

History of Western Civilization III: Techne and Sophia Syllabus

Instructor

Fred Beuttler

Quarter: Spring 2024

Start – end date: March 19 – May 7

Session day/time: Tuesday, 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm

Course Code and Section: HUAS90905 24S1

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Course Overview

This third course in a three-quarter sequence will examine the development of a “world civilization” through the perspective of the West, focusing on the relation between technology and “wisdom.” Instead of a political framework, this year’s sequence will examine how changes in technology, primarily information technology, impacted the philosophical and spiritual ideas of a particular culture. In many ways, this revisits the struggle between the “Ancients” and the “Moderns,” that is, between the perennial and the progressive.

Modality

Remote learning

Spring quarter will examine the significance of the new technology in the Information Age, from the telegraph to the Internet, from around 1850 to the present. Part of premise of this course is that we are now living in era of change as fundamental as that from an oral to scribal culture in the Axial Age and as the emergence of print culture. Rather than a survey, this class will discuss selected primary documents, supplemented by the works of modern historians, to illuminate these developments in the history of ideas. Students can take any or all of the courses; there are no pre-requisites for the third course. There are no prerequisites, and students can take one, two, or all three courses.

Note to students

This course is non-credit; there are no papers, no exams, no grades! (Education in its essence!)

Required texts

Peter Watson, *Ideas: A History of Thought and Invention, From Fire to Freud*, (Harper 2006) ISBN-13 978-0060935641

Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (Cambridge UP 2010), ISBN-13 : 978-0521179447

Primary source readings, emailed to students each week.

Books can be purchased online through the [University of Chicago Bookstore](#).

Course readings

Week	Topic	Reading Assignment
Week 1	Introduction: The Story So Far Democracy, Liberty, and Equality: 1789-1840s	Skim: Watson, Introduction, pp. 1-18 Skim: Poe, <i>History of Communication</i> , Intro and c3 “Humanity in Age of Print” Condorcet, <i>The Progress of the Human Mind</i> , 1794 Herder, on Nationalism, 1784 I. Kant, <i>Critique of Practical Reason</i> , preface, 1788 B. Constant, <i>The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of Moderns</i> (1819) Tocqueville, v1, c3, <i>Democracy in America</i> (1835)
Week 2	Industrialism and its Critics	Watson, c30, “The Great Reversal of Values – Romanticism” Rousseau, <i>Discourse on Inequality</i> (excerpts) Blake, “And Did those Feet in Ancient Time” J. S. Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> (selections)
Week 3	Time and the Integration of the Natural and Human Sciences	Watson, c31, “The Rise of History: Pre-History and Deep Time” Watson, c32, “New Ideas About Human Order: The Origins of Social Science” Poe, <i>Communications</i> , c4 <i>Humanity in the Age of Audiovisual Media</i> Darwin, <i>Origin of Species</i> (selections) M. Weber, <i>Science as a Vocation</i> K. Marx, <i>Interview with Chicago Tribune</i> , 1879 Pope Leo XIII, <i>Rerum Novarum</i> 1891 (selections)
Week 4	The Modern and the Secular	Watson, c33, “The Uses and Abuses of Nationalism and Imperialism” Watson, c34, “The American Mind and the Modern University” Watson, c35, “Enemies of the Cross and the Qu’ran – the End of the Soul” W. James, <i>Pragmatism</i> c1-2; <i>The Ph.D. Octopus</i> ; <i>The Will to Believe</i> T. Herzl, <i>The Jewish State</i> 1896 (selections) H. G. Wells, <i>Anticipations</i> , 1902 c1-2

Week	Topic	Reading Assignment
Week 5	Technology, the State and Big Science	<p>Watson, c36, “Modernism and the Discovery of the Unconscious”</p> <p>A. Flexner, <i>Medical Education in the United States and Canada</i> (selections)</p> <p>V. Bush, <i>Science, the Endless Frontier</i> (selections)</p> <p>N. Wiener, <i>Cybernetics, The Human Uses of Human Beings</i> (selections)</p>
Week 6	Crisis: The Middle Third of the Twentieth Century	<p>C. Dawson, <i>Religion and the Totalitarian State</i>, selection 1934</p> <p>W. Benjamin, “Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction”</p> <p>J. Ortega, <i>Revolt of the Masses</i>, excerpt</p> <p>G. Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”, 1946</p> <p>H. Arendt, <i>Origins of Totalitarianism</i>, 1951, c9</p> <p>C.S. Lewis, <i>The Abolition of Man</i>, selection “On the Tao”</p> <p>J. Ellul, <i>The Technological Society</i> (selection)</p>
Week 7	The Internet and the Digital Age	<p>Poe, <i>Communications</i>, c5 “Humanity in the Age of the Internet”</p> <p>McNeely, <i>Reinventing Knowledge</i>, conclusion</p> <p>Marshall McLuhan, <i>Understanding Media</i>, ToC Intro, c1, through p.17. Here: https://designopendata.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/understanding-media-mcluhan.pdf</p> <p>E. F. Schumacher, <i>Small is Beautiful</i> (selection)</p> <p>Steven Levy, “The Hacker Ethic,” 1984</p> <p>Bill Gates, Open Letter to Hobbyists, 1976</p> <p>Stewart Brand, “We Owe It All To The Hippies,” 1995</p>
Week 8	The History of the Future	<p>Poe, “Conclusion: Media and Human Well-Being”</p> <p>Watson, “Conclusion”, pp 739-746</p> <p>Netflix documentary, T. Harris, et al. “The Social Dilemma” (2020).</p> <p>Ray Kurzweil’s talk on “The Singularity,” 2001</p> <p>Klaus Schwab, “Fourth Industrial Revolution: What it Means, How to Respond” 2016</p> <p>Stahlman, et al “Making Sense of a World in Transition”, 2021</p>

Week	Topic	Reading Assignment
		Joel Kotkin's <i>The Coming of Neo-Feudalism</i> (ToC and intro) here: https://www.amazon.com/Coming-Neo-Feudalism-Warning-Global-Middle/dp/1641770945
		Other Readings, TBD

Accessing remote courses

Remote courses are taught through our Canvas platform. Approximately two weeks before your class begins, we will add you to your canvas site using the email address you provided at the time of registration. An invitation will then be sent to that email. Click the “Get Started” button in the email to begin the Canvas login process. For step-by-step instructions, please visit <https://grahamschool.uchicago.edu/academic-programs/online/learning-resources/liberal-arts>. Once you’ve created your Canvas account, you can access any Graham School canvas course for which you are registered at: <https://canvas.uchicago.edu>.

Accessibility information

Student Disability Services (SDS) works to provide resources, support and accommodations for all students with disabilities and works to remove physical and attitudinal barriers, which may prevent their full participation in the University community. Students that would like to request accommodations should contact SDS in advance of the first class session at 773.702.6000 or disabilities@uchicago.edu.

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For more information, please see [this handout for students](#) as well as the [University’s Policy on Harassment, Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct](#) and [Policy on Title IX Sexual Harassment](#). You can also reach out directly for services and support from the [Office for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support](#) by emailing titleix@uchicago.edu.

If you, or another student you know, wishes to speak to a confidential resource who does not have this reporting responsibility, please contact the Sexual Assault Dean on Call through the UChicago Safe App or at 773.834-HELP.

Questions? Contact Zoë Eisenman at zmel@uchicago.edu.