

AI and Barbarism

A Critique of Digital Reason and the Project of Autonomy

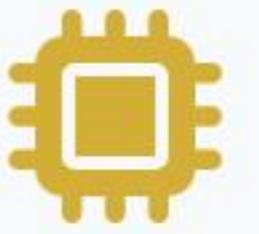
Alexandros Schismenos (2025)

The Fundamental Conflict



Autonomy

The human capacity for self-determination and the conscious creation of laws, meanings, and social values.



Heteronomy

A state where society is governed by external "objective" laws—today manifested as algorithmic determinism.



Barbarism

A crisis of meaning where politics is reduced to administrative calculation and technical efficiency.

The Logic of Digital Reason



Degradation of Logos

Schismenos argues that AI represents a degradation of **Logos** (Human Reason) into mere **Ratio** (Calculation).

- **Instrumental Rationality:** Obsession with 'how' over 'why'.
- **Loss of Interiority:** AI lacks the biological rootedness and mortality required for judgment.
- **Mythinformation:** The ideology that more data equals truth.

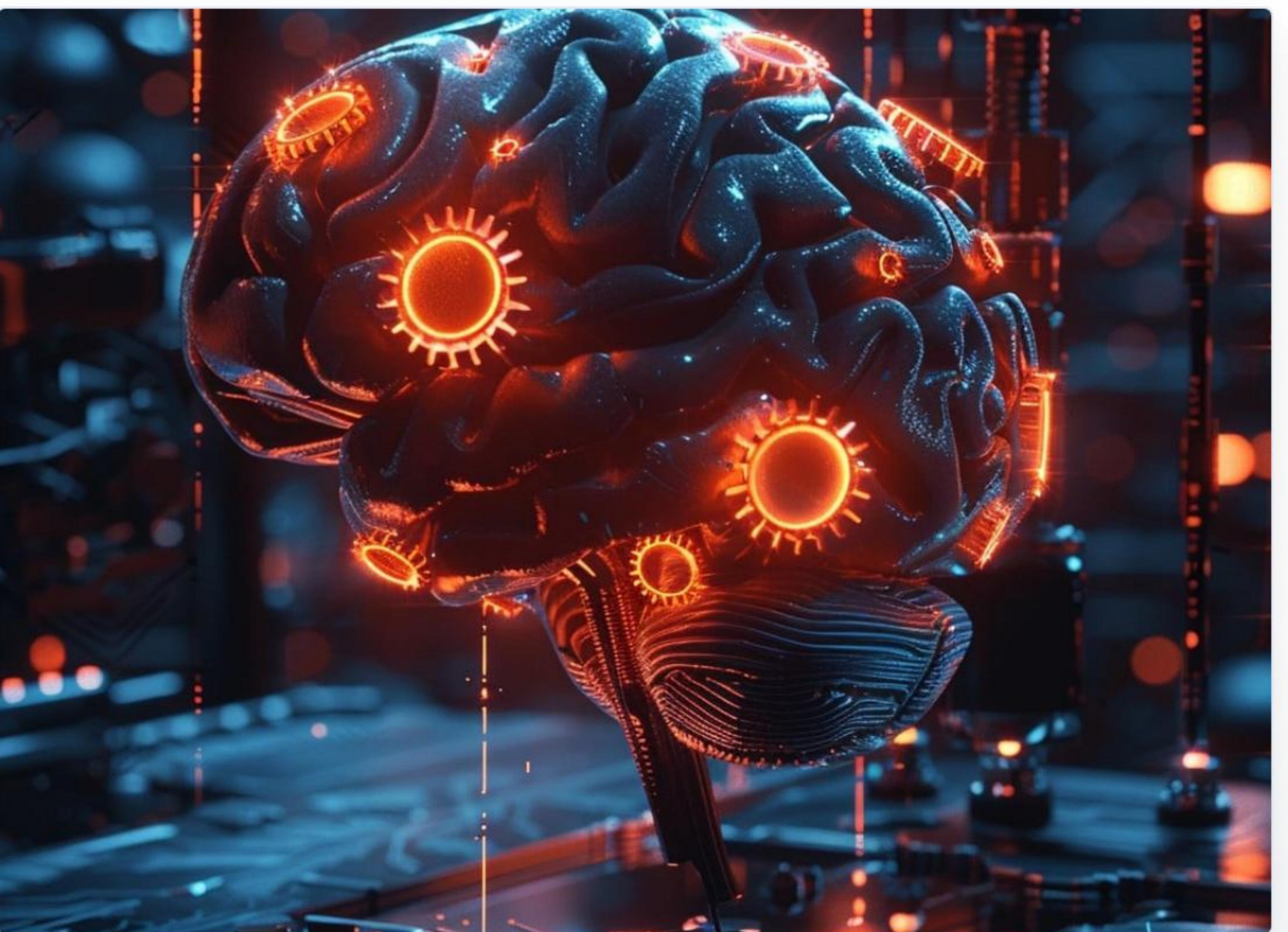
The Path of Technoskepticism

Schismenos rejects the binary of current discourse, proposing a rigorous middle ground:

♥ **Technophilia:** Uncritical belief in AI as a universal problem-solver.

👻 **Technophobia:** Fear of sci-fi dystopias that ignores actual political control.

◎ **Technoskepticism:** A power-aware critique of technology as "frozen politics."



The Philosophical Roadmap



Foundations

Ontological critique of
Intelligence vs. Automation.



Politics

The role of Corporate
Capitalism and Extractivism.



The Crisis

Defining Digital Barbarism
and Heteronomy.



Praxis

Democratic Digital
Humanism and the
Commons.

Beyond Phobia and Philia

Technophilia

An uncritical belief in corporate progress, viewing AI as a neutral tool that automatically solves complex social and ethical problems through data expansion.

Technophobia

Fearful rejection rooted in apocalyptic scenarios of machine rule, which often distracts from the real political and economic threats of current AI systems.

*Schismenos proposes **Technoskepticism**: A tech-aware stance rooted in political autonomy.*

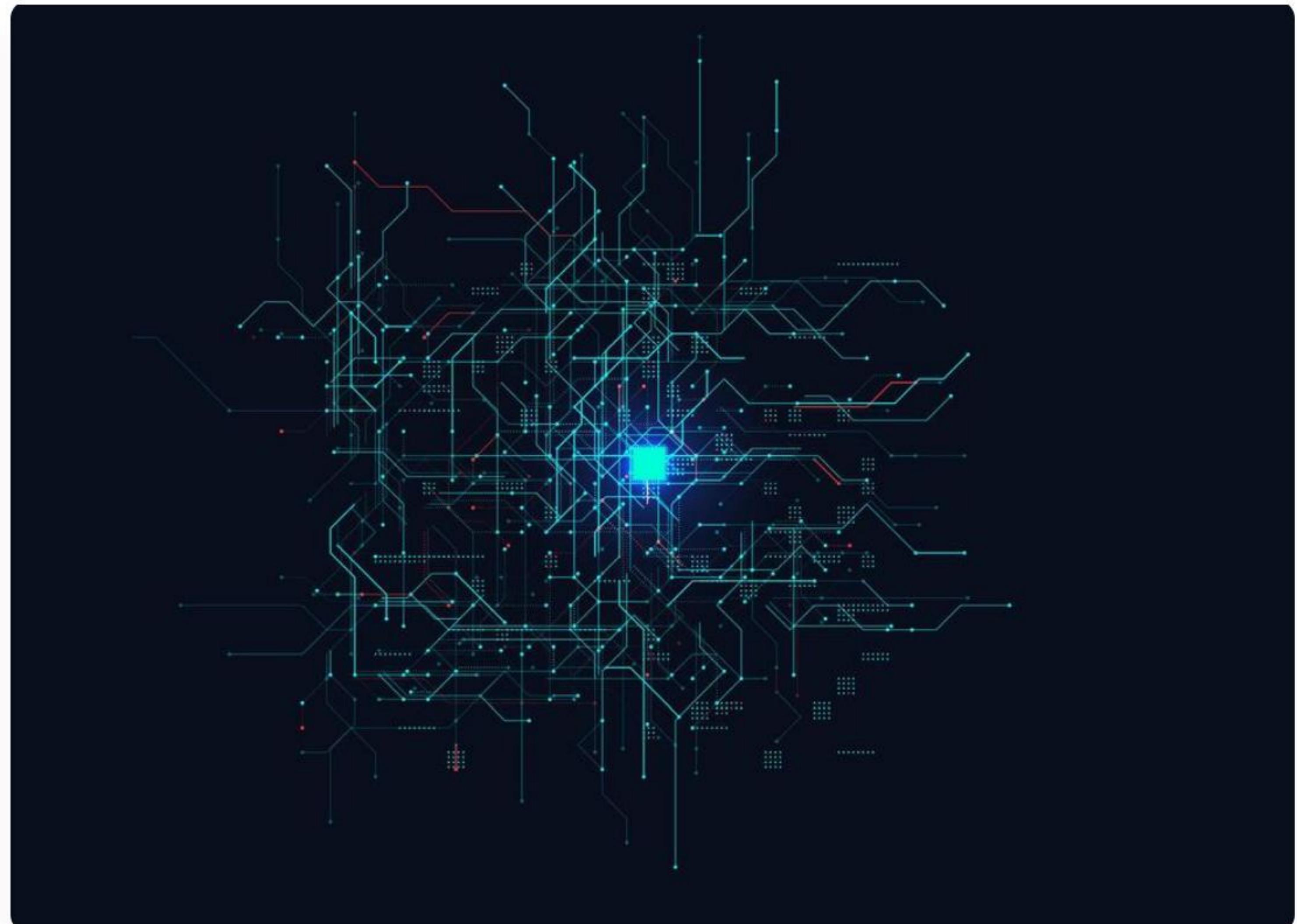
Syntax vs. Semantics

The Ontological Divide

Schismenos argues that AI operates purely on **Syntax**—the manipulation of symbols according to rules—while Natural Intelligence is defined by **Semantics** (Meaning).

$$AI(s) = \sum \text{Rules} \neq \text{Meaning}$$

Machines match shapes; humans interpret the world.



Natural vs. Artificial Intelligence

Feature	Natural Intelligence (Human)	Artificial Intelligence (Technical)
Origin	Biological, self-preservational, embodied.	Electronic, mathematical, algorithmic.
Reason	Interpretive, semantic, judgment-based.	Calculative, syntactic, pattern-based.
Capacity	Poiesis: Creating new meaning.	Reassembling existing data sets.
State	Autonomy: Self-law-giving.	Heteronomy: Externally programmed.

Corporate Capitalism

Data Extractivism

AI is not a scientific miracle but a product of **Global Capital**. Human social interactions are mined as "raw materials" for predictive profit.

The "Barbarism" begins when the uncertainty of the future is replaced by calculated market risks, removing the human subject from the loop of social creation.



The Pillars of Mythinformation



Neutrality

The false claim that math is inherently objective, masking the "frozen politics" encoded by corporate developers.



Black Boxes

Proprietary algorithms that govern public life without transparency, accountability, or auditability.



Predictability

The reduction of citizens into data points to ensure market stability, suppressing social spontaneity and rebellion.

Impacts of Digital Barbarism

O

HUMAN AGENCY

The Erasure of the Subject

In the barbaric state, political deliberation is replaced by **Algorithmic Governance**. Decision-making is outsourced to machines that lack the capacity for empathy, ethics, or justice.

Citizens are transformed into "Users" whose choices are pre-packaged by filter bubbles and predictive policing of thought.

Castoriadis and Autonomy

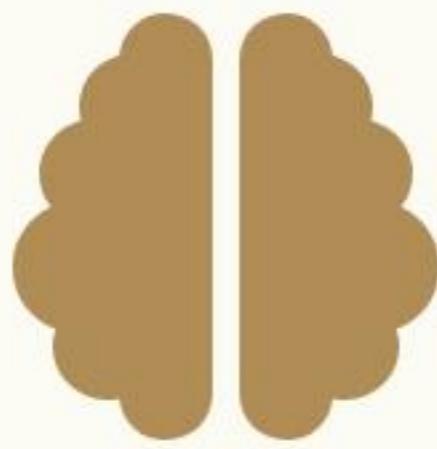


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Credit: Louis MONIER

The Project of Autonomy

Following Castoriadis, Schismenos argues that AI threatens the "Social Imaginary." Democracy requires the collective capacity to signify new meanings.

Heteronomy occurs when we accept laws (or code) as "natural" or "divine" rather than recognizing them as human creations that must be contested.



The Social Imaginary

AI as the apex of "Rational Mastery"—the attempt to eliminate social spontaneity through total calculative control.

The Logic of Envelopment

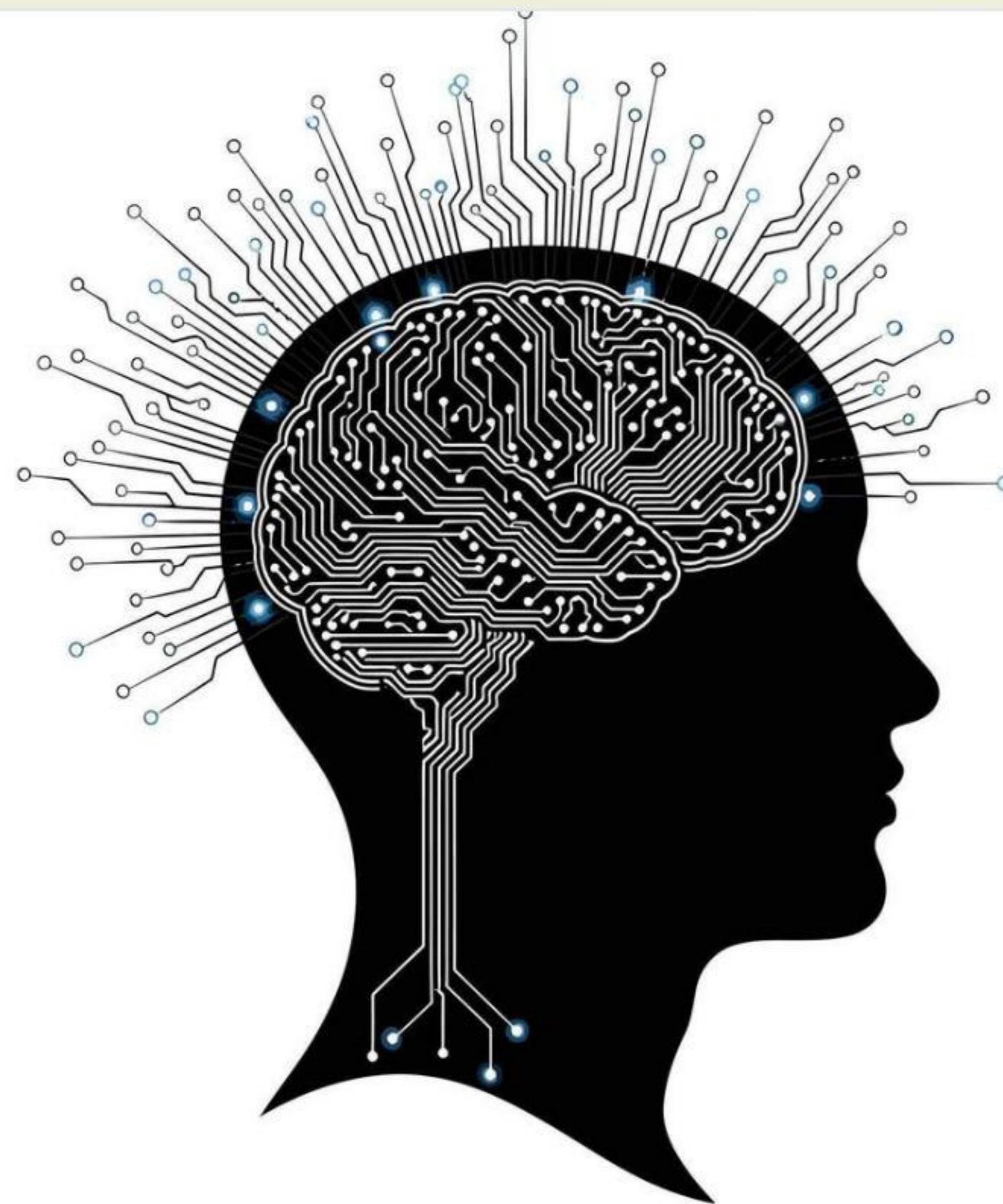
Floridi's Warning

Agreement on Envelopment: the process of redesigning the physical and social world to suit the agency of "dumb" machines, making the world machine-legible.

Schismenos' Critique

We "dumb down" human environments to meet machine limits. This is not progress, but the erosion of the semantic complexity required for human freedom.

Comparison: Martin Heidegger



Concept	Heidegger	Schismenos
Enframing	<i>Gestell</i> : A mode of revealing the world as a resource.	<i>Automation</i> : A mode of obscuring the social creator.
Subjectivity	Man as the "shepherd of Being."	Man as the autonomous "source of meaning."
The Solution	"Only a god can save us" (poetic waiting).	Reclaiming the Agora (political praxis).

Comparison: Cornelius Castoriadis

Concept	Castoriadis	Schismenos
Rational Mastery	The core imaginary of the modern West (technoscience).	Taken to the absurd: The mastery of the creator by the tool.
The Social Imaginary	Creation of "Magmas of Signification."	AI as a "hollow signification" that mimics meaning.
Autonomy	A society giving itself its own laws.	A society reclaiming code as a democratic commons.

Philosophical Comparison

Philosopher	Key Concept	View on AI	Solution
Schismenos	Digital Barbarism	Tool for capitalist heteronomy	Democratic Digital Humanism
Heidegger	Enframing (Gestell)	Ontological fate of revealing	Poetic dwelling
Stiegler	Proletarianization	Exteriorization of knowledge	Politics of Care (Negentropy)
Floridi	Infosphere	Ontological shift to information	Ethical design / Governance

Roots in Castoriadis

Social Magma

The messy, unorganized flow of human meaning that algorithms try to "solidify" but ultimately lose.

Radical Imagination

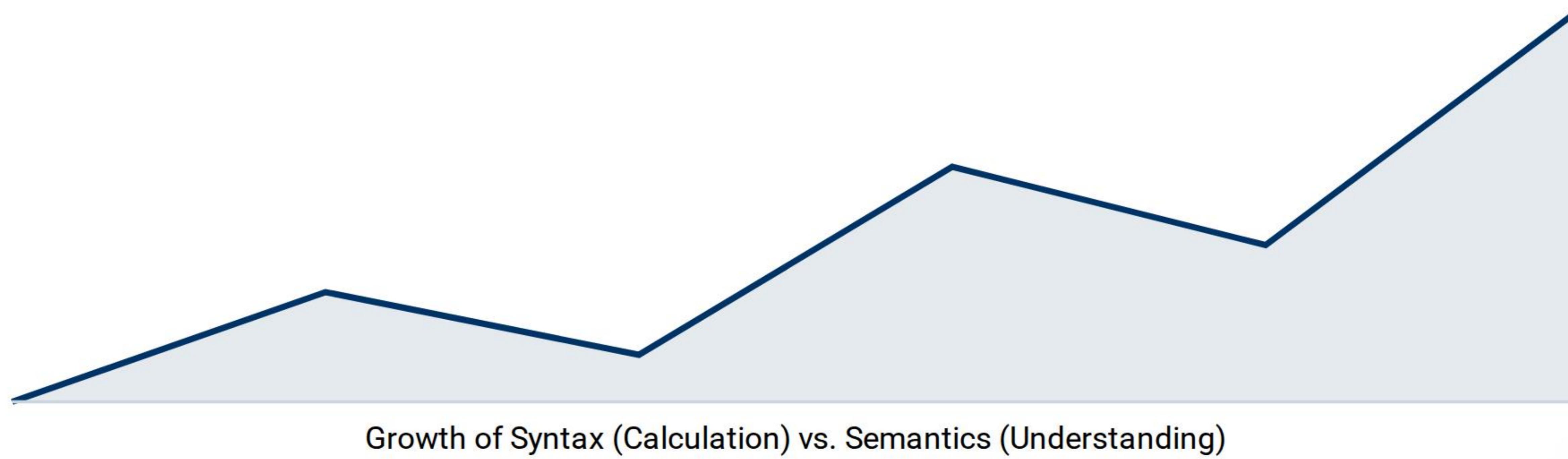
The unique human capacity to create the "new." AI only remixes existing data sets.

Signification

Humans are the only entities that can assign "value." AI possesses syntax, but never semantics.



The "Meaning Gap" Trend



As calculation (Syntax) accelerates, human meaning-creation (Semantics) is "short-circuited," creating the Barbarism Gap.

Pillars of Digital Barbarism



- **Politics:**Algorithmic Governance (40%)
- **Economics:**Corporate Surveillance (30%)
- **Creativity:**Data Extraction (20%)
- **Social:**Mythinformation (10%)

Part II: Institutional Envelopment

Mapping the risks of algorithmic governance across social domains.

Domains of Relevance (I)

Domain	Algorithmic Implementation	Barbaric Risk (Schismenos)
Education	Automated grading & AI tutors.	Devaluation of pedagogy; reduction of knowledge to data-consumption.
Healthcare	Diagnostic triage & resource AI.	Empathy dismissed as "inefficiency"; healthcare managed by proprietary metrics.

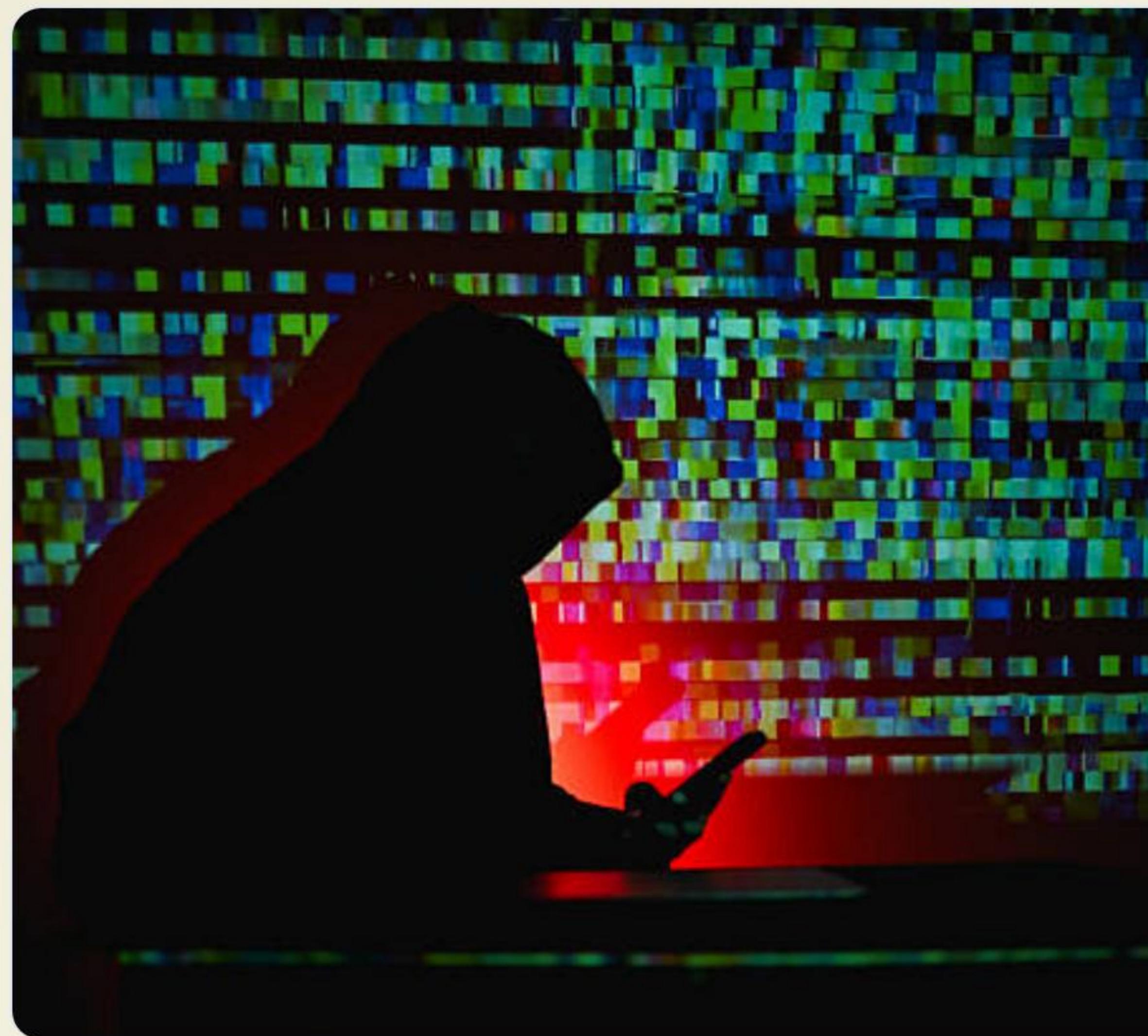
Domains of Relevance (II)

Domain	Algorithmic Implementation	Barbaric Risk (<i>Schismenos</i>)
Democracy	Micro-targeting & sentiment bubbles.	Engineering a "predictable" citizenry; the death of political spontaneity.
Human Rights	Surveillance & Facial Recognition.	Subjectivity reduced to "data points" for preemptive risk management.

Domains of Relevance (III)

Domain	Algorithmic Implementation	Barbaric Risk (Schismenos)
Policy	Black-box decision modeling.	Removing social policy from public debate into technical "optimizations."
Judiciary	Predictive sentencing software.	Frozen Politics: Coding historical bias into permanent, automated law.

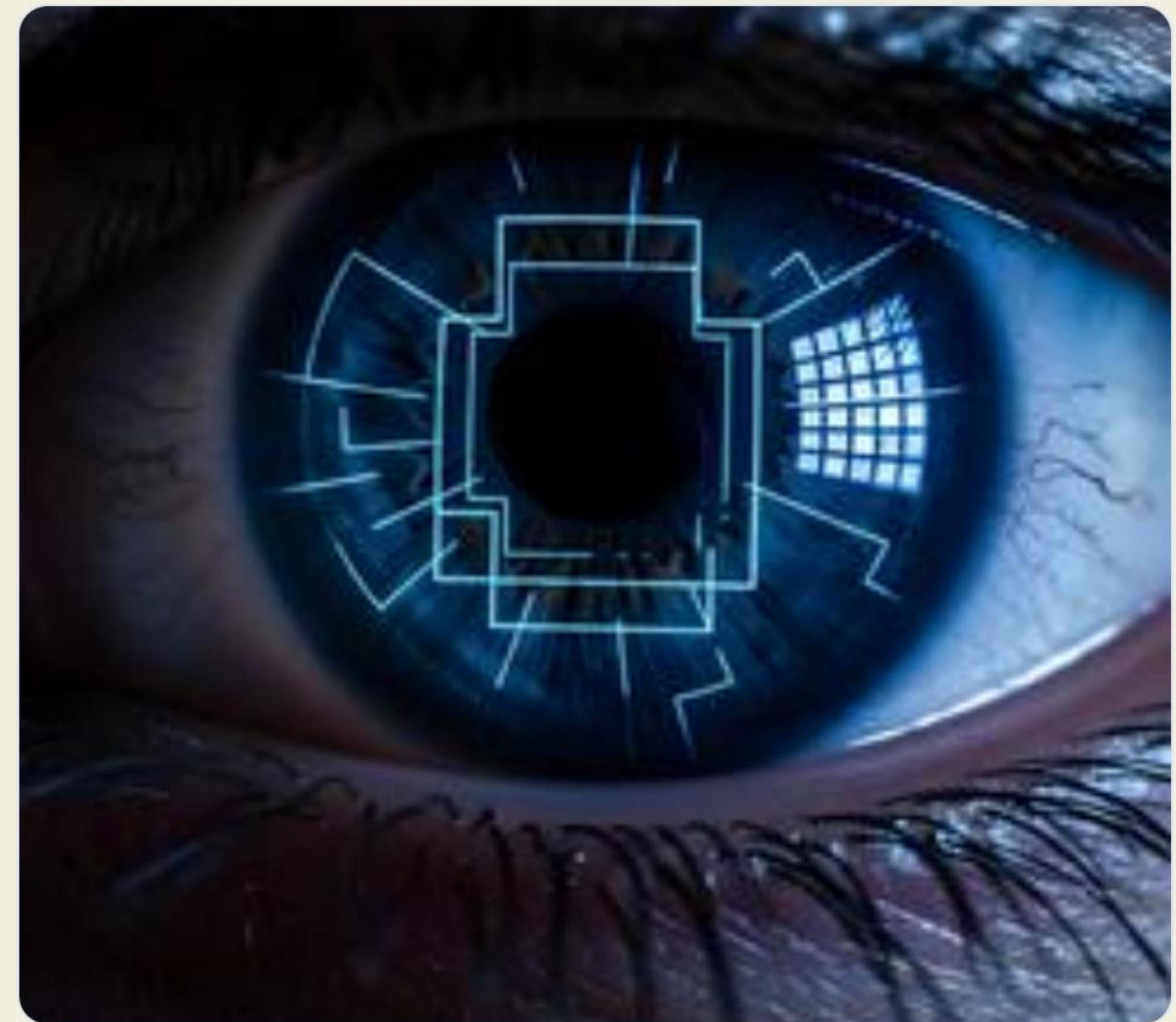
Institutional Impact: Care & Learning



Domain	Implementation	Barbaric Risk
Education	Automated tutors and grading.	Loss of pedagogy; knowledge reduced to data-acquisition.
Healthcare	Diagnostic triage and resource AI.	Empathy dismissed as "inefficiency"; biopolitical management.

Institutional Impact: Power & Rights

Domain	Implementation	Barbaric Risk
Democracy	Micro-targeting and bubbles.	Engineering a "predictable" citizenry; death of political spontaneity.
Human Rights	Predictive policing/Facial rec.	Reduction of personhood to "detected data-points" for control.



Institutional Impact: Law & Policy

Domain	Implementation	Barbaric Risk
Policy	Black-box decision modeling.	Removing social policy from public debate into technocratic optimization.
Judiciary	Sentencing AI software.	Frozen Politics: Coding historical bias into permanent, automated law.
Economy	Gig-management algorithms.	Total worker heteronomy; rule of code over social and labor laws.

Conceptual Matrix: The Semantic Gap

Category	Syntactic (Machine)	Semantic (Human)
Process	Symbol manipulation via rules.	Interpretation via lived context.
Foundation	Probability / Regression.	Conatus / Will to live.
Output	Statistical Reassembly.	Social Creation (Poiesis).

"The algorithmic future is merely a statistical re-averaging of the past."

Political Matrix: Reclaiming the Commons

Dimension	Data Extractivism	Digital Commons
Ownership	Private / Proprietary Capital.	Social / Public Stewardship.
Governance	Black-Box Optimizations.	Democratic Audits and Open-Source.
Subjectivity	User as "Resource" (Heteronomy).	Citizen as "Creator" (Autonomy).

COMPARATIVE TABLES

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4.4 Schismenos • Winner • Contemporary AI Ethics

Dimension	Schismenos	Winner	Contemporary AI Ethics
Artifact politics	Algorithms embed political effects	Artifacts embody politics	Focus on fairness, bias, accountability
Scale	Societal imaginaries and institutions	Local/infrastructural politics	Organizational and sectoral governance
Actors	Publics, civic movements, institutions	Designers, engineers, policymakers	Regulators, companies, civil society
Outcome metric	Autonomy and shared meaning	Democratic control of artifacts	Risk reduction and compliance
Measures	Public deliberation + contestability	Institutional design and politics	Technical standards and audits

4.5 Schismenos vs Contemporary AI Frameworks

Framework	Core focus	Schismenos critique	Complementary measures
FAT	Technical fairness and governance	Too narrow; misses meaning	Add contestability and public deliberation
Human-Centered AI	User needs and oversight	Marketized; lacks political dimension	Embed collective autonomy and governance
Responsible AI	Ethical principles for developers	Principles insufficient without institutions	Combine with sectoral governance and civic oversight
Regulatory approaches	Legal compliance and standards	Risk of capture; may miss mythinformation	Democratic participation; impact assessments

5.1 Education

Pathway	Digital Humanism	Digital Barbarism
Assessment	Transparent rubrics; explainable AI	Opaque automated grading
Pedagogy	AI augments teacher judgment	Replacement of teacher judgment
Data governance	Student data rights; consent	Data extraction; profiling minors
Curriculum	Support for critical thinking	Standardization and test-driven learning

5.2 Healthcare

Pathway	Digital Humanism	Digital Barbarism
Diagnosis	Clinician + explainable AI	Black-box automated diagnosis
Triage	Equity-oriented protocols	Algorithmic rationing; bias
Access	Augmentation of care in underserved areas	Vendor control; unequal deployment
Consent	Patient consent and auditability	Data commodification; opaque consent

5.3 Policing & Security

Pathway	Digital Humanism	Digital Barbarism
Surveillance	Community oversight; limits	Mass biometric surveillance
Decision-making	Human review; contestability	Automated suspicion; opaque scoring
Accountability	Transparent audits; legal remedies	Vendor secrecy; immunity clauses
Public trust	Participatory governance	Erosion of civil liberties

5.4 Creative Work

Pathway	Digital Humanism	Digital Barbarism
Authorship	Hybrid workflows; attribution	Devaluation of labor; plagiarism
Cultural diversity	Tools for amplification	Homogenization; mythinformation
Economic model	Fair compensation; licensing	Platform extraction; unpaid training data
Aesthetic value	New hybrid forms	Commodification of creativity

5.5 Democracy & Public Discourse

Pathway	Digital Humanism	Digital Barbarism
Information quality	Civic literacy tools; moderation	Algorithmic manipulation; deepfakes
Deliberation	Transparent moderation; civic tech	Echo chambers; misinformation
Institutional response	Public oversight; platform accountability	Platform self-regulation; capture
Electoral integrity	Auditability; transparency	Targeted manipulation; microtargeting

5.6 Labor & Automation

Pathway	Digital Humanism	Digital Barbarism
Work design	Skill augmentation; worker agency	Algorithmic management; surveillance
Economic policy	Social safety nets; retraining	Mass displacement; precarious gig work
Representation	Worker participation in design	Opaque productivity scoring
Value of labor	Recognition of human creativity	Commodification and deskilling