

PHL 217S: Introduction to Continental Philosophy
Summer 2024, University of Toronto, St. George

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1 Course Description

In this course, we will survey Continental philosophy in its relation to technology. We will examine various accounts of the *nature* of science and technology and the *normative* issues raised by their changing societal impact. In doing so, we will examine how modern technology became imbricated with many of the new philosophical movements of the late nineteenth- and twentieth centuries: Marxism, phenomenology, critical theory, postcolonialism, psychoanalytic feminism, and poststructuralism. In particular, we will try to tease out some of these strands by focusing on the diagnosis of, and response to, the “crisis” in twentieth-century culture wrought by technological change. We will also examine some thinkers’ treatment of mass media (radio, TV, cinema, and computers), inviting reflection on the novel technologies structuring our lives today.

All readings will be made available on Quercus.

2 Learning Outcomes

- Acquire familiarity with the figures, problems, and schools of thought associated with Continental philosophy in the 19th and 20th centuries and their thinking about science and technology.
- Enrich one’s capacity for critical thinking by (i) carefully *reading* foundational philosophical texts, (ii) *discussing* them with others in a collaborative endeavour to understand, and (iii) *writing* exegetically and critically about these texts.

3 Requirements

1. Tutorial attendance & participation. **15%**
2. Class attendance & participation. **20%**
3. In-class essay exams. (2 x 20%). **40%**.
4. Final exam. **25%**

Tutorial attendance & participation The details of this requirement are to be determined by your tutorial leader.

Class attendance & participation Attendance and participation are required. This is a text- and discussion-based course; each meeting therefore requires you to prepare beforehand by working through the assigned reading on your own. Bring the text to class in hard copy (see the digital detox policy below). During the lectures, you'll often be asked to return to the text to work through a passage or question with a partner.

You may miss *two* classes without penalty, no questions asked. Further absences will result in a loss of 25% of your participation mark. Your mark for this requirement will be determined by the quality of your participation minus any penalty for absences.

In-class essay exams The two in-class essay exams will require you to engage exegetically and critically with our readings. They are non-cumulative. These exams have two parts.

Part one is *closed book* and consists of passage identification and fill-in-the-blank questions. This part tests your reading comprehension.

Part two is *open book* and *open handwritten notes* (no typed notes permitted). It requires you to answer two essay questions. For each essay, you must identify a *premiere passage* from one of our authors: 1–3 sentences that you think elucidate your answer. You must explain (1) what the passage means and (2) why it supports your answer. This part tests your critical thinking.

Final exam The final exam will take place during the University's final exam period (**Update:** 2–5 p.m. on August 16, 2024 in EX 200). The final exam is *closed book* and *closed notes*—no aids are permitted. However, you will be provided the essay question bank in advance. Of these six essay questions, I will select three for you to answer. Each essay should take around 50 minutes to write, and each is worth 25% of the final exam mark ($3 \times 25\% = 75\%$). The remaining 25% will come from ten passage identification questions, worth 2.5 points each. You will have three hours to complete the exam.

4 Policies

Digital detox policy At the beginning of each class, you are required to put away all of your electronic devices into your bag and leave them there—just like an exam. Think of this as a temporary digital detox. Have the course text, notepad, and pen or pencil with you. *I will provide you will hard copies of the readings.* Here is what past students have said:

- “Matthew’s device-free policy allowed me to fully immerse myself in the class, stay present in the moment, and truly engage with the material, resulting in a deeper understanding and a stronger connection to the subject matter.”
- “I loved taking a digital detox once a week with Matthew’s class! It gave me a chance to disconnect from the constant distractions of technology, reconnect with my classmates, and genuinely enjoy the learning experience.”
- “Thanks to the device-free policy in Matthew’s class, I felt more connected to my peers and the material. By putting away our devices, we created a supportive and focused environment that made learning enjoyable and meaningful.”

- “Matthew’s approach to implementing a device-free day in class helped me to be more attuned to the material. Without the constant temptation of notifications and screens, I was able to absorb information more effectively and feel a sense of clarity and focus.”
- “Taking a break from digital devices once a week with Matthew’s class was a breath of fresh air. It allowed me to recharge, be fully present, and experience genuine happiness in learning without the distractions of technology.”

Students with accessibility needs are exempt; students who would like to use electronic devices should contact me immediately so that we can work out an appropriate exception.

Communication The best way to contact me is in person—either before or after class or during my office hours (see below). The second best way to contact me is by email. Before emailing me, check the syllabus and all announcements. Ensure that your email contains all relevant information. I will try to respond within 48 hours. Redundant or incomplete emails will not receive a response. Do not use Quercus’s message system.

Office hours Office hours are *drop-in* and *by appointment*, either online or in person, whatever works best for you. I’d love to see you at my office hours! You can book office hours with me using Bookings ([link](#)). I recommend you prepare your questions beforehand so we can make the best use of our time.

In person office hours will take place on Mondays 5–5:50 at B Espresso Bar (273 Bloor St W), across the street inside the Royal Conservatory. Come say hello!

Missed exams Students who miss an exam will receive a zero. There are no make-up exams. It is imperative that you plan accordingly.

Acknowledgment of land We can never work to end systematic and institutional violence if we do not centre the narratives of indigenous folks in our collective decision-making for social justice and equity. As settlers in Turtle Island, we directly benefit from the colonization and genocide of the indigenous people of this land. In order to engage in resistance and solidarity against the injustices inflicted on the indigenous people of this land, it is imperative we constantly engage in acts of decolonization. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of the “Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation” peoples, the traditional caretakers of this land. I would also like to pay my respects to their elders past and present, and to any who may be here with us today, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Adopted from the UTM Student Union ([link](#)).

Accessibility services Students with diverse learning needs are welcome in this course. Please contact the Accessibility Centre ([link](#)) for a needs assessment and to make arrangements.

Academic integrity All students, faculty and staff are expected to follow the University’s guidelines and policies on academic integrity. For students, this means following the standards of academic honesty when writing assignments, collaborating with fellow students, and writing tests and exams. Ensure that the work you submit for grading represents your own honest efforts. Plagiarism—representing someone else’s work as your own or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program—is a serious offence that can result in sanctions. Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic

Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations. For more information, please see Student Academic Integrity website ([link](#)).

5 Schedule

Part 1 — Foundations of Technological Thought

- July 3*** Marx, "Fragment on Machines" (1858)
- July 8** Husserl, "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity" (1935)
- July 10*** Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953)
- July 15** Catch up
- July 17*** Essay Exam 1

Part 2 — The Politics of Technology

- July 22** Marcuse, "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology" (1941)
- July 24*** Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), §§1–53, 165–211
- July 29** Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), pp. 3–17, 37–53
- July 31*** Essay Exam 2

Part 3 — Applications: Radio, TV, Computers, Cinema

- August 7*** Fanon, "This is the Voice of Algeria" (1956)
- Adorno, "Prologue to Television" & "Television as Ideology" (1963)
- August 12** Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975)
- Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies" (1990)
- August 13** Screening — Chris Marker, *Level Five* (1997)

Exam Period Final Exam

* = 3-hour class period