

What Makes Us Human?:

Some Philosophical Insights into Technology and Subjectivity

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to explore the meanings of technology from several perspectives such as Martin Heidegger, Bernard Stigler, and G. W. Hegel. In the first week, it will discuss modernity and its relation to technology and the second week sets forth the dimension of subjectivity, which easily dismantles the bright side of the modern individual. The lecture will examine the cultural response to Artificial Intelligence by bringing in popular arguments like Yuval Harari along with the philosophers described above. In the third week, it will deliver the way in which technology interferes human identity as such. It will analyze the hidden meaning of Neuralink. Neuralink, an American neurotechnology company founded by Elon Musk and eight others, is dedicated to developing a mind-machine interface (MMI).

Instructors

Slavoj Zizek Senior Researcher, University of Ljubljana

Alex Taek-Gwang Lee Professor, School of Global Communication, Kyung Hee University

Week 1 (July 8 – July 12, 2019) by Alex Taek-Gwang Lee

I will deliver a general introduction to the philosophical perspectives to technology and its relation to humanity. By drawing on Yuval Harari's works, the lecture will account for the way in which the new development of technology influences the understanding of human beings. It is supposed to deal with some philosophers like Heidegger and Stigler so as to dig into the interconnection between technology and a human.

1. What Is Technology?
2. Artificial Intelligence
3. Digital Humanities
4. Technology as Modernity

Literature: Yuval Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, 2015.

Week 2 (July 15 – July 19, 2019) by Alex Taek-Gwang Lee

I will recount the process of colonialization from the perspective of cosmotechnics by rethinking technology. Technology always contains interality from within and serves as mediation between scientific knowledge and nature. The inbetweenness of technology rethink the meaning of modernity. In this way, I will argue that technology is still already political in the process of modernization. In the first Korean modern novel *Heartless*, which was entirely influenced by Japanese modern literature, protagonist Yi Hyongsik encourages his friends to study abroad and come back to build up the nation with their scientific knowledge. Exclaiming “Science! Science!” He urges three fellow travellers to return to “give the Korean people science.” The climatic scene of the novel, written by Yi Kwangsu, sets forth the way in which the intellectuals in colonial Korea regarded science as the fundamental element of the strong nation. For them, then, to strengthen the country comes along with modernization and science is the very foundation of modernity. The primal milieu of the Korean modern literature betrays the relation between scientific knowledge and colonialism, even though the novel does not clarify what science means by its narrative. The term science here symbolizes the power of Western civilization and the knowledge must be brought to the nascent nation for an independent country. Without science, from this perspective, there is no possibility of national independence. Yi Kwangsu seemed to convince that scientific knowledge is necessary for bringing forth the strong nation-state. For him, the strength of one country depends on mature culture as well as economic development. Science is nothing less than the technological foundation of cultural and economic achievements. It is not accidental that Yi Kwangsu considers science, or more precisely technology, as the fundamental motor of modernization. According to Yuk Hui, modernization cannot be separated from the change of scientific knowledge, in particular, of cosmology. Colonialization was the process of imposing Western cosmology onto the non-Western countries and implementing Western science as a universal knowledge of nature. As Bentley Allan argues, the ideas of scientific cosmology transformed the international order since 1550. The cosmological concepts of Western science facilitated the shift from the pre-modern order founded on divine providence to the current law premised on economic growth. The ideas of the connections between scientific cosmology and international politics strongly influenced Asian power elites who sought to find out the problem of their countries. The Chinese translation of Henry Wheaton’s *Elements of International law with a Sketch of the History of the Science* (萬國公法) accelerated Asian elites’ concerning the relation between scientific cosmology and its practical realization, i.e. international law. Law re-enframing life was inseparable from colonial biopolitics. The new global order as such was for colonial elites the technological incarnation of the Western cosmology.

1. On Cosmotechnics
2. Technology and Colonialism
3. Liberalism and Governmentality
4. Modernity and International Law

Literature:

Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*, 2018

Slavoj Zizek, *Like A Thief In Broad Daylight: Power in the Era of Post-Humanity*, 2019

Week 3 (July 22 --July 26, 2019) by Slavoj Zizek

In recent years, techno-scientific progress has started to utterly transform our world - changing it almost beyond recognition. In this extraordinary new book, renowned philosopher Slavoj Zizek turns to look at the brave new world of Big Tech, revealing how, with each new wave of innovation, we find ourselves moving closer and closer to a bizarrely literal realisation of Marx's prediction that 'all that is solid melts into air.' With the automation of work, the virtualisation of money, the dissipation of class communities and the rise of immaterial, intellectual labour, the global capitalist edifice is beginning to crumble, more quickly than ever before-and it is now on the verge of vanishing entirely. But what will come next? Against a backdrop of constant socio-technological upheaval, how could any kind of authentic change take place? In such a context, Zizek argues, there can be no great social triumph-lasting revolution has already come into the scene, like a thief in broad daylight, stealing into sight right before our ever eyes. What we must do now is wake up and see it. Urgent as ever, *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight* illuminates the new dangers as well as the radical possibilities thrown up by today's technological and scientific advances, and their electrifying implications for us all. First, when our brain is connected to digital machines, we can cause things to happen in reality just by thinking about them (I direct my thought at the TV screen, and the selected program starts to play; etc.); then, my brain is directly connected to another brain, so that my thought is shared by another individual (I daydream about an intense sexual experience, and another individual can directly share my experience)... Whatever the (dubious, for the time being) scientific status of this idea, it is clear that its realization will affect the basic features of humans as thinking/speaking beings. But HOW? To indicate an answer, we will turn to a philosopher who had no idea about neuralink: Hegel.

Assessment

Essay (no more than 1,000 word) (50%), Participation (30%), Attendance (20%)

– More details will be provided during the first session of the course.