

PHL 501

Science, Technology, and Culture

Fall 2018

TR, 11:00 AM - 12:20 PM, LA 146

Albert Borgmann, LA 149

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(1) INTENT OF THE COURSE

The course is intended to clarify the connections between science, technology, and culture.

We will begin with a rudimentary introduction to the physical ground state of reality, quantum physics and by way of chemistry to its application in computer technology. For a philosophical introduction to technology we will turn to Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology." We will then read Christopher Preston's *The Synthetic Age* for an account of current technology. To have a reminder of a world that was vigorously shaped and yet intelligible and centered we will return to Heidegger and his essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking." Finally we will ask whether it's possible to recover such a world within the framework of technology.

(2) TEXTS

- Heidegger, *Basic Writings*.
- Preston, *The Synthetic Age*.

(3) STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

There will be five parts to the course:

1. The first two weeks will be devoted to a brief survey of the standard philosophical views of science, technology, and culture.
2. We will then devote three weeks to a simple introduction to quantum mechanics and its application in computer technology.
3. In the subsequent three weeks, we will discuss Heidegger's essay on technology.
4. We will read Preston's book in the following three weeks.
5. In the concluding four weeks we will discuss Heidegger's essay on "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" and the reform of the technological world.

(4) REQUIREMENTS

a. Classroom Performance (half of the course grade)

1. Toward the end of every other Tuesday and on the day of the final, Friday, December 14, at 10:10 AM, there will be a twenty minute test of three brief questions on the material covered in the preceding two weeks (not including the material of the Tuesday on which the test is given). You can make up a missed test prior to the next test. Otherwise you receive an F.

The first test is on September 18.

2. You can raise (but not lower) the overall test grade through class participation, asking for clarifications, asking questions of any kind, offering objections or comments.

b. Term Paper (half of the course grade)

Graduate students are invited to pick a particular issue of personal concern in the fields of science, technology, or culture, e.g., global warming, global justice, conservation, restoration, agriculture, wilderness, the distribution of prosperity, the Internet, the status of the arts, the structure of the economy, and the like, and are expected to apply significant parts of what we have learned about science, technology, and culture. I'll be glad to help with the formulation of a topic.

The paper should be about 12 pp. long (3000 words), double-spaced, paginated, *paper-clipped*, the notes at the end of the paper; no outline or bibliography.

Follow any of the standard formats. The paper has to incorporate some secondary material, two or so articles, a book or two, or two or so chapters from a book. The emphasis of the paper, however, has to be on original reflection.

Undergraduates should aim at the same kind of topic and format and at a paper of 10 pages (2500 words). Secondary material is not required. The emphasis must be on original reflection.

Outline due: October 23

Paper due: November 27

Office Hours: TWR, 10:00-10:30 AM and by appointment.

If you have a disability, please let me know so we can provide accommodations.