

# MODULE 8

## WHITE PAPER: TECHNOLOGY AND THE WHOLE PERSON

### I. NORMATIVE SYNTHESIS

#### THEORETICAL CONCLUSIONS

Module 8 concludes the seminar by drawing together its many lines of analysis into a single, unifying claim: **the difficulty central to modern technology is its challenge to the integrity of the human person.** Every prior module has examined a distinct domain in which technologized rationality either has come already to dominate or imminently threatens to do so—conceptual, psychological, environmental, biological, cultural, political, and communicative—but each analysis has disclosed the same underlying danger: *fragmentation of the person*. Our final module names this fragmentation explicitly and argues that it is the signature harm of technological modernity: that is, technology as a way of both disproportionate extending our faculties and thereby simultaneously revealing the world as both something to be manipulated and obscuring its own irreducible intelligibility—through increasingly dominant instrumental means.

Our technological problems cannot be adequately understood—or addressed—unless the human being is grasped as an integral whole. Put otherwise, the person is not nor can he be correctly understood as a collection of separable functions or capacities, but only as a unified reality whose flourishing depends upon the right ordering of body, psyche, intellect, will, memory, and social relationality. Technology becomes dangerous precisely insofar as it intervenes in this unity piecemeal, amplifying particular powers or capabilities while ignoring the demands of integration, chiefly that of right proportioning.

From the beginning, the seminar has rejected both technophilic optimism and technophobic despair. Here, we make clear why both positions are inadequate. Uncritical optimism assumes that human flourishing can be secured by extending speed, efficiency, and control. Despair assumes that technological development and incorporation necessarily erode our humanity. Both presuppose the framing of technology as an external force (be that instrumental or systemic) which acts upon a human nature that remains functionally unchanged in itself by those external forces. The seminar's cumulative argument has been otherwise: technology is both an expression of human rationality itself—a certain modality of thinking, that is, through which we extend our capacities to affect the world—and a reflexive medium that changes our very habits of living. Therefore its danger consists in the possibility of improper *extensions* and *reflexions* which together *disorder* these habits, thereby betraying the goal of having technology subservient to nature, and finally *distorting* our very exercise of reason itself. Mere presence of technology alone is not the danger. Rather, its unconscious, unrealized effects upon us, as the consequences of unthinking use, go much deeper and are much more dangerous.

We must recall **proportion** as an important governing principle for the discernment and constitution of conditions conducive to human flourishing. This sense of proportion is not “balance”, in the sense of compromising our faculties and their technological extensions, nor moderation in the sense of minimal use, but rather found in the right ordering of powers and activities to their proper ends. Human life requires combinations of speed and slowness, action and contemplation, connectivity and solitude, each determined in their proper proportions not by a technical formula but through the reasoning exemplified in the virtue of prudence. Modern technology tends to absolutize particular goods—speed, access, optimization—at the expense of others that resist technical mediation. When we presuppose these particular and context-dependent goods as intrinsic or necessary goods, prudence and the determination of proper proportion are pushed aside.

It is therefore helpful to recapitulate the harms examined earlier in earlier modules. The psychic deformation analyzed in Module 2 consists in a disproportion among all our faculties but most especially between attention to **material** objects (the here-and-now presence of particulars) and **formal** objects (the universal intelligibility by which we understand any particular objects), and secondarily between the corresponding forms of attention and memory—resulting in a fragmentation of our experience over time, rendering us incoherent in our personalities. The environmental disorientation discussed in Module 3 reflects the disproportionate senses of scale that dominate our world today: manufacturing and production, neighborhood or community, work and home, information and time, and so on—we have become thoroughly alienated from the contexts in which human beings naturally live. The biological reduction identified in Module 4 shows a thinking that isolates organic functions from life as a whole. The cultural hollowing seen in Module 5 replaces the organic pursuit of growth under the guidance of prudence with the development of and compliance with systems of interaction. The political technocracy described in Module 6 further displaces the exercise of prudence with the administration of policy, extending these technological systems into our ruling institutions. The communicative fragmentation seen in Module 7 overwhelms the capacity for discovery and common understanding of what is meaningful—leaving every individual person more susceptible to social fragmentation. In each case, a partial good is elevated beyond its proper place, and on the whole, the result is a breakdown of the possibilities for genuine human flourishing.

But as extreme as its negative consequences have been, and even though they threaten to become worse, we in this final module insist that **integration**, not resistance, is the proper response to technological difficulty. This integration does not mean an uncritical adoption, however—for the principle governing the integration is not efficiency, speed, capability, or the increase of force, longevity, etc., but rather the nature of the human person as rightly proportioned between its parts and in ordination to its end. This means: ordering technology to the goods of human life as a whole. This ordering cannot be achieved by technical means alone, because the criteria of integration are not themselves technical, cannot be outsourced to some technical system or principle. Rather, it requires cultivating the habits by which the good can be discerned and, through the exercise of consistent reflection, discerning how we may adapt and adjust our technologies towards that good as a whole, before they do greater damage.

Thus the central role of *virtue*. No technological arrangement can substitute for prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. These virtues govern the use of means in light of ends that cannot be automated or optimized. They are acquired slowly, through education, habit, and example—thriving in communities where they are commonly upheld and pursued—or, put otherwise, through *experience* upon which we *reflect*, and these virtues presuppose thoughtfully-discerned and maintained limits. A culture that treats every limit as an obstacle to be overcome will inevitably produce not only technological systems but also persons incapable of living well-integrated lives.

In other words, **limits** are not **obstacles to** but rather **conditions of freedom**. That the lack of limits deprives us of our freedom is, however counterintuitive that might sound to some ears, easily observed in our world today: our unlimited connectivity undermines the capacity for (and distinctiveness attained within) focus and attention; our unlimited choice undermines our sense of how to make good judgments (as, for instance, in the overwhelming number of products returned in online shopping queries, or ever-growing libraries of streaming content); and our ever-increasing capacity for (or at least pursuit of) optimization in health, performance, and systematization obscures both the end and the struggle through which experience resolve to an intelligible meaningfulness for life. The refusal of limits does not thereby expand human possibility—given that this refusal results in our becoming disproportioned in our faculties or behaviors—but rather causes us to withdraw and recede from the meaningfulness of both understanding and choice. The technologized rationale of modernity tempts us with the claim that freedom consists in the removal of all constraints and allowing us to explore any and every possibility. We, through this module, show instead that freedom instead depends upon forms of restraint that preserve the unity of the person: for it is precisely these restraints that keep our faculties from being disproportionately extended in the ways that destroy our balance. A “freedom”, in other words, that destroys our very nature is not truly a freedom at all.

As the essential channel to affect a proper and proportionate technological integration, we point to education, precisely distinguished (from the false technocratic model commonly employed today) in its actual essential reality. That is, education—if it is properly understood—consists in neither the transmission of information nor the cultivation of skills as such, nor is it a time-delimited pursuit spread across a pre-determined set of years, but rather the persistent and recursive formation of knowledge, the capacity for judgment, the ordering of memory and desire towards and through the truth and the good—in other words, the cultivation of intellectual habits. Without such formation being upheld as itself a great virtue worthy of pursuit and as a communal aim, technological power will invariably come always to exceed human capacities for governing their own instruments—and our established institutional forms of education will be conformed to the inhuman systems of governance which displace the human exercise of authority. This is why the seminar consistently returns to education as the long-term horizon of any responsible technological culture.

This deepens our understanding of why the technological question cannot be solved by political means alone. Policies can regulate specific harms, but they cannot supply the **measure** of the human good. That measure arises only from a rightly-construed understanding of **what a human being is** and what,

in accordance with that essential nature of humanity, constitutes a life well-lived. Without such understanding, even well-intentioned policies will be absorbed into the technological logic they seek to restrain, and ultimately become subordinate to it.

The final theoretical insight advanced in the module is therefore sobering but nevertheless hopeful. Technology does not doom humanity to disintegration—but neither does it guarantee progress. The outcome depends upon whether human beings can recover the intellectual and moral resources needed to order first themselves and subsequently their own creations. The difficulty of technology is inseparable from the dignity of human making. To be capable of technology, which essentially we are, is to be capable of misuse, disproportion, and fragmentation—but also of wisdom, creativity, and care.

As such, the insights of this seminar conclude by naming the task before us: **to preserve the integrity of the human person within technological modernity. This task is to be accomplished unendingly through the continual restoration of techne to poiesis.** Such is a cultural and educational work that must be renewed in every generation, in the minds and desires of every new human being who inherits a world from us. It demands patience rather than speed, judgment rather than reaction, and fidelity to goods that cannot be reduced to function or efficiency.

We discuss the opportunities for this restoration in the modules of the subsequent seminar.

## PRACTICAL ACTIONS INDICATED

### 1. Retrieval of the virtues as ordering principles for human life

No technical solution can restore human integration, once we have abandoned the principles that make it possible. We instead require the cultivation of virtue—especially prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude—as that which enables persons to order technological means toward genuinely human ends. Such virtues govern not only individual action but, if practiced by the persons having care of our social structures, communal and institutional practice.

### 2. Reorientation of technology toward poiesis

Drawing together the insights spread across earlier discussions, Module 8 explicitly states what they have indicated all along: the need to restore technology to poiesis: that is, meaningful making ordered toward truth, beauty, and goodness (concepts stated very broadly and which demand further explanation that cannot be given here) as the essential objects by which the human affects integration rather than fragmentation. Technology must serve the proportionate unfolding of human capacities towards flourishing—realized in the habits of intellectual and moral virtue—rather than their outsourced replacement or disproportioned distension.

### 3. Identifying limits as conditions of flourishing

We reject the common (and commonly unstated) assumption that limits are obstacles to freedom. Proper limits—on our access to speed, connectivity, intervention, and optimization—are conditions for human flourishing. Such limits must be chosen through conscious reflection concerning the extensions and reflexions affected by our technological instruments and systems, and maintained by healthy

communal interaction—not merely individually, wherein they tend to be overwhelmed by the atmosphere of limitless option.

#### 4. Education as the principal means for integration

Education emerges as the principal means for instantiating and restoring the wholeness of human flourishing. Properly conceived—that is, not as a mere transitory passage but a persistent habit of communal living—education forms the acquisition of knowledge, habits of judgment, ordering of memory, attention, and desire in an integrated way, equipping persons to inhabit technological environments without being dominated by them.

## II. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

### CENTRAL QUESTION

How can technological development be reconciled with the integrity of the whole human person, and what does it mean to integrate technology proportionately into a fully human way of life?

### ORIENTATION

As the capstone of the seminar, this module draws together the analyses of psyche, environment, biology, culture, governance, and communication into a unified account of the human person as the locus at which technology alone truly matters. We advance, as a guiding conviction, the belief that technological difficulties ultimately arise not in any single domain but principally in the failure to maintain the unity of the person amid increasingly fragmented and fragmenting technological mediations—that is, we can overcome these difficulties if and only if we *resolve* the technological extensions and technical revelations into the human good and reject the efforts to develop technological systems that ultimately become the measure of human action.

Rather than introducing substantially new material, this module synthesizes prior insights to articulate a comprehensive view of technological integration. The question is no longer merely diagnostic—that is, observing what technology does to us in specific domains of human action—but normative and constructive: discerning principles for how human beings, innately capable of technological development and intervention, ought to live in light of this essential truth of our nature.

### MAJOR FINDINGS

#### 1. Fragmentation is the signature harm of technological maladaptation

Across all modules, we have witnessed a common pattern to emerge: technology tends to fragment what should remain unified, given the unthinking habits of using it. Faculties become extended in isolation or disproportionately; environments are optimized without regard to embodied life; institutions are reorganized according to efficiency of process rather than for the sake of meaningful living; and communication accelerates beyond the capacity for judgment, eroding our capacities for true knowledge.

Thus fragmentation—not addiction, not error, not misuse, but the fracturing of human relations and the disintegration of the individual psyche—appears as the signature harm of technological modernity and our subsequent maladaptation. This fragmentation manifests psychologically, socially, and most of all spiritually—that is, not in terms of mysticism but by cutting us off from both the ends of our own natures and from the means by which those ends may be made known to us.

## 2. The human person is an essentially integrated unity

Against reductionist models, this module reaffirms that the human person is an integrated unity of body, psyche, intellect, and will—that is, in Aristotelian terms, an animal having *logos*. These dimensions cannot be addressed independently without distorting the whole, and the efforts to treat technological problems in a materialist framework fail to address the fundamental difficulty—namely, the human tendency to produce technological extensions which distort the perception of our own natures.

Technological interventions that target and extend isolated functions—be those of attention, productivity, health, communication, or aught else—inevitably affect the entire person. Failure to account for this unity results in unintended and often invisible harms as these technologies disproportion our operations in a way that causes fragmentation. As will be discussed in the final white paper, “AI”—which has the potential to affect every other technological instrument or system, inasmuch as it mimics the universal symbolic interaction of concrete linguistic signification (the most fundamental of all specifically-human technologies)—threatens this integrated unity more than anything in history.

## 3. Technology shapes the human *habitus*, not just behavior

We reiterate that technology’s deepest influence is on the habits of human living, a kind of *reflexion* that affects us as we use it. As discussed in Module 2, habits are a *holding*: either of the self towards the world or the world’s holding the self. By shaping patterns of action, perception, and expectation, technologies help to form a technological *habitus* (or we might say, set of habits) within which persons come to understand themselves and the world.

This *habitus* is rarely chosen explicitly. It is absorbed through participation in technological environments and institutions. The more these environments and institutions determine our habits, the less clearly we see the world without the intermediation of technologies; that is, the more technologized becomes our own thinking. The principal risk of such a *habitus* is the displacement of our proper and natural human proportioning.

## 4. Disproportion and loss of measure

Human flourishing depends upon the right ordering of powers, activities, and ends. Technology tends to magnify particular goods beneficial in the short-term—speed, control, convenience—while obscuring others needed for long-term psychological and social well-being—contemplation, endurance, and sustained personal presence.

This loss of measure, which follows the lost sense of proportion, leads not to imminent ecological or social catastrophe but rather to a chronic disintegration. It may be that the mastery of speed, control,

and convenience over all material being extends our lives indefinitely; but these become lives that function in a vacuum of meaning and the possibility of its rediscovery, so long as the technologized rationality dominates our modes of living and behaving.

## KEY EXPLANATORY CLAIMS

### 1. **Fragmentation is the primary harm of unaddressed technological difficulty.**

Doubtless everyone today can see the social and individual fragmentations from which the world suffers, but too few recognize that the root is not this or that technology, but the essential misunderstanding of technology itself—of what technology is in reference to human existence.

### 2. **The person must be understood as a unified whole, and technological development and use must be conscious of this essential wholeness.**

While technologies invariably extend one or another aspect of the human being, the development and use of these technologies must not operate ignorantly of either how they specifically extend a particular faculty or operation, but also take into consideration how that extension may affect the whole person.

### 3. **Technological habituation precedes reflection.**

We invariably propose, design, develop, test, and evaluate our technologies on their successful use for specific tasks, that is, conceived ways of extending our natural faculties to operations impossible (at least as to speed and efficiency) without technological intervention. This process ordinarily habituates us to the utility of our technological interventions before we are capable of reflecting upon how they are changing us in the process.

### 4. **Proportion is a moral and anthropological concept.**

No mere quantitative calculation, proportion signifies the fittingness of parts within a whole. When we lose the sense of proportion, we tend also to misunderstand what constitutes the whole—and vice versa. Technologies that distort our sense of proportion, therefore, tend to distort our awareness of ourselves as integral wholes.

### 5. **Integration, not rejection, is the central task.**

The question which must be taken up in future inquires—as in the Opportunities of Technology seminar—is *how do we (re)integrate our technologies with our natural personhood?* In this final module, we propose that this consists in a *restoration* of *techne* to *poiesis*: that is, to move the technical vision from out of the position of dominance and back to a more original receptivity, a set of cognitive habits capable of discerning the proportion between instruments, systems, and the persons they are intended to serve.