Der Zauberlehrling (The Sorcerer’s Apprentice) (1797)

Sir, my need is sore / Spirits that I’ve cited / My commands ignore.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832)
PHIL 2330 (67862) Philosophy & Technology
Slot 04 / M W F / 11:00–11:50 / A 3017
Dr. Craig Cramm

Questioning Technology

This course is a special invitation to those already involved (and those contemplating) a career in the technological sciences to think critically on your way of life. It is also, of course, open to all students (philosophy and otherwise) with an interest in this topic.

Technology’s ecological and social effects continue to deepen into the fabric of our lives. It is (past) time to rigorously question its nature: Is technology different from science? Knowledge? What is technology’s eco-social logic? Connection to modern structures of power? Economic forms of life? Novelty? Class, race, and gender? What are technology’s different historical modes, e.g., mechanical, information, and so on?

Why is new technology almost always presented as a panacea (utopia)—secular salvation in medicine and economy—revealing its darker side (dystopia) only in later stages when dependence seems impossible to reverse, e.g., plastics, Internet, and fossil fuels? Are we capable of controlling it? Or does a technological form dictate the terms and conditions of life that we are mostly helpless to change? What are the characteristics of technological change and agency?

Is technological morality only about individual responsibility, e.g., weapons in the wrong hands? Or does the logic of technology occasion the continual, insatiable opening of greater risk (and benefit) horizons for all Earthly things? As the technological induced Anthropocene and bio-information singularity fall upon us, we need greater critical clarity about what we do, what we have done, and how to, possibly, regain governance of our technology.

To address at least some of these questions, this course will examine selected thinkers from both the history philosophy and the contemporary scene, e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Jacques Ellul, Michel Foucault, and Bruno Latour.