

Living Together in a Techno-World

Technology is everywhere. Whether we like it or not, technology in its manifold forms permeates all aspects of the contemporary world. Its boom is no longer limited to the “developed” countries, on the contrary, it can be observed that often poorer regions and communities are more eager to employ the most up-to-date solutions (take for example the rapid development of paying via smartphone technology in the countries of Africa where credit card infrastructure is still absent).

Technology is a factor that transcends traditional philosophical oppositions. Obviously, it is easily recognizable everywhere, all around us in the external world. But more and more often it also constitutes some internal elements of our own bodies in the form of various implants and prostheses. Moreover, what seems to be the innermost – our minds – are subject to the technological stimulations coming from various psychoactive pharmaceuticals or from the constant contact with digital media that are often designed to deliberately disrupt our concentration. Technology accompanies us at work and at leisure time. The screens of our digital gadgets are among the first things we attend to in the morning and the last ones we see going to sleep. It seems there currently is no technology-free aspect of the human world and we experience only the rapid progress of this tendency.

A simple conclusion seems inevitable: we can neither understand ourselves nor our times without deeply thinking about technology. A stronger claim seems plausible: technology should be the main topic of contemporary philosophy of culture. Understanding technology is an urgent call because the faster it develops and changes reality, the less familiar we feel with our traditional conceptual tools. By “understanding” I mean not only facing the emerging theoretical problems, such as: Where is the borderline between the “human” and “technology?”; or bioethical dilemmas such as: Should we modify the human genome to improve mankind? There is also a vast area of more practical – but nevertheless philosophical – issues concerning the way we should live in the everchanging, technologized world: how do we properly utilize the new possibilities or how do we not get lost in the aggressive world of digital media where our time and attention are often being treated as

another “natural resource” to be mined, stored and eventually capitalized on? Finally, there is yet another field for philosophical inquiry here: the question of evaluating technology and its various aspects. Does technology help in bringing upon a new, more pleasant and inclusive world, or on the contrary – does it mainly serve the privileged to consolidate the *status quo* which is oppressive for many? Does it make people smarter and more reflexive or does it mainly boost the lower instincts of pleasure and consumption?

The articles from this issue’s Thematic Section bring many different answers to these and other philosophical questions concerning technology. In his article “Can a Robot Be Grateful? Beyond Logic, Towards Religion” Stanisław Krajewski from the University of Warsaw raises a fundamental issue about the relation between the human being and a digital computer or a robot. Are computers perfect models of human minds as some cognitivists used to claim? Will robots be soon indistinguishable from human beings? Answering negatively to such questions, professor Krajewski points at several features and activities that are typical for humans but inaccessible to robots. Among them there are: consciousness of mortality, consciousness as such, taking care of others, and perhaps most compellingly, developing an I-Thou relation and prayer.

In the next article, Joel Gn from the Singapore Institute of Social Sciences examines the pop-cultural phenomenon of cuteness through a deep philosophical analysis of some iconic mascots such as the female rabbit Miffy or Domo-kun, which are enormously popular in Asia. What is cuteness? How are the images of the lovable being produced and imprinted in us by the media? How do these images fulfill their purpose of seducing people? These highly original and thorough analyses aim at disclosing the transformations of the affective space brought upon by the structures of mass culture. Joel Gn, alongside Stanisław Krajewski, is concerned with the “space between one and the other”. He builds upon Heidegger’s view, to whom he refers to, in his ambivalent diagnosis of the changes caused by technology.

Heidegger is also one of the main references in our third essay which is also connected to the topic of visuality in contemporary media. Róisín Lally from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington elaborates on “The Ontological Foundations of Digital Art”. The author rightly claims that “the internet has become our predominant public space and yet the role of art in this space remains largely unthought”. She then reconstructs the Heideggerian theory of art, according to which the purpose of art is twofold: whereas petty art seeks instant pleasure, great art serves contemplation and the “unconcealing” of Being. This distinction proves useful when evaluating contemporary images of digital art. Interestingly, Róisín Lally is probably the first author who has commented in a serious philosophical manner on retro arcade video-games manufactured by the Japanese company SNK.

Rafał Ilnicki of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań is yet another author who implements the Heideggerian conceptual framework to the analyses of contemporary technology. In his essay devoted to cryonics as a “technological fictionalization of death”, he claims that this technology (freezing terminally ill people in hope of curing them in the future) exerts existential impact on the human condition. Technology enforces an unprecedented metaphysical change: our “being-towards-death” changes into “being-towards-deactivation”. Despite that the promise offered by cryonics is still fictional, it nevertheless leads to new eschatology (“a technologically grounded version of *apokatastasis*”) and to new understandings of death.

The last article in the Thematic Section is devoted to the relation of “smart” electronic technology to democracy. Tibor Solymosi from Case Western Reserve University begins with a set of questions that should concern everybody living in a modern democracy: How does the Platonic critique of democracy stand in the wake of contemporary media technology? Does the proliferation of electronic gadgets and social media, that continuously tend to distract us, put us in a tyranny of our lowest instincts, aiming only at pleasure and instant gratification? Does technology catch us in the trap of “dopamine democracy”? Solymosi, introducing a sophisticated theoretical framework combining neurology and contemporary pragmatism, suggests that the only

solution to this crisis is a better education which would also make use of the available technology in order to transform “dopamine democracy” into “creative democracy”.

The Forum section of our current issue consists of two articles which complement each other in an interesting manner. Adam Lipszyc from the Polish Academy of Sciences writes about the idea of space which he uses as a vehicle of comparing the Freudian concept of anxiety to some key ideas from Jewish cabala. This juxtaposition, far from being obvious, is made via Derrida’s interpretation of the Platonic notion of *khora*. It leads to uncovering something unexpected: the Messianic dimensions in Freud’s thought. The second article in this section explores another one of the Kantian fundamental forms of experience. John W. August III looks for the connections between time and the felt passage of it and the experience of meaning. Discussing phenomena such as boredom, ambition, and concern, the author comes to an extremely interesting and original hypothesis regarding the relation between the fluctuations of meaning and the changes in the fluidity of the experience.

Finally, our Discussion Papers, Comments and Book Reviews section opens with a very interesting and wittily written piece by Gary Herstein, a Whitehead scholar with a background in computer science, devoted to some paradoxes and issues concerning the measurement conventions in science. Next comes Crispin Sartwell’s review of Randall Auxier’s *Metaphysical Graffiti*, which is a unique collection of philosophical essays devoted to rock music published recently by Open Court Press. In the last article in this issue of *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* Matthew Sharpe from Deakin University in Australia discusses “a troubling sign of the times”. By this he means the use that the bloggers and enthusiasts of the so called “Alt-Right” make of the Modern Stoicism philosophical movement.