CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY (Jan-May, 2024)

PHILOSOPHY   4443 (Seminar) ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY

Topic: "Techno-Anxiety"
Tuesdays: 15:30-18:15

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Office Hours: Wednesday: TBD (for the moment- by appointment - please email me)
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COURSE DESCRIPTION: The topics discussed this year will be "Philosophy of Technology" with Heidegger as our hermeneutic "clue"; complimentary to this will be a reflection on "anxiety" ("about" technology).

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 "mystic" 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 course 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, especially in the context of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, "problematising" technology 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.

An collateral theme of the course will be "anxiety". The main point will be to juxtapose Heidegger and Freud's notion of "*anxiety*" (hence, both the traditions of phenomenology and psychoanalysis) in an effort to open up the particularly rich philosophical conversation which can be developed between *phenomenological approach to technology* and *psychoanalysis;* in particular with regard to the "phenomenon" of *anxiety.*

ASSIGNMENTS: One brief "Explication de texte" (20%); One preliminary paper proposal (10%) and presentation (5%); One Final paper proposal (15%); One final paper (35%); Participation in development of other proposals (15%)

HELPFUL (but non-necessary) PREREQUISITE: Some knowledge of the phenomenological tradition

-The Chinese University of Hong Kong values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the various codes of conduct of the CUHK.