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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
  - ○ on the basis of my book *Homo sapiens technologicus* (Paris, Le Pommier, 2008)
    - ▪ 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
  o 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
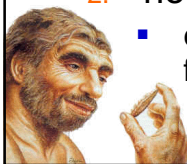
- **a category mistake with consequences :**

  - 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
      - pharmaceutics, 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**
  - 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
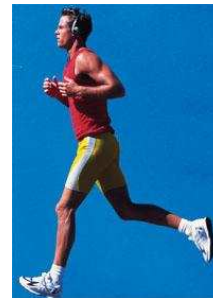
- a *human* environment is neither
  - ○ purely natural
  - ○ purely artificial
  - ○ just a mix or sum of these two

    - ▪ 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*
  - 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:
  - 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"
  - 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
  - Don Ihde, Albert Borgmann, some of you in this room…
  - TV, fridge, telephone, laptop computer, pacemaker, skyscrapers…
    - intimate relationships we don't have to be ashamed of…

- a new philosophy of action
  - what does *action* mean in our environment?
  - 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…
- reconception: *environment* seen not as a constraint but as potentials, opportunities…
  - = a change of mind → how can we make it happen?
  - by being a *self*, a person in *capacity* (Paul Ricoeur)
  - 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

  - they were the structures of the industrial civilisation
  - 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
  - application fields:
    - sustainability, medias content, bioethics, schooling…

- coevolutions? Yes, please
  - *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
  - → 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
  - 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*
  - 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
  - human being = being consistent
  - 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
  - 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…
  - the Self is the problem
    - technology is not
    - "artificial" is not

- the *consistent Self* is the connection between technology and *wisdom*
  - the way to the Homo sapiens technologicus
- *care*, *self-care*, is the attitude for a human being confronted with any sort of environment
  - in particular: affluence, welfare institutions, comfort devices, easy-going things, alcohol-tobacco-drugs…
  - 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
  - He/she has no right to transfer responsibility to any kind of "environment"
    - in particular: technophobic transfers…
  - he is wrong any time he "delegates" to discharge himself
    - contemporary technology makes it possible not to delegate
  - 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.

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

o Browse the book (in French, so far) *Homo sapiens technologicus*:
- http://technosapiens.free.fr

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