What is and what is not a problem with the Homo Sapiens Technologicus

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• I state here very directly and frankly what I think
  ○ after reading, teaching, meeting people, participating in tech-business… for 10 years or so
  ○ starting from a classical training in philosophy
    ▪ and still engaged in fundamental more than applied philosophy
    ▪ complete title reads: Philosophy of contemporary technology, philosophy of contemporary wisdom
• … and I leave it open to discussion.
what sort of predicament are we in?

- is Homo Sapiens having a problem because he has to become Technologicus?
- because of the artificial environments we have to live in?
  1. take a natural entity
  2. put it in an artificial environment
  3. something looks strange…

- but Homo Sapiens is not that kind of “natural entity”

a category mistake: natural / artificial

- Homo has always been Technologicus, a technical species
  - we cannot live but in an environment which is natural and artificial,
    - a world in which we use houses, knives, fires, clothes…
    - and a very sophisticated technique: language
  1. not an “artificial” environment,
    - even if artifacts are so important in it
  2. not exactly a “natural” environment
    - even if everything in it comes more or less directly from nature
• a category mistake with consequences:
  
  o we are lost in problems such as
    ▪ Genetically Modified Anything (Organism, Plant, Food, Human…)
    ▪ In Vitro Anything (Fertilisation, Embryo transfer and optimisation…)
    ▪ conservationist or preservationist ecology?
    ▪ “natural” medicine for “artificial” diseases
      – pollution-induced, stress-induced, artificial food-induced… diseases
    ▪ … or artificial medicine for natural diseases
      – pharmaeutics, high-tech surgery, GMO-produced insulin…

  what is the natural environment for us?
  – a log cabin in the woods?
  ▪ how can we live (naturally?) in artificial environments?
    – my home: 124th floor, apartment #B407

• we cannot merely use “natural” as a value and “artificial” as a pejorative
  o except if… we like unsolvable problems
    ▪ which is actually the case (see below)
the correct category: human

- a human environment...
- human is a root-category, just like nature and artifact
  - if not, we have no chance understanding anything contemporary
  - human is a category
    ▪ proceeding from nature and artifact
      - it was not a root-category from the start
      - we evolved to that status
    ▪ mediating them
    ▪ coevolving with them
      - a 3-terms coevolution: human / nature / artifacts

- a human environment is neither:
  - purely natural
  - purely artificial
  - just a mix or sum of these two
    ▪ two quite different classifications:
      1. human / non-human within artifacts
        ▪ ⇒ risks misapprehending the ontological unity of artifacts
        ▪ + risks initiating a sorting process
          ▪ so-called “(re-)humanisation”
          ▪ ex: in medicine, human factor and technical factor misapprehended as 2 separate factors
      2. nature / artifacts / human within the human sphere of consciousness and action
        ▪ ⇒ an opportunity to apprehend the contemporary ontological pluralism
        ▪ ex: the “medical environment” is a hybrid experience of artifacts / human / nature
becoming wise, while being so technological

• what is at stake then?
• Homo Technologicus is having a problem because he has to become, at least, *Sapiens*
  o because of the power of his present technologies
    ▪ we are an arrogant species and we were wrong to call ourselves “sapiens” so early
    ▪ “sapiens” means *wise*
      – as a survival condition for this special species
    ▪ to understand “sapiens” to mean “knowing (scientifically)” is a category mistake and a factual nonsense
      – we were humans long before Newton
      – most of us humans are not exactly scientists…

• usual category mistakes:
  o science / technology
    ▪ a mistake about what things really are in our inhabiting the world
    ▪ discourse / action
      – such a confusion is an ethical disaster
      – the very specific tie between language and action may be the very specific feature of humans
      – so 1) understand *the difference* “in essence” → 2) understand *the merging and melting* “in existence”
  o knowledge / wisdom
    ▪ a mistake about what humans really long for
    ▪ a representational discourse mirroring the world in words (and math)?
      – here philosophy of technology has much to learn from the new (non-positivistic) trends in philosophy of science
basic reconceptions: being, environment and action

- we have to re-think what we are and what we want
  - hypothesis: what if this duty were precisely the opportunity to be human?
- being human =
  - building and inhabiting a human environment
    - = a culture, a civilisation, a world
  - do we need a human environment to be human? Yes
  - does it require humans to build a human environment? Yes
  - is this a vicious circle? No, it is the cultural circle of cultural life

- Bauen, wohnen, denken (Heidegger)
  - we think according to the way we dwell, we dwell according to the way we build
  - = what culture means, from “material civilization” up to high speculations
  - ⇒ contemporary technology is not an opponent to (a dead) culture but a central part of (a living) culture
- a new ontology
  - not exactly for “new objects”
  - but for new modes of inhabiting the world = new existential dimensions
    - hypothesis: contemporary technology means not only new experiences but radically new existential dimensions
• ➞ a new existential analysis
  o Don Ihde, Albert Borgmann, some of you in this room…
  o TV, fridge, telephone, laptop computer, pacemaker, skyscrapers…
    ▪ intimate relationships we don’t have to be ashamed of…

• a new philosophy of action
  o what does action mean in our environment?
  o it is so convenient to keep on saying “no action is possible…”, “there is nothing we can do…”
    ▪ when, honestly: we do not want to do anything
      – but we do not want either to assume that decision (doing nothing) and responsibility…
  o reconstruction: environment seen not as a constraint but as potentials, opportunities…
    o = a change of mind → how can we make it happen?
    o by being a self, a person in capacity (Paul Ricoeur)
    o something has to change in ourselves to really use the potentials of modernity
      ▪ instead of being crushed by the pressure of modernity
      ▪ the problem with “reflexive modernization” is not with modernity but with the reflexive
        – the problem with the reflexive is: the self
regaining roots

- roots inside, not outside
  - outside roots could be: leaders, communities, (dogmatic) values, texts (revelation or law)...
  - inside roots are: self-reliant self, sapientia

- philosophical heritage, western and eastern
  - may help to go beyond our (suicidal?) arrogance
  - go global in philosophy too:
    - integrate tradition, from the Stoics to Heidegger and beyond
    - integrate the East (Buddhism in particular)
    - maybe restart from existing cultural bridges: Gandhi, Emerson and Thoreau...

consequences: controversial issues

- politics? No, thank you
  - I suggest: traditional politics is now always part of the problem, not of a possible solution
    - this category mistake is tragic: we loose time and energy only fueling the predicament we are in

- ideology or religion? No, thank you
  - I can’t prove it, but let's just see it, as a very sad case of Emperor’s New Clothes:
  - ideology and religions… just do not work
    - or even worse → category mistake: a source of evil as a source of good…
• institutions? No, thank you
  
  o they were the structures of the industrial civilisation
  o now they are the glue
    ▪ that prevents us from turning the industrial page (turning the corner) and starting something different, sustainable
    ▪ they pretend to be in charge
      – so that we delegate to them instead of being in charge ourselves (with our self)
      – so that they neutralise the issues instead of acting on them
  o application fields:
    ▪ sustainability, medias content, bioethics, schooling…

• coevolutions? Yes, please
  
  o global means something at least:
    ▪ every change in one of the 3 (human / artifacts / nature) has an impact (multiple and interactive impacts) on the others
  o → a transaction model for change decisions
    ▪ every change (aka “progress”) is a negotiation case
      – with real (1) and symbolic (2) gains (3) and losses (3)
      – = 4 items to check, validate, negotiate…
      – and after that a decision is made to process or not process the transaction
• micro-actions? Yes, please
  o micro-action =
    ▪ a real action
      – not a speech
    ▪ micro- = small-scale : the consistent self scale
      – not some heroic feat... (no heroes; anonymous everyday wisdom)
    ▪ such as : leave litter or not, buying this or buying that, watching
      or not watching this on TV, walking or using a car, or a bus, or a
      bicycle...
    ▪ resulting in: care for the commons (material and cultural
      commons), care for one’s self
  o why do we like unsolvable problems?
    – you don’t think we do? Read some bioethics...
    ▪ because we do not want to act
      – = the dirty little secret of technoethics and bioethics
    ▪ how to make a problem unsolvable?
      – think global (instead of micro-action), trust an institution, ask for a
        new law, a new political party, a moral improvement of your fellow-
        humans...

• self-reliance? Yes, please
  o human being = being consistent
  o define your own satiety
    ▪ it does not matter how “high” or “low” it is, the point is to have a
      satiety conception of one’s own
      – = not to be insatiable
  o enjoy non-submissiveness
    ▪ just say “no (thank you)”
      – Gandhi: we don’t use enough that powerful word, existing in any
        language – no!
    ▪ we are obsessed by the power-side of politics (➔ unsolvable
      problems), we should focus on the submissiveness-side
      – if no one accepts symbolic submissiveness, we do push the
        boundaries...
  o the Self is the problem
    ▪ technology is not
    ▪ “artificial” is not
• the consistent Self is the connection between technology and *wisdom*
  o the way to the Homo sapiens technologicus

• *care, self-care*, is the attitude for a human being confronted with any sort of environment
  o in particular: affluence, welfare institutions, comfort devices, easy-going things, alcohol-tobacco-drugs…
  o in particular: power, power over matter, nature, other people
    ▪ wisdom and self-care build (inside-)roots for a more substantive *power: over oneself*

• Homo Sapiens Technologicus is in charge of himself/herself – or must be
  o He/she has no right to transfer responsibility to any kind of “environment”
    ▪ in particular: technophobic transfers…
  o he is wrong any time he “delegates” to discharge himself
    ▪ contemporary technology makes it possible not to delegate
  o contemporary technology *gives access* to this form of self-reliance: *wisdom in a technological world*
    ▪ it is not what we are looking for, I’m afraid…
    ▪ but we should.
- Download this presentation:  

- Comment and discuss online:  
  - Michel.Puech@paris-sorbonne.fr

- Browse the book (in French, so far) Homo sapiens technologicus:  