

# Do Artifacts Have Politics?

**Type:** Argumentative Essay

**Problem Space:**

How technical systems are linked to organizing power and authority.

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. Do artifacts (machines, etc) embody specific forms of authority?
2. Other methods for evaluating technologies role have shortcomings.

## II. BODY

1. Artifacts as forms for ordering of human activity
  - a. Histories of architecture, city planning, and public works contain many examples of physical arrangements with explicit or implicit political purposes. These devices might have been designed and built in such a way that it produces a set of consequences, logically and temporally, prior to any of its professed uses.
    - i. Example 1: Moses' Bridge
    - ii. Example 2: McCormick's Molding Machines
  - b. Conclusion: Consciously or not, deliberately or inadvertently, societies choose technological structures that establish a framework for public order, similar to legislative acts or political foundings.
2. Some technologies are by their very nature political in a specific way
  - a. Some kinds of technology require their social environments to be structured in a particular way in much the same sense that an automobile requires wheels in order to move.
    - i. "The thing could not exist as an effective operating entity unless certain social as well as material conditions were met.
    - ii. "Design or arrangement of a system could provide a convenient means of establishing pattern of power and authority of a given system"
    - iii. Example: Atom bomb
3. Others are strongly compatible with, but does not strictly require, social and political relationships of a particular stripe.
4. Within both versions of the argument there is a further distinction to be made between conditions that are internal to the workings of a given technical system and those that are external to it.

## III. CONCLUSION

"To understand which technologies and which contexts are important to us, and why, is an enterprise that must involve both the study of specific technical systems and their history as well as a thorough grasp of the concepts and controversies of political theory."