spend large portions of their waking hours at work or working. But the “workplace” is increasingly one that is dominated by technology: we use it to communicate and, increasingly, it is used to surveil employees. In what ways is AI opening up pathways to employment, restricting them, and transforming the very nature of work itself? How might these changes affect the relationship between work and flourishing?

Readings:

William Hasselberger, “Human Agency and the Ethics of Meaningful Work: A Bibliographic Essay,” *Hedgehog Review* (2012): [webpage](#); [download](#).

Daron Acemoglu et al., “Can We Have Pro-Worker AI? Choosing a path of machines in service of mind,” Center for Economic Policy Research (2023): [webpage](#); [download](#).

5. AI and Religious Community (20 March)

Although controversial, recent empirical research has shown that participation in religious community is associated with various domains of flourishing, including greater longevity, lower incidence of depression, and even better survival from cancer. Is this simply because religious communities are opportunities for socialization, or might there be something special about the transcendent in our relationships?

Readings:

Tyler VanderWeele. Seeking the Transcendent. *Psychology Today* 28th December 2023: [webpage](#); [download](#).

Jonathan D. Teubner, "Chatbots and the Divine," *Hedgehog Review* (Web Feature), 15 October 2025: [webpage](#); [download](#).