



**UNIVERSITÄT
ERFURT**

Max-Weber-Kolleg

Max-Weber-Kolleg | Forschungsbau Weltbeziehungen | Universität Erfurt | 1:30-7 p.m.

Symposium Programme

Technology and the Good Life

This symposium creates a vital space for debate, inviting all who are interested in critically exploring the values and future directions embedded in our technological world. The goal is to start bridging a crucial divide in contemporary thought. Today, two powerful ways of understanding technology often remain separate: the detailed empirical studies of science and technology, which often set aside deeper normative questions and traditions of social critique that sometimes view technology merely as a force of alienation. The symposium is an invitation to bring these perspectives together. We invite people to connect rich empirical analysis with profound ethical and philosophical critique, as we collectively interrogate the normative horizons of our technological age.

30 March 2026 | Organizers: **James William Santos and João Tziminadis**

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Presentations

Viktor Berger | Digital Colonization of the Lifeworld and Its Implications for the Good Life

The presentation develops a conceptual outline of how online platforms may mediate systemic processes that colonize the lifeworld. It argues that the scope of Habermas's theory of colonization must be broadened. A thorough account of how systemic processes undermine the symbolic reproduction of the contemporary lifeworld requires attention to forms of systemic influence that permeate everyday life even when steering media such as money or power are not directly involved. To address this gap, the analysis incorporates theories of technological affordances and considers actors as embodied beings. Both affordance theory and the embodied cognition paradigm in phenomenology offer valuable resources for this task. The presentation contends that digital colonization of the lifeworld may have detrimental effects on the possibilities of the good life, as it harms the life-worldly spheres of personality, society, and culture – or, put differently, creates obstacles to establishing stable relations of resonance. It also emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the lived experiences of platform users. The strength and character of digital colonizing tendencies may vary significantly across platforms and between individuals. This will be illustrated by empirical findings from various platforms, including online dating and satellite navigation.

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Ariane Hanemaayer | Innovation and Entrenchment: Genomic Sequencing Technologies and a Healthy (Good) Life

Two common narratives influence the ways that new technologies are introduced in existing institutions and social systems. The first I will call the “response to a social need” and the second I will call “the driver of social change.” This paper will explore these two (in no way exhaustive) stories that accompany the justifications for integrating new technologies within healthcare. Specifically, I focus on Genome Wide Sequencing (GWS), which is a set of tests that can identify the genetic causes of disease. Using an archaeological form of critique, informed by the method of Michel Foucault, I demonstrate that these narratives are myths; the test has neither yet resolved the “need” or problems it claims to solve in clinical care, nor revolutionized health systems. Instead, I will explain how forms of discursive entrenchment influence the materiality of technological integration in established health systems. In particular, my argument focuses on the discursive relations of evidence-based medicine, the types of “needs” it prioritizes and reproduces, while stabilizing its dominance as the authoritative way to make healthcare decisions and investments. I raise normative questions about the kinds of stories we tell and what they obscure. Using this analytical method makes visible the ongoing relations that shape how societies make sense of “innovation” when it comes to health and disease.

Jörn Lamla | Digital Resonance as a New Justification Regime

This paper discusses the extent to which cybernetic ideas of the good life are spreading in the age of artificial intelligence, and how these ideas make use of resonance as a mode of justification. This could reduce the effectiveness of this concept as a critical anchor in the relationship between technology and the good life. This raises the question of what could take its place to renew the critical impulse.

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Pieter Lemmens | Traumatic Technology. A Tragic Critique of the Eudaimonology of Contemporary Philosophy of Technology with Bernard Stiegler and Mehdi Belhaj Kacem

In my talk I aim to pose some questions with respect to the persistence in contemporary philosophy of technology as an academic discipline to focus almost exclusively on ethical assessments of concrete technological artefacts – by default the most recent gadgets (think iPhones and ChatGPT) – and doing so overwhelmingly in a laudatory if not cheerleading way under covert neglect of the ever more dramatic harmful and destructive effects on both individuals and the social fabric that these artefacts most often have these days, not to mention the impact on society of the exclusively profit driven process of technological innovation as such, which cannot be considered as beneficial anymore for the well-being of humanity and the planet at large by any stretch of the imagination. Indeed, we see the very structures of our society and the citizens trying to survive in them being ruined before our eyes by a ruthless, oligarch-controlled technological juggernaut – with geopolitical tensions escalating every day, propaganda and censorship suppressing any remaining dissent, transhumanism, neo-feudalism, technocracy and technofascism on the rise everywhere, the renewed militarization of our societies brutally put on the agenda and a live-broadcast genocide becoming the most normal thing in the world. This world, the world as it unfolds outside, is suspiciously absent in contemporary academic philosophy of technology, with which I mean, to be sure, the currently dominant approaches which have all in common a more or less explicit rejection of the so-called ‘classic’ or ‘transcendental’ tradition in philosophy of technology exemplified by thinkers such as Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcuse and Ellul and instead embrace what has been called ‘the empirical turn’ since the 1990’s, to wit postphenomenology, critical constructivism, social constructivism (or Actor-Network-Theory) and science and technology studies. What is severely lacking in these approaches, and was still strong and prominent in the ‘classics’, is not only a truly philosophical interest in what Heidegger called ‘the question concerning technology’ (i.e., an investigation into

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its metaphysical-ontological 'nature'), but also – and probably because of this metaphysical-ontological orientation – a lucid awareness and critical attitude with respect to what may be called the 'dark', the negative and adverse dimension inherent in all technologies as well as in 'Technology with a capital "T"' (Don Ihde), a dimension often referred to with the term 'nihilism' but which can also be categorized under the concept of evil, as shown by the French-Tunisian philosopher Mehdi Belhaj Kacem.

In my talk I want to question what I would like to call the tenacious eudaimonology of mainstream philosophy of technology, the fact that it tends to idolize the fruits of what Heidegger called the hidden event of enframing and views them mainly if not exclusively as ever more steps toward the improvement of the human condition and the realization of the 'good life'. In contrast to this pervasive trend, I want to make a plea for the necessity, especially in our times of a resurfacing 'de-civilization of power' (Rainer Mausfeld) and an escalating techno-elitist authoritative and appropriative brutality, of a counterbalancing, let us say 'ponerology' (Andrzej Łobaczewski) of technology', based on a decisively tragic (instead of metaphysical) understanding of technology as pioneered, on the one hand, in Bernard's Stiegler's pharmaco-organology and historical pathology of technology, and on the other in the tragico-dialectical 'pleonectology' of technology as hyper-appropriation-expropriation developed by Mehdi Belhaj Kacem. Our time demands a juxtaposition of the question concerning technology with the question concerning evil.

Jörg Oberthür | Quantified Self as 'DIY'? Considerations on Digital Lifelogging as (Maybe) Utopian Practice

Abstract to follow

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Robert Rosenberger | On the Phenomenology of Political Suppression: Examples from Hostile Architecture

Ideas from the phenomenology of technology can be useful for drawing out aspects of systems of political oppression that have become set within the patterns of our everyday lives. In particular, I review some ideas from the postphenomenological perspective to consider both how politics can become instantiated within the objects and institutions around us, and also how such politics can become sedimented within people's learned bodily-perceptual habits. As a guiding case, we'll consider examples from anti-homeless design, i.e., objects in public spaces designed to deter usages taken up by people living unhoused (such as benches designed to deter sleeping on them, or garbage bins designed to deter picking). And we'll explore how these "hostile" designs play roles in larger agendas of policy and design that function to push the unhoused out of shared public spaces. These ideas can help to bridge those philosophies of technology that identify large-scale political patterns of design and usage, such as critical theory, and those like postphenomenology that specialize in the articulation of the details of user experience and human-technology relationships. The account I develop here can help to describe how larger political structures connect in variable ways to the level of individual experience, becoming concretized in everything from the design of the objects of our surroundings, to individuals' sense of normalcy, learned habits of perception, and their conception of the world and their own identities.