

*SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF PHILOSOPHY AND
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The emerging Society for the Study of Philosophy and Technology mounted a seminal program in Chicago on April 30, 1977. Meeting in conjunction with the Western Division of the American Philosophical Association, some thirty philosophers who came to discuss technology's impact on society wound up trying, at least implicitly, to assess its impact on philosophy.

The first part of the program, entitled "The Impact of Technology on Society," involved three papers which explored the adequacy of the vision of some European philosopher as a basis for understanding technology. Henryk Skolimowski (University of Michigan) synthesized from these papers some characteristics of technological thinking which he offered as guides for future research, thereby stimulating a vigorous interchange of ideas. The program concluded with a group of panelists reporting on their participation in various interdisciplinary projects.

David Lovekin (Sauk Valley College) interpreted Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* (Paris, 1954; New York, 1964) to be saying that "the logic of technology" is both in itself and in its cultural ramifications an amoral instrumentalism. As distinguished from mere "technical operations" (tools individually controlled), rationalization and artificiality are "technical phenomena" which transcend and nullify individual involvement to produce an abstract "technological consciousness." Paradigmatically true of machines, this instrumentalism reduces value to use and obtains wherever rationalization of process ("technique") becomes the only consideration. The correlative of rationalization is artificiality, a tendency to view things not as objects to be perceived but as processes to be measured and transformed into artifacts. From these basic "technical phenomena" others flow: automatism, self-augmentation, monism, universalism, and autonomy.

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Having thus presented Ellul's vision of technology as a state of mind ("technological consciousness"), Lovekin suggested that an alternative account might be reached by analyzing cultural consciousness per se after the fashion of Ernst Cassirer.

Michael Zimmerman (Tulane University) contended that Herbert Marcuse also tends to view technology as a state of mind, or "ideology," in accordance with his mentor, Martin Heidegger. Tracing the trouble to Descartes, Heidegger had portrayed technology as a renunciation of man's custodial and even reverential role with respect to nature in favor of a desacralized, amoral, and unqualifiedly mercantile manipulation and exploitation of anything that can enhance the Nietzschean Will to Power. With the help of a Freud's-eye view of Marx (see his *Eros and Civilization*), Marcuse traces the ideology of technology not to economics but to the desire of the ruling class to dominate by suppressing those basic drives which, at least under capitalism (*One-dimensional Man*), do not contribute to production. For Marcuse, the problem is not technology per se but the socioeconomic system which necessitates excessive containment of human fulfillment for reasons only tangentially related to a narrowly technological state of the art (*Essay on Liberation*, 1969).

In a joint paper by himself and Nancy Holmstrom, Bernard Gendron (University of Wisconsin) focused more narrowly on mass production in order to argue that the work of Marx provides a basis for challenging what Gendron calls the "technological account" of alienation among factory workers. In Blauner's *Alienation and Freedom* (1964), alienation from one's work is accounted for technologically by preautomation methods of production and hence will dissipate with the coming of automation. To this Gendron replies that, even if such alienation is to some extent endemic to assembly-line methods of production, its character and extent is far more deleterious in a capitalist economy than it is under socialism. For alienation is not only performance-related but is also related to the economic system within the context of which performance is carried out. Thus a worker's attitude toward work under capitalism, where by definition one works without managerial comprehension of one's input to one's job or its relationship to other jobs, compares unfavorably with that of a worker in a socialist economy who, again by definition, does have such participatory input. So improvement in working conditions by automation will have at best a limited ameliorative effect on worker alienation under capitalism, according to Gendron. Moreover, performance-related alienation is less of a problem under socialism than capitalism because technological changes tend to be made to some extent on the basis not of technical but of socioeconomic priorities. Under

capitalism these priorities oppose, but under socialism favor, the real interests of the workers.

Skolimowski responded by declaring that all consciousness is technological, thereby denying the existence of any special "technological consciousness" and thus rejecting Lovekin's proposal to approach the subject through a study of cultural consciousness. From his own personal knowledge of conditions in Poland as well as of Marx's attention to two additional sources of alienation (society and environment), he questioned Gendron's attempt to attribute less alienation to industrial workers under socialism than under capitalism. As a kind of guide for future research, Skolimowski drew from the papers a list of ten characteristics attributed to the technological mind, namely, that it is ephemeralized, theological or self-divinizing, Promethean, naive both epistemologically and eschatologically, obliterative of the subject/object distinction, existentially alienating, perversely rational in its reduction of *logos* to *praxis*, nihilistic or at least systematically closed in its rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, and ontologically monistic, in that it views the relationship between technology and the world in any of three undifferentiating ways: (1) the Pythagorean (and/or Galilean), which reduces the world to numbers and equations; (2) the Heideggerian, which envisions the world as raw materials and is related to but different from (3) the Faustian, "a very messy monism" according to which the world is to be manipulated and controlled by man.

Ensuing discussion, as noted by the chairman, Bernard Murchland (Ohio Wesleyan University), tended to stress the need to go beyond the frames of reference within which our (European) intellectual heritage has viewed technology, notably by means of a more hospitable and encompassing concept of the character and scope of reason.

The second part of the program, entitled "Outreach Activities in Philosophy of Technology," featured a panel of philosophers whose interest in technology is finding expression in real world activities. Ronald Benson (Ohio Northern University) is involved in health-care planning, most recently with regard to acquisition criteria for the new \$1 million-\$2 million CAT-scanner. John Phillips (Saint Cloud State College) directs, and brings philosophical considerations to bear upon, a baccalaureate degree Environmental Studies program. Frederick Rossini (Georgia Institute of Technology) has been involved as a philosopher in federally-funded research into the methodological and epistemological structure of technology assessments. Carol Ann Smith (University of Missouri at Rolla) spent 1976-77 at the National Humanities Institute at the University of Chicago working with humanists from other disciplines to develop a culture-grounded value

theory. Richard Van Iten (Iowa State University) is involved in a Program in Technology and Social Change through which students have taken on such challenging tasks as setting up a bicycle factory in Pakistan. It is relevant to add that Samuel Shuman (Wayne State University), who chaired this session, complements his philosophy with lawyering, in which capacity he is particularly interested in problems arising in the area of mental health.

What is perhaps most noteworthy about this program is the way in which it evoked from those in attendance expressions of dissatisfaction with narrowly rationalist aspects of European philosophy of technology. Many of the philosophers in attendance may have considered only the first part of the program as being within the proper domain of philosophy of technology; but others, including everyone on the second panel, at least impliedly extend that domain to include practical involvement in the social process of understanding and dealing with technology.

The resolution between *logos* and *praxis* in the philosopher's relationship to the technological society is probably soluble not by a more accommodating theory but by choosing, in full awareness of all the possible dangers, to live one's life and devote one's energies to working for its greater humanization. Not every philosopher will follow Rossini and his colleagues into critique of technology assessment. Nor will all have an opportunity to be, like Skolimowski, occasional philosopher in residence at Paolo Soleri's Arcosanti. Nor, finally, will others follow Shuman to try to effect solutions through the law. Theory, even global theory, should remain as important to philosophers as it has been to the Club of Rome. But the challenge of our times requires each of us to show how our peculiar insights contribute to ameliorating the technology-related problems that continually confront everyone. It is not just a question of coming down from the ivory tower. The ivory tower is in actuality no longer there. It will survive in its effects, however, so long as any academician still thinks that ideas can somehow change the world just by bumping into one another, primly, behind closed doors.