

MCGILL UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY (2018-2019)

PHILOSOPHY 675 (Autumn): SEMINAR - CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY

Tuesday: 11:30 - 13:30

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Office Hours: Wednesday: 15:30-17:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION: The topic discussed this year will be "Philosophy of Technology" with Heidegger as our hermeneutic "clue". The analysis of technology and its "global dominance" is certainly a central phenomenological component of Heidegger's later thought. His description of this complex phenomenon called technology, however, produces certain tensions that are frequently resolved through one-sided readings. Some commentators emphasize the critical component of his reflections (often making Heidegger out to be a progenitor of "green" philosophy or "deep ecology"). Other philosophers highlight the call for a new, non-technological type of thinking (here Heidegger is often transfigured into a type of "new age" thinker). Some readers simply proclaim the "neutrality" of Heidegger's description (i.e., he is "neither for nor against technology"). A problem with the first type of interpretation is that it often re-inscribes a form of "calculative" thinking that Heidegger is clearly criticizing. The difficulty of the second view is that it sometimes goes in the direction of an "irrationalism" of which Heidegger is often accused but of which it can be shown he is not guilty. The third standpoint might be called a form of "phenomenological correctness" - clinging to the neutrality of the phenomenological project so as to offend nobody. Ultimately, accepting such a "distant" standpoint not only strips Heidegger's philosophy of some of its contemporary significance and vigour, but is also rather "un-Heideggerian" in that his philosophy critiques the very notion of the philosopher as a detached, neutral spectator.

The aim of this seminar is to chart a course of interpretation which does not take all of the bite out of Heidegger's critique of the technological "world" in which live, while stressing that "critique" should not be confused with banal criticism, nor with sentimental traditionalism, nor with exaggerated post-modernism. Among the different avenues which will inform our approach to Heidegger's The Question Concerning Technology: (i) Husserl's work, particularly his Crisis-text; (ii) careful attention to the relationship between Heidegger's earliest work (Being and Time) and his later discussion of technology; (iii) The works of Jacques Ellul, Lewis Mumford, and Canadian political philosopher George Grant.

ASSIGNMENTS: One essay (80%); Participation (20%)

SUGGESTED PREREQUISITE: A previous reading of Being and Time

-McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information).

-In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.