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### **Society and Technology: Battle for Autonomy**

The advancement of technology is changing our understanding of and relationship to autonomy faster than we can realize. On one hand, development gives us power to broaden the scope of what is possible and encourages freedom by offering anything from assistive gadgets that improve physical skills to communication tools that cross geographical boundaries. Given access to information, we ourselves can pursue an education and make sound decisions. Social media platforms offer never-before-seen opportunities for interaction and self-expression. But, this level of comfort and ease of use might also be an indirect threat to the social order we have had implemented for centuries. In Foucault's piece, *The Eye of Power*, he challenges the traditional notion between humans and technology by introducing new ways how technology can shift power dynamics of the intimate relationship between humans and technology. In this paper, the close relationship between technology and humans and how the modern technology era has caused a shift of autonomy.

The concept of autonomy is a fundamental aspect of human existence, encompassing the ability to make choices and decisions without external influence. In the 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, A black monolith appears to primitive humanity, inspiring them to take their initial steps toward utilizing tools. Millions of years later, in 2001, humanity reaches the moon and discovers another monolith. A crew of astronauts are then sent on a mission to Jupiter that is tied to the monolith<sup>1</sup>. The spaceship's computer, HAL, begins to exhibit strange behavior amongst the crew and eventually tries to take over leading to an intense battle between HAL and the crew. HAL's ability to take complete control over the spaceship creates a sense of dependence for machinery. HAL's ability to make decisions independently, without human evaluation, calls into question its autonomy. This blurs the line between human and artificial intelligence, challenging the idea that autonomy is exclusive to humans. The depiction of HAL's distinct behavior serves as a warning about the dangers of unregulated technological growth and the erosion of human autonomy. The character's actions question our concept of autonomy and push us to reconsider how humans, technology, and power interact.

Although modern technology can offer an innumerable amount of benefits, it's undeniable that its universal surveillance and data collection create a panopticon-like environment, eating away at our autonomy through constant monitoring, biased algorithms, and

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<sup>1</sup> Clarke

the limitation of free choice. In his text, *The Eye of Power*, Foucault says, “Architecture manifested might, the Sovereign, God. Its development was for long centred on these requirements. Then, late in the eighteenth century, new problems emerge: it becomes a question of using the space for economico-political ends.”<sup>2</sup> Foucault intends to highlight the change of architecture’s purpose from serving the power of the sovereign and God, to being used for economic and political purposes. Just as architecture took a major shift from serving an absolute power to other means, technology is taking the same turn, being used for control and profit. Social media collects huge amounts of data from posts, activity, and browser history. The data could then be used to create profiles for targeted advertisements and manipulation. Facial recognition software is a growing technology that would be used in public spaces and could track and identify individuals from cameras. However, this raises huge concerns about mass surveillance and the potential for misuse by governments. The technologies listed exhibit features that would contribute to a panopticon-like environment. Being able to comprehend such parallels allows us to gain a better grasp of how technology affects human autonomy and strengthens current systems.

While modern technology does have the potential to greatly benefit society, it is important that it must not be overdone. Philosopher and researcher, Nick Bostrom, focuses on the ethics and risks of artificial intelligence. He argues that artificial intelligence will likely become super-intelligent in the near future, and humans have to establish a system to ensure that this technology is handled responsibly.<sup>3</sup> However, It has been shown that this “super-intelligent” technology has seen exponential growth in improvements, faster than humans can implement legislation to help mitigate the dangers from these technologies

“Porcha Woodruff was eight months pregnant when she was arrested for carjacking. The Detroit police used facial recognition technology to run an image of the carjacking suspect through a mugshot database, and Ms. Woodruff’s photo was among those returned.”<sup>4</sup>

This is just one example out of hundreds of cases that have occurred due to malpractice with artificial intelligence. Misusing artificial intelligence can be terrifying. Biased algorithms could discriminate. AI weapons could cause devastation, while manipulative AI could dominate humans. We must be mindful of these hazards and implement controls to ensure that AI helps everyone.

In my previous works, I have mentioned my appeal towards Heideggerian ideologies. In terms to the shift in autonomy between technology and humans, I believe Heidegger’s philosophy applies very well to this situation. Heidegger’s approach to modern technology is

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<sup>2</sup> Foucault, 148

<sup>3</sup> Bostrom

<sup>4</sup> Swarns

based on the belief that technology is more than just a tool, it influences our view of the world and ourselves. Technology is starting to have unpredictable impacts on how we interact with our environment as it becomes more autonomous. Heidegger's notion of *technikon*<sup>5</sup>, which maintains that technology is a tool rather than an end in and of itself, is fundamental to his philosophy. One may argue, following Heidegger, that the rise in autonomous technology is a reflection of that technology's inclination to become a means, not a goal in and of itself. Because technology is being built to accomplish particular tasks rather than being recognized for its own sake, it is becoming more self-sufficient.

The shifting autonomous relationship between technology and humans is a philosophical and existential issue with far-reaching implications for how we think about ourselves, our world, and ourselves. As the autonomy of technology increases, filling and creeping into many physical and mental realms of human existence, we must grapple with the implications of this shift with the same care and thoughtfulness that has marked our history of innovation. On the one hand, the increasing autonomy of technology can be understood as a testament to human existential triumph. Creating and innovating the technologies that act autonomously can advance human development, expand and improve our capabilities, and foster many major improvements to various domains such as the health, education, transportation and communications industries. However, on the other hand, the emerging autonomous existences of technology-driven actors in many aspects of our material, social and psychological lives pose many philosophical and existential questions about the meaning of human existence. The increasing autonomy of technology strips technology off the status of a simple tool or instrument, available for human purposes, and conversely, thickens the phenomenal or lived reality of technology as actors, present in many spaces including those that were excluded to humans. Unlike the phenomenal devoidness of or humanity's absolute control over any tool or instrument, emerging technologies are increasingly seamlessly integrated into our human experiences, workspaces and worlds in ways that are often not clearly understood. Increasing technology autonomy pairs with and amplifies these novel phenomenological characteristics. It challenges the very ways we think about agency and action, as well as the overall notion that one can summon and exercise their agency as a sole author of their own destiny. Instead, the phenomenal experiences and social dynamics of technologies that act as agents in our midst blurs the lines of human and machine. This pairing unveils the profound philosophical and existential questions about constitution, the limitation and extent of sheer human freedom and action in the man-technology and humanity-technology networks, the nature of consciousness, agency, and freewill and its morally laden implications. The increasing autonomy of technology reveals a shift in the extent of human

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<sup>5</sup> Heidegger, 310

responsibility that shapes our relationships with such agents as well as the consequences for circumventing, fully accepting or managing technological autonomy. But because the increasingly autonomous technologies are part of the phenomenal existences of humans (and vice versa), many of the philosophical and existential implications of the shift in existential terms are existential questions about humanity: what does it mean to be human in the face of the increasingly autonomous relationships with the products of our ingenuity? Are we still in full control of our destiny? Are we still singular authors of our own destiny, or are we now nodes that are part of multiple agents of unified will? Answers to these questions will determine our futures. The way forward is therefore one that demands careful and nuanced reflection on the emerging autonomous nature of our current generation of technology, so as to enable us to live and interact with machines in ways that are respectful of the existing relationships between technology and humanity and which affirm our humanity by making those relationships more beneficial to us all.

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