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Why Philosophy? Why Now? Engineering Responds to the Crisis of a Creative Era

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Abstract

For the inaugural Workshop on Philosophy & Engineering (WPE-2007), this abstract asks why engineers are turning now to philosophy. Upon reflection, philosophy and engineering are very different occupations, and engineering has rarely turned to philosophy in the long history of the systematic design and production of complex artifacts. After briefly examining events since World War 2, the extended abstract carries over Kuhn's explanation of the rise of philosophy of science during the intellectual tumult of relativity and quantum physics in the opening moments of the 20th century to the case of engineering in the early moments of the 21st century. Specifically, the paper argues that the crisis of the rapid pace of technological change, reflected in the centripetal forces of the O's (bio, nano, and info) may help explain increased interest in a philosophy of engineering at this time. The abstract concludes by citing a number of ways that philosophy may help clarify what otherwise might be confusing times.

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