Collected Lectures of the Conference on

The Future of the World and New Philosophical Problems

Supervised by
Muhammad Asghari

November 20, 2025

UNIDIALOGUE

Collected Lectures of the Conference on The Future of the World and New Philosophical Problems

Supervised by Muhammad Asghari

TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction

Today, the question of the future of our world is an existential question. Why? Because our world today is a world in which, like an individual's body, all its parts live in connection with each other. Perhaps this poem by Saadi is very appropriate to say that human beings are members of each other. So, questions related to the environmental crises that almost many countries are experiencing, the wars that are taking place between some countries, including Russia and Ukraine, and the wars in the Middle East and Africa, the emergence of artificial intelligence and its ethical challenges, and many other similar issues, force every human mind to ask questions about their own future, their family, their society, and ultimately the common world. Of course, it is not possible to give a definitive and firm answer to these types of questions. But it was the raising of these questions that occupied our minds in 2024, and we asked the philosophers participating in the conference in advance to send us their opinions on the future of the world, and I was in contact with each philosopher via email until we were able to receive the main themes of the conference from them.

Professor Slavoj Žižek, who was unable to attend the conference online due to boredom, sent a short 20-minute video recording a week before the conference on the importance of philosophy (Today We Need Philosophy to Survive as Humans). In this speech, he

points out the importance of philosophy in our time. In this speech, Žižek says that "philosophy is desperately needed today" because philosophy challenges the dominant ideologies that disguise unfreedom as freedom. Quoting Alain Badiou, he describes the role of philosophy as "corrupting youth" – that is, disrupting the ideological order by asking fundamental questions. Like Socrates, we need to question the concepts we take for granted (freedom, equality, human rights, justice), especially in the context of the environmental crisis, artificial intelligence, and modern politics.

He argues that today we need philosophy more than ever, because philosophy—following Socrates—forces us to question the true meaning of concepts like freedom, justice, and human rights. He illustrates how relying on technology without human judgment can be disastrous, referring to the 2025 Air India crash caused by digital-system confusion rather than human or mechanical error.

He contrasts Confucian "rectification of names" with Socratic questioning, emphasizing that real thinking means breaking the linguistic and ideological frameworks that control us. In politics today, from Trump to China, power has replaced justice, and many people simply refuse to listen or think. His conclusion: to remain human, we must rethink what justice and moral values mean today—and only philosophy can enable this.

The conference was held online on November 20, 2025, with the participation of the Journal of Philosophical Investigations at the University of Tabriz in Iran and the Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna, Austria. This was the first conference to explore the future of the world from a philosophical perspective and from the perspective of 21st century philosophers, and we hope that this work will continue in the coming years. Philosophers and philosophy professors who spoke at this conference include:

Slavoj Žižek (Slovene/The European Graduate School/EGS): Why Today We Need Philosophy to Survive as Humans

Jeremy Shearmur (Australia/Australian National University): Popper, Critical Rationalism and its Agenda for Philosophy in 21st Century.

Frank Ruda (Scotland /University of Dundee): Courage

Donald Gillies (England/University College London): AI and problem of induction and demarcation and aesthetics

Muhammad Asghari (Iran/University of Tabriz): Dialogue between Eastern and Western Philosophy on the Basis of Constructing Truth in our time

Reaz Gholami (Member of the scientific staff of the Research Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies, Tehran/head of the Iranian Wisdom House in Vienna): From Problematic to Problematic: The Mission of Philosophy in Shaping Human Futures.

Thomas Bauer (Austria/University of Vienna): media philosophy and cultural studies.

Robert Hanna (Canada/Independent philosopher): "The Myth of AI, The Future of Human Intelligence, and The Role of Philosophy."

Maurice Hamington (USA/Portland State University): Care in the Modern Social Compact.

Secretary of the Future of the World Conference
Professor Muhammad Asghari
University of Tabriz
November 2025

Foreword

This book presents the speeches delivered at the international conference "The Future of the World and Emerging Philosophical Issues," held fully online on Thursday, 30 Aban 1404 (20 November 2025), on the occasion of World Philosophy Day. The event brought together some of the most prominent contemporary philosophers and thinkers from around the world, offering a unique opportunity for in-depth and comprehensive engagement with emerging philosophical challenges and issues.

The conference was organized jointly by the University of Tabriz and the Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna, running from 17:00 Tehran time (14:30 Central European Time) until 21:00. The keynote speakers, in order of appearance, were: Slavoj Žižek, Frank Ruda, Jeremy Shearmur, Donald Gillies, Mohammad Asghari, Reza Gholami, Thomas Bauer, Robert Hanna, and Maurice Hamington.

The opening address was delivered by Professor Mohammad Asghari, scientific secretary of the conference and Editor-in-Chief of the Philosophical Research quarterly at the University of Tabriz, while the closing summary was presented by Reza Gholami.

The conference was structured around four main themes:

1. Environmental crisis and climate ethics

2. Digital technology, artificial intelligence, and human agency

3. Human dignity, justice, and cosmopolitanism

4. Re-thinking philosophy's engagement with the new world

The event was live-streamed via Google Meet and was accessible to participants worldwide.

"The Future of the World and Emerging Philosophical Issues" was remarkable not only for gathering leading philosophers and scholars from multiple countries, but also for its crucial role in fostering profound philosophical dialogue about the turbulent future facing humanity. The conference successfully guided global philosophical discussions toward today's and tomorrow's critical issues, while further strengthening Iran's position as an active and influential center of philosophical thought internationally.

The papers presented at the conference will be published next year in the Philosophical Research journal, and videos of the sessions will be made available to philosophy researchers via the Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna's YouTube channel.

As one of the most extensive international collaborations between the University of Tabriz and the Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna, the conference received overwhelming interest from the global philosophical community and became one of the most significant online philosophical events of 2025.

At this juncture, I would like to sincerely thank all those who contributed to the organization and success of this conference, especially Prof. Muhammad Asghari (scientific secretary of the conference) and Mr. Akbar Habibollahi Najafabadi (Deputy Executive Secretary of the conference).

Reza Gholami
President of the Iranian House of Wisdom, Vienna
Executive Secretary of the Conference
30 November 2025

The Greatest Threat to Humanity Is the Refusal to Think: Philosophy as Humanity's Last Line of Defense

Slavoj Žižek

Slavoj Žižek (born March 21, 1949) is a Slovene philosopher and cultural theorist whose works address themes in psychoanalysis, politics, and popular culture.

We celebrate the World Philosophy Day every third Thursday in November – this year it falls on November 20. So let's use this opportunity to recall what philosophy is at its most basic.

Alain Badiou opens up his *True Life* with the provocative claim that, from Socrates onward, the function of philosophy is to *corrupt the youth*, to extraneate them from the predominant ideologico-political order. Such "corruption" is needed especially today, in our liberal-permissive West where most of the people are even not aware of the way the establishment controls them precisely when they appear to be free – the most dangerous unfreedom is the unfreedom that we experience as freedom, or, as Goethe put it two centuries ago: "None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free." Is a libertarian who works on destroying the thick social network of customs in which he can only thrive really free?

Socratic revolution is characterized by two features. First, it is a reaction to the general crisis of the Greek social life which, for

Socrates, is embodied in the widespread popularity of sophists, performers of empty rhetorical tricks who enacted a decay of the tradition of *polis*. Second, what Socrates opposes to this decay is not a simple return to the glorious past but a radical self-questioning. The basic procedure of Socrates is the endless repetition of the formula: "What, exactly, do you mean by /…/?" – by virtue, truth, the Good, and similar basic notions? Today, we need the same questioning: what do we mean by equality, freedom, human rights, the people, solidarity, emancipation, and all other similar words which we use to legitimize our decisions? Thinking means that, when we are confronted with the ecological crisis, we don't just focus on saving nature, we also ask ourselves what nature means today. With the rise of AI, it is not enough just to ask are machines able to think, we should also ask what human thinking really means. We should follow here Descartes: when he wrote god could have decided that 1+1 is not 2. This insight is not a regression to obscurantism but the beginning of modern science which realizes the contingency of our even most self-evident truths.

Let's give a simple but extreme case of what thinking means. On 12 June 2025, the Air India Flight 171 from Ahmedabad Airport in India to London Gatwick Airport crashed 32 seconds after takeoff. All 12 crew members and 229 of the 230 passengers aboard died. On the ground, 19 people were killed and 67 others were seriously injured. As the aircraft reached its maximum recorded airspeed of 180 knots (330 km/h; 210 mph) 3 seconds after takeoff, both fuel control switches sequentially moved from RUN to CUTOFF, 1 second apart. Both engines immediately shut down and stopped producing thrust. The investigation led to a quite terrifying conclusion: the cause of the catastrophe was neither personal (pilot's error) nor mechanical but purely digital. Because of some miscommunication between the different parts of its digital machinery, the digital system that regulates the plane was simultaneously informed that it is still on the ground and that it is already in the air; when confronted with such contradictory information, the digital system "played it safely" in the same way we would do upon seeing a machine malfunction – not knowing what really goes on, it decided to stop the machine working. So the digital

system didn't thought the plane is still on the ground – it didn't know where the plane is, on the ground or in the air, and desactivated its activity. It also prevented the pilots to intervene because it though that one of them may accidentally push the fuel control button… In short, the catastrophe was caused by the very precautionary measures to prevent a catastrophe. What the digital system was not able to do was a simple *decision* that even a bad pilot would be able to do: you see that the plane is in the air, so you switch the fuel control to RUN.

One should oppose here the Socratic questioning to the Confucian "rectification of names". Confucius' analysis of the lack of connection between things and their names grounds the need to overcome this lack: "If language is not correct, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what must be done remains undone; if this remains undone, morals and art will deteriorate; if justice goes astray, people will stand about in helpless confusion. Hence there must be no arbitrariness in what is said." In clear contrast to this stance, the Socratic tradition is fully aware that to really think means to think in language against language and, in this way, to destroy the ideology inscribed into our language.

Already Democritus, the pre-Socratic atomist, took recourse to a wonderful neologism *den*. The Ancient Greeks had two words for nothing, medel and ouden, which stand for two types of negation: ouden is a factual negation, something that is not but could have been; meden is, on the contrary, something that in principle cannot be. From meden we get to den not simply by negating the negation in meden, but by displacing negation, or, rather, by supplementing negation with a subtraction. That is to say, we arrive at den when we take away from meden not the whole negating prefix, but only its first two letters: meden is med'hen, the negation of hen (one): not-one. Democritus arrives at den by leaving out only me and thus creating a totally artificial word den. Den is thus not nothing without "no;' not a thing, but an 'othing', a something but still within the domain of nothing, like an ontological living dead, a spectral nothing-appearing-as something. Or, as Lacan put it: "Nothing, perhaps? No-perhaps nothing, but not nothing." As Heinz Wisman

put it concisely: "being is a privative state of non-being", i.e., being emerges as *othing*, by way of subtracting something from nothing.

This is how you think in language against language. It is crucial to note how, contrary to the late Wittgensteinian thrust towards ordinary language, towards language as part of a life-world, materialism begins with violating the rules of ordinary language, by thinking against language. Today, the true anti-Platonist sophist is, of course, Donald Trump. On the very first page of his *Republic* Plato wonderfully deploys how the Trumpian populists (here represented by Polemarchus) treat their opponents (here represented by Socrates, the narrator):

"Polemarchus said to me: 'I perceive, Socrates, that you and your companion are already on your way to the city.' 'You are not far wrong', I said. 'But do you see', he rejoined, 'how many we are?' 'Of course.' ' And are you stronger than all these? for if not, you will have to remain where you are.' 'May there not be the alternative', I said, 'that we may persuade you to let us go?' 'But can you persuade us, if we refuse to listen to you?', he said. 'Certainly not', replied Glaucon. 'Then we are not going to listen; of that you may be assured'."

The stance of simply not listening to your opponent (if you are stronger than him) is what we encounter today again and again in big politics – and even in philosophy. One of the standard critiques of Hegel is that the notion of dialectical progress presupposes the urge to go on thinking, to bring out every consequence of a specific thought or stance: say, if you are an ascetic, thinking about it will make you realize that asceticism is an egotist stance – you are totally focused on yourself, trying desperately to erase all remainders of pleasure and joy… But Hegel knows this: at the very beginning of his *Logic* which analyses the logical order of pure categories of thinking without any empirical presuppositions, he points out that *Logic* is nonetheless grounded in an (ultimately contingent) act of will, a willful decision to think. An ascetic individual can simply say: "OK, I am really an egotist, but I don't care about it, I refuse to think what my asceticism implies, I just accept that this is what I am."

This refusal to listen and/or to think is not just one big

primordial decision; it takes place continuously in our lives. Those who support Israel simply ignore all the obvious arguments that a genocide is going on there, they just dismiss them as anti-Semitic lies. A similar refusal to think happens to me again and again: when I recently listed arguments for our environmental crisis, the reply I got was a variation of "we are not going to listen; of that you may be assured," and the brief explanation was that the struggle against global warming is a campaign motivated by dark reasons (destroying the prosperous West). Along these lines, Trump said in his speech at the UN general assembly on September 23 2025 that climate change is "the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world." This stance is grounded in a precise notion of justice articulated couple of pages later by Thrasymachus who says: "I proclaim that justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger." And he goes on to explain how "the different forms of government make laws democratic, aristocratic, tyrannic, with a view to their several interests; and these laws, which are made by them for their own interests, are the justice which they deliver to their subjects, and him who transgresses them they punish as a breaker of the law, and unjust. In all states there is the same principle of justice, which is the interest of the government; and as the government must be supposed to have power, the only reasonable conclusion is, that everywhere there is one principle of justice, which is the interest of the stronger."

Is this not, again, Trumpian politics at its purest? Is this not the justice Trump brings to the Middle East, to Ukraine…? And Trump is not alone here. On July 3 2025, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told the European Union's top diplomat that Beijing can't accept Russia losing its war against Ukraine as this could allow the United States to turn its full attention to China. An official briefed on the talks said, contradicting Beijing's public position of neutrality in the conflict, that Wang's private remarks suggested Beijing might prefer a protracted war in Ukraine that keeps the United States from focusing on its rivalry with China. Illusions about China – the idea that, in spite of all its problematic features, it wants peace and global cooperation, and even follows some notion of justice – are irrevocably shattered: Chinanow made it clear that it wants the long

devastating war destroying an entire country to go on because peace may hurt its economic interests. Such brutal reasoning displayed in public is rather something one would expect from Trump.

A conclusion to be drawn from this is that today we need philosophy more than ever – we need it to survive as humans. Naïve as it may sound, we cannot survive without some notion of justice that transcends pragmatic considerations of survival. And we need to reflect what justice can mean today.

The Anxiety-Inducing Courage, the Fundamental Reconsideration of Human Life, and the Role of Philosophy in Today's Challenging World

Prof. Frank Ruda

Frank Ruda (Born in 1978), is a German philosopher. He is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy at the University of Dundee, Scotland, and member of the Scottish Centre for Continental Philosophy.

After the disasters of the 20th century and in the absence of any valid political alternative to the destructive forms of capitalism that now determine the entire planet, a new order was born; but it is more than high time to muster the courage to rethink the most fundamental concepts of planetary human existence – something that, I believe, is exactly in line with what Gigi has just emphasised. But what is courage? In what follows, I will argue that the last universally recognised philosopher formulated an – even though ultimately insufficient – theory of courage that can still help us in the present situation.

Secondly, what is not frequently mentioned about Heidegger's *Being and Time* is that it contains a remarkably refined theory of courage. Heidegger is, in fact, one of the most important 20th-century thinkers to renew the very idea of courage. As early as paragraph 29 of *Being and Time* – written in 1926, published in 1927 – he speaks of a peculiar kind of courage: the courage to be anxious, the courage of anxiety; in German, *Mut zur Angst* – an audacious anxiety.

Here courage is no longer the confrontation with a particular fear or danger. This courage has no object. Or rather: the "object" of this courage is an object that is not an object. And that is because, as Heidegger will later show, anxiety itself is objectless – entirely unlike fear. Fear is always fear of something concrete in the world.

To understand what is at stake, we need a brief, selective reconstruction of some of the book's arguments. The key term appears in Division Two, where Heidegger treats Dasein and temporality, and it emerges precisely when he analyses the obscuring effect produced by what he calls "the they" (*das Man*).

Before we reach that point, however, I must first recall a few elements from Division One, chapter five, entitled "Being-in as Such". There Heidegger asks what it fundamentally means to be *in* something – to be in a world – that is not itself a thing. In paragraph 28 he sets out the task of a thematic analysis of being-in; in paragraph 29 he turns to being-there as state-of-mind, as *Befindlichkeit*.

The German word *Befindlichkeit* carries at least two senses: (1) finding-oneself-somewhere, being situated or located; (2) how one finds oneself, that is, one's mood or affective attunement.

Heidegger writes – I quote:

"What we indicate ontologically by the term 'state-of-mind' [*Befindlichkeit*] is ontologically the most familiar and everyday sort of thing: mood [*Stimmung*], being-attuned [*Gestimmtsein*] … the undisturbed equanimity [*Gleichmut*] and the inhibited ill-humour [*Missmut*] of our everyday concern, the way we slip from one to the other or slip away into bad mood [*Verstimmung*] – all these are by no means nothing ontologically … That the moodiness of Dasein changes and deteriorates over time simply means that Dasein in every case always already has some mood."

There is no Dasein that is not attuned. Even when we feel out of tune, we are attuned. Being-there is essentially mooded – *gleichgestimmt* or *verstimmt*, equanimous or disgruntled. And it is precisely through mood that Dasein's "there", its *Da*, first registers.

Remarkably, the German word for courage – *Mut* – is etymologically and conceptually bound to mood, to *Stimmung*. Courage is the index that there is a "there" at all, that *Sein ist Da*.

Hence Heidegger's far-reaching thesis: there is no Dasein without mood, and therefore no Dasein without a certain courage.

Bad mood – *Verstimmung*, literally "de-tuning" – is particularly revealing. In bad mood Dasein loses sight of its own situatedness; it forgets its own state-of-mind. The origin of the bad mood remains obscure: does it come from "outside" or "inside"? Heidegger replies that this is the wrong question. Mood, he says, "does not come from 'outside' nor from 'inside', but arises out of being-in-the-world as a way of such being". The inner/outer distinction collapses. Our states-of-mind disclose the world in which we already are.

It is ultimately anxiety that discloses Dasein's essence as thrown possibility. Anxiety is the state in which the ready-to-hand world drains away of all significance – the significance that Dasein itself had projected. Anxiety is therefore, as Heidegger says, "short of death": a symbolic death, a complete collapse of meaning that lets the utter groundlessness of our engagement with meaning appear. Everything is based on nothing solid.

In everyday life we are immersed in "the they": a suffocating over-abundance of pre-given meaning, ready-made interpretations, too much orientation. Anxiety is the exact opposite: a total suspension of that ready-made meaning, a terrifying meaninglessness. Between these two extremes – too much meaning and no meaning at all – there is no pre-given measure.

Anxiety is a breakdown. Like a broken hammer that suddenly reveals its hammer-ness, the breakdown of everydayness reveals Dasein to itself. In a later work Heidegger will call everyday inauthenticity *Wegsein* – being-away. Dasein begins as being-away; it must be interrupted in its being-away in order to arrive, even if only momentarily, at its own *Da*, its "there".

This interruption is what Freud would let me call the thought-*Da*-game: the movement from *Weg* to *Da*, from being-away to being-there.

Anxiety therefore provides an *Aufschluss* – a word poorly translated as "information". *Aufschluss* means opening, exposure, unlocking. Anxiety unlocks the ground on which Dasein can finally encounter itself.

And this is why falling, turning-away, fleeing are grounded in anxiety. Fear – fear of immigrants, of tigers, of anything worldly – is itself a mode of fallenness. Fear always has an object; it binds us to entities within the world. Anxiety, by contrast, de-objectivises. It unbinds us from every particular thing while binding us to the world as such – a world that now appears completely indefinite, indeterminate, lacking all significance. That in the face of which we are anxious is nowhere and therefore everywhere. It concerns everything.

Heidegger's lesson is therefore paradoxical and productive: it can be fruitful to be anxious. Only anxiety lets us question the very foundations of the world that otherwise appear unavoidable. But anxiety is hard. Fear is easy: it offers objects, an economy, a dynamics we can handle. The courage to be anxious – *Mut zur Angst* – is the courage of indetermination. It is the courage to suspend what is given as necessary, to make the seemingly immutable indeterminate once again. That is why, in the end – and I believe in full agreement with what Slavoj Žižek said a moment ago – we still need philosophy today. We need it because philosophy can give us the only thing we really lack: the courage to be anxious.

Thank you.

The Lessons of Popper and Lakatos for Critical Rationality and Scientific Dialogue

Prof. Jeremy Shearmur

Jeremy Shearmur (born on 13 June 1948) is an Australian philosopher; Emeritus Fellow at the Australian National University (ANU), Canberra; Professor of Philosophy and Political Theory.

Hello. One facet of the invitation to contribute to this meeting – an invitation for which I'm most grateful – was to discuss a problem. This also is an issue which is often voiced by critical rationalists, but it seems to me that this very request can be problematic, just because it is these days particularly associated with an analytical approach to philosophy, something to which I am opposed.

Accordingly, what I will do in this brief presentation is try to explain what I take to be involved in a critical-rationalist approach to theory appraisal. From this, I hope, one reason (I think there are many more, but this is just one reason) why I think that an analytical approach to philosophy is problematic will become clear. So, what do I take a critical-rationalist approach to theory appraisal to amount to?

There are three steps involved, and I will conclude with a remark that spells out what I take to be the lessons directed against analytical philosophy.

First, from a critical-rationalist perspective, we are faced with problems about how to make sense of the world. These are posed for us by clashes between our anticipations of what things will be like – anticipations which are in important ways biologically based – and what things actually turn out to be like. While we should aim at truth, there is no way in which we can be sure that we have reached it. Our own subjective feelings of conviction, which may indeed be very strong, have in themselves no epistemological significance. In this setting, our ideas are fallible – including what we should make of respects in which our anticipations of reality don't work out.

From a critical-rationalist perspective we should be guided by fallible intersubjective appraisals of these things, where people are aiming at truth. Our own initial biases and mistakes may be corrected by what we can all tentatively agree to be the case – for example, what the outcome is when a hypothesis is tested. What is relevant here is that an individual reports on what they observe when a test is undertaken. What is to the point is what they claim to have taken place and that this claim passes critical scrutiny by others. While an individual's experiences may motivate them to make such a claim, those experiences themselves don't play an epistemological role. What matters is whether what people say they have observed passes critical scrutiny. If it does, it will tentatively be accepted as giving us information about the world, but it can always be challenged and corrected.

If such a test statement clashes with our prior knowledge, we need to consider what to do. Unless the test statement itself is successfully challenged, we may need to make a revision to our previous knowledge. What it makes sense to do depends on our situation. In some cases what we need to do may be straightforward. In other cases we may need to make significant changes to our previous ideas – although clearly we may not know how to do this, and the issue of what to revise becomes part of an agenda for future action.

In broad terms, Popper's view was that we need to try to replace our prior ideas by a new system of theories (which may include statements about initial conditions) that:

● captures what in the past we were able to explain successfully with our previous ideas;

● offers an explanation of the refutation of our earlier theory;

● makes additional predictions of things which we would otherwise not expect to occur, some of which are then corroborated when they are tested.

Popper discussed a case illustrating this in his lectures: the orbit of the planet Uranus didn't fit what one would expect given our knowledge of the planets and Newton's mechanics. The problem was resolved by a correction to our background knowledge – the hypothesis that there was a previously unknown planet, Neptune, with characteristics such that, if it existed, this would explain the anomaly. The postulated planet was indeed then detected.

Concerning this whole issue, however, it seems to me that Popper made a strategic mistake in that he didn't at once move to offering a reformulation of what all this implied for his earlier, more systematic ideas. That, I fear, was a habit of his. The same thing arose in respect of his ideas about deductive explanation and the idea of so-called fact-correcting explanation. Popper seems only to have offered a general discussion of what was to be learned from the Uranus–Neptune case in unpublished material written for a draft of his intellectual autobiography. The fact that he didn't do this left open an opportunity for Imre Lakatos to introduce some problems for the interpretation of Popper's work. Building on the Uranus–Neptune example, Lakatos developed what was in fact identical to Popper's own view about the issue, but presented it as if it was an objection to Popper's work and offered what was in fact in agreement with Popper's own views about this particular issue as an alternative to Popper.

Second, to tell this story properly, more needs to be said concerning Popper's work. We need to take a step back to the interwar period and to Popper's interactions with the Vienna Circle. Popper's concerns were close to theirs, but he differed from them on a number of grounds. While Popper wasn't a Kantian, he had been influenced by the discussion of Kantian issues, and he didn't

share the Vienna Circle's sensationalist empiricism. He was also a fallibilistic realist, and he didn't think that metaphysics is meaningless – indeed he was opposed to their and Wittgenstein's preoccupation with meaning. Popper argued that some metaphysical ideas had had an important influence on the development of science. He later (it seems by the late 1940s) developed this into ideas about what he called the role of metaphysical research programmes. These were seen as claims about how one should understand the world which, as he elaborated this in the 1950s, could themselves be critically appraised in terms of their success or otherwise in resolving the problems at which they were directed, but which could also serve to suggest how detailed and testable scientific explanations should be developed.

Third, and the lesson against analytic philosophy Lakatos, in effect, took Popper's idea of metaphysical research programmes, removed the fallibilistic realism, and turned it into his own "scientific research programmes". In my view the lesson from all this, from critical rationalism, is that one should use Popper's realist approach supplemented by useful points from Lakatos's interest in heuristics (and, Lakatos argued – with reference to an interesting paper by the 19th-century philosopher of science William Whewell – a programme might be criticised for its relative failure to generate suggestions as to scientific explanations in line with its programmatic ideas).

All this leads us to a situation in which we see there as being competing metaphysical research programmes, each of which has its distinctive problematic – theoretical and empirical – about the current state of play, concerning each of which we should, as far as I can see, be able to reach intersubjective agreement. Popper discussed metaphysical research programmes, but also stressed that provided we are fallibilists and are aiming for truth, we can hope to learn from one another even though we don't share our fundamental ideas. His paper "The Moral Basis of a Free Society" (better known as "Public and Private Values") brought out that we could expect there to be a continuing competitive pluralism of ideals, and his "On Toleration" discussed the fruitfulness of

exchanges that took place between Bohr and Einstein – scientifically productive without their reaching agreement. What he said about objectivity in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* depicted it as a product of ongoing dialogue between different views.

In my view, it is always misleading to think – after the fashion of analytical philosophy – that some kind of neutral units of analysis are simply available to us or in any sense given. Rather, I'd see these as something that has to be worked towards in dialogue with those who take different perspectives to our own, and anything which we take to have such a status must be understood as provisional and in principle open to revision in such dialogue.

Accordingly, the key elements in critical rationalism include a recognition of our fallibility, an acceptance of the fact that while we are seeking truth we need to recognise ourselves to be in an ongoing situation of pluralism, and that it is from respectful dialogue with others that we can best hope to learn. If this is the case, we need to be particularly careful of inadvertently assuming the superiority of our own view – in effect of taking up a form of intellectual imperialism to which, in my judgment, analytical philosophy is particularly prone.

Thank you very much.

Artificial Intelligence Under the Ethical Microscope: Concerns About Targeted Advertising and Privacy

Prof. Donald A. Gillies

Donald A. Gillies (born on 4 May 1944) is a British philosopher and historian of science and mathematics. He is an Emeritus Professor in the Department of Science and Technology Studies at University College London. He is one of the most prominent contemporary philosophers of science.

Okay then. We have just witnessed a remarkable revolution in AI – the deep-learning revolution. It started in 2012, and the following decade saw many remarkable innovations in AI, culminating in the release of ChatGPT on the 30th of November 2022 – which is less than three years ago – and yet ChatGPT has really stirred things up.

The novel neural-networks-based AI turned out to have a whole range of applications to industry and commerce. Unfortunately, many of these applications are widely considered to be morally wrong. Consequently, the philosophy of AI now includes ethics.

I cannot in a short talk give a comprehensive account of all the bad, or allegedly bad, applications of AI – that would fill an entire book, and indeed entire books have already been written on this theme (for example Kate Crawford's 2021 book *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*).

Instead, I will discuss just one illustrative example.

There are some examples of AI applications which everyone, or almost everyone, would agree are morally bad – an obvious case is deep-fake pornography; I don't think I know of anyone who thinks that deep-fake pornography is morally good. However, I thought it would be more interesting to consider an example where there is some doubt as to whether the application is morally bad or not. For this purpose I have chosen the example of targeted advertising.

It is possible to do some targeting of advertisements without using AI, but AI has been the key enabling technology which has allowed the enormous expansion of targeted advertising in recent years, and nowadays nearly all targeted advertisements are produced using AI.

The procedure goes roughly as follows: huge databases of consumer behaviour have been collected by recording the online purchases of individuals made using their computers or smartphones. In addition, individuals can be tracked via their smartphones, and this reveals data about what shops they visit. Deep-learning AI systems are trained using this data and come up with models which enable them to predict whether a particular individual is likely to purchase the products of some company, and therefore be a suitable target for advertisements for those products. Moreover, further data can establish whether targeted advertisements have been successful by monitoring the percentage of those targeted who have purchased the product advertised. This data can then be used to improve the AI models.

Naturally this is only a rough sketch of the sophisticated techniques which have been developed, but it leaves no doubt that the use of AI is essential to nearly all targeted advertising. Without AI – this is the key point – the databases recording millions of consumers would be far too large to be processed by hand. It is the enormous size of these databases which enables AI systems to learn models that make fairly accurate predictions. But is targeted advertising morally bad?

In fact, in the early days of targeted advertising, it was often argued that it would be a beneficial development – not only for the

advertiser, but also for the consumer. This is revealed by Cathy O'Neil in her 2016 book *Weapons of Math Destruction.* She recalls that while she was working for the advertising start-up Instant Media, her office was visited by a prominent venture capitalist who claimed not only that targeted advertising would be profitable, but that it would be welcomed by consumers. So what was the argument? Let me give an example involving two characters: Miss A and Mr B.

Miss A is an enthusiast for healthy eating and is particularly fond of Japanese food. Mr B, by contrast, really loves traditional fast food – for him the perfect meal might be a cheeseburger and French fries, followed by a chocolatey donut and washed down with a cola drink. (That's not an imaginary meal – you can order exactly that meal from a fast-food outlet near where I live; I've never done so myself, but it would be possible). Mr B regards Japanese food as uneatable, while Miss A shudders with horror at what she regards as greasy and disgusting traditional fast food; she would never allow any of it to pass her lips.

Given this situation, it would obviously be a waste of time to advertise fast food to Miss A or Japanese restaurants to Mr B. Moreover, it would be very irritating for Miss A to receive advertisements for cheeseburgers, and equally irritating for Mr B to receive advertisements featuring the delights of Japanese cuisine.

Suitably targeted advertisements would be much better for both Miss A and Mr B. The irritation just mentioned would disappear. Miss A might receive advertisements for Japanese restaurants which she didn't know about but which she would like to try; Mr B might receive advertisements for new fast-food outlets or special offers. All this sounds very admirable and harmonious.

But of course there might be snags. Mr B might have been warned by his doctor that he is already overweight and risks developing diabetes, heart problems, and other unpleasant conditions. The doctor has strongly advised him to give up fast food and eat more healthy food (though not necessarily Japanese). Mr B is worried about his health and is trying to follow the doctor's

advice, but he still suffers from cravings for his beloved fast food. Naturally the relevant corporations know very well about this craving and will continue to target him with tempting offers for fast food, tempting him to disobey his doctor's advice and risk the onset of some unpleasant disease.

There are of course many other similar examples. Someone might have been a compulsive gambler and lost a lot of money; he is now trying to give up gambling, but his past is known to the advertisers and he may well continue to receive targeted advertisements for online gambling, tempting him to worsen his already very bad situation. Gambling is a highly profitable industry.

These are significant objections to targeted advertising, but there is another, extremely serious objection – I think perhaps the most serious of all. Targeted advertising is only possible if large quantities of data about an individual's consumer habits are available to commercial firms. Indeed such data is regularly appropriated by some firms and sold on to others; it has become part of normal commercial transactions. However, the necessary data can only be obtained by surveillance, and many object to such surveillance as intrusive and invasive of their privacy.

The extent of this surveillance is really remarkable, as is illustrated by an experiment carried out by Janet Vertesi (Professor of Sociology at Princeton) and described in her 2014 article. When she became pregnant she knew she was liable to become the target of marketing companies. As a sociologist of technology she was also launching a study of how people keep personal information private on the internet. This suggested to her the experiment of seeing whether she could go the entire nine months of her pregnancy without letting the marketing companies know she was pregnant. It turned out that this was very difficult – and attempting to carry out the experiment actually led to her being suspected of criminal activity. It was immediately obvious that she couldn't say anything about her pregnancy on social media such as Facebook or Twitter, and she had to warn her relatives not to mention it. As she says:

"Social interactions online are not just about what you say, but

also what others say about you. One tagged photo with a visible bump and the cascade of congratulations would let the cat out of the bag."

So when they phoned friends and families to tell them the good news, they also told them about the experiment, requesting that they not put anything about the pregnancy online.

Unfortunately, this request was ignored or forgotten by an uncle who, at seven months, sent Janet a Facebook message congratulating her on her pregnancy. She was forced to reply very rudely online, denying the truth. Another family member made a similar mistake a few weeks later and rather naively said, "I didn't know that a private message wasn't private."

Janet Vertesi had to take further steps. She used the Tor browser (which has a reputation for facilitating illicit activities) simply to visit babycenter.com and look up possible names. When it came to shopping she did all her purchasing – prenatal vitamins, baby gear, maternity wear – in cash. She turned down loyalty-card swipes and even set up an Amazon account tied to an email address hosted on a personal server, delivering to a locker and paid for with gift cards purchased with cash. These measures began to make it look as if she was engaged in criminal activity of some kind. This became obvious when she needed to buy a stroller (what in British English we call a pushchair). As she says:

"For months I joked to my family that I was probably on a watch list for my excessive use of Tor and cash withdrawals. But then my husband headed to our local corner store to buy enough gift cards to afford a stroller listed on Amazon. There, a warning sign behind the cashier informed him that the store reserves the right to limit the amount of prepaid cash-card purchases and has an obligation to report excessive transactions to the authorities."

Janet Vertesi concludes:

"No one should have to act as a criminal just to have some privacy from marketeers and tech giants. It's time for a frank public discussion about how to make personal information privacy a basic human right, both online and off."

A survey conducted in the United States in 2012 revealed that most Americans agree with Janet Vertesi: 68% of those surveyed said they are not okay with targeted advertising because they do not like having their online behaviour tracked and analysed. This makes perfect sense. How many people would be agreeable to personal details about themselves – such as the fact that they are pregnant, or that they were once a compulsive gambler, or that they have an addiction to traditional fast food – being appropriated by firms for commercial purposes?

However, the use of AI to produce targeted advertisements necessarily involves the appropriation of such personal details. My conclusion, therefore, is that the use of AI to produce targeted advertisements is a morally bad application of AI.

Thank you.

East–West Philosophical Dialogue: Philosophy as the Key to Understanding and Shaping Truth in Today's World

Prof. Muhammad Asghari

Muhammad Asghari (born in 1975) is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tabriz, Iran; He is Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Philosophical Investigations; Deputy Dean for Research, Faculty of Literature, University of Tabriz; Scientific Secretary of the Conference.

Today we are witnessing enormous transformations in the world that are perhaps unprecedented in human history. The world is undergoing fundamental changes every day; or rather, we are experiencing developments that often make us all – in every country and every city – worry about the future.

My dear friend and colleague, Professor Maurice Hammington from the University of Portland, USA, believes that the world today needs care more than ever. But the necessary condition for this care is dialogue.

In this lecture I will try to examine the dialogue between different Eastern and Western philosophies in order to analyse the contemporary situation and to consider this dialogue not on the basis of a pre-existing truth, but on the basis of constructing a common truth.

For this, I would like to start with Iranian literature. Although this is a mystical story and not a pragmatist analysis, there is a beautiful story in Iranian literature about the Simorgh which Attar of Nishapur narrated in his book *The Conference of the Birds* a few centuries ago.

The summary of the story is as follows: thousands of birds, led by the Hudhud (the hoopoe, a symbol of philosophy), decide to go to the peak of Mount Qaf and see the Truth in the form of the perfect Simorgh in order to achieve immortality. During this long and arduous journey, many birds fail to continue for various reasons: the nightingale says he cannot leave the garden and the rose; another bird makes another excuse. Finally only thirty birds reach the peak. And there they see that the perfect Simorgh is not there. "Where is the perfect Simorgh? Where is Truth? We do not see him," they ask the Hudhud. The Hudhud replies: "Look within yourselves. You yourselves, all thirty of you together, are the Simorgh. You have created the Simorgh, you have created Truth together."

From this story we can conclude that each bird symbolises a philosophical tradition – in the East or in the West – which, guided by the common concept of philosophy, must create truth rather than simply search for it. Today's philosophers must turn to constructing truth instead of merely discovering it.

We know that today neither Eastern nor Western philosophy alone is able to analyse the conflicts and the complex state of the world and its future. Both need a philosophical dialogue with each other.

We no longer live in McLuhan's global village; we live in a global common room. Today's human problems are much wider and more complex than in the past, and artificial intelligence has become a shared concern for humans on all five continents.

We have no choice but to expand our classical dialogue in order to better analyse the future of the world – a future in which huge developments are coming in the fields of technology, the environment, the economy, society, art, and religion. Philosophical dialogue is the only solution if we are to achieve a convergent

perspective between thinkers, especially at the level of the United Nations.

The seeds of this classical dialogue already exist globally in Islamic, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, and even African philosophies. Although the foundations of these philosophies are different – Eastern philosophy relies more on intuition, religious and spiritual experience; Western philosophy relies on science, rationality, and empirical method – considering the developments in the world today, both are like birds with one wing. Neither can fly alone.

If a philosophical dialogue is formed on the basis of constructing truth, the world becomes a temple, and this can help us understand the problems of the world today more deeply. The solution to many of today's problems lies in the dialogue of philosophies.

Fortunately, in the present century such dialogue has already begun to take shape. Interdisciplinary thinking and pre-paradigmatic sciences have been strengthened. The question is: can philosophers with different approaches do something similar? The answer depends on the attitude of the philosophers themselves.

Human problems in this century are rising, and interdisciplinary research is flourishing at universities such as Cambridge and Oxford. Is it possible for a similar situation to be established on the basis of Eastern and Western philosophies? In other words, can the important issues of today and the future of humanity be shared through the dialogue of philosophies?

These questions arise from our deep concern for the future of humanity. The spirit of AI and its applications in all areas of private and public life both increases our overall improvement and deepens our concern. As Slavoj Žižek says, the light that reaches us at the end of the tunnel may not be the light of the sun but the light of an oncoming train. Islamic and Buddhist philosophical thought, by touching reality through intuition and the insight of philosophers and mystics, increases our capacity for human life. On the other hand, Western philosophy – relying on reason, experience, the scientific method, and hermeneutic approaches – provides valuable practical achievements.

It can be said that the realms of theory and practice are linked to each other through philosophical dialogue. Today, philosophy can analyse the current state of the world and learn with the help of art, literature, and science.

Mankind must, as Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas have stated in different ways, take charge of its destiny on a global level, not a national one, because national responses are inadequate. Today's world has become a vast network of human relationships, and human life is shaped by these relationships. It seems that the identity of every human being in the future will only find meaning by entering into this complex web of relations.

Our goal is to create a space for philosophical reflection and thinking about the development and future of humanity. Today, no one can present a complete vision alone. Among the many scattered visions, it is the dialogue of philosophers that, in the human state, asks after the human future.

Thank you very much.

From Problem-Oriented to Problem Understanding: Philosophy's Mission in Shaping Human Futures

Dr. Reza Gholami

Reza Gholami (born in 1976) is an Iranian theorist. He is Professor of Political Philosophy, Cultural and Civilizational Studies; Faculty member at the Research Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies; President of the House of Iranian Wisdom, Vienna.

Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to take this moment to thank Professor Muhammad Asghari for his efforts in orchestrate the scientific part of conference. I also thank all the distinguished professors, researchers, and participantsfor their presence and contribution. I hope this conference helps revive the role of philosophy in solving global problems. Now, let me move straight to my topic.

Introduction: Humanity's Position on the Threshold of the Future

We stand on the threshold of a future filled with opportunities and threats. Technological advancements, especially artificial intelligence, could be the most important factor in creating change in the coming decades.

1. Parallel Challenges of the New Era

But the harsh reality is this: we talk about new technologies like

artificial intelligence, while we have not yet overcome the challenges of climate change on Earth, and we may even fail in this path.

2. Crises in Political Philosophy

Even from the viewpoint of political philosophy, there are serious concerns: the weakness of democracy, the limits on freedom and justice, and most importantly, the growing fragility of human rights. These political concerns have become more serious because globalization has turned from an idea or perspective into an objective reality, making humans inhabitants of a small village or a single ship. This situation has brought major changes to governance and has confronted the political order of the modern era with serious shifts.

Part 1: The Role of Philosophy in Human Transformations

The discussion is about transformations that can confront human life with changes beyond our imaginations. In this midst, philosophy certainly cannot and should not be a mere spectator.

1. Philosophy as a Guide

By proactively confronting these transformations, philosophy can bring humanity closer to opportunities and keep it away from threats. This means philosophy has a hidden but important role, which is to serve as a source of hope. Philosophy creates hope by elevating thought even in the hardest conditions.

2. Mutual Relationship Between Philosophy and Humans

Basically, philosophy for its own sake is meaningless. History shows that philosophy is for humans and, in critical situations, helps people and societies respond to fundamental questions and approach truth. This mutual help has also ensured the growth of philosophy itself and saved it from stagnation and standing still.

Part 2: Problem-Oriented Philosophy and Its Connection to Society

1. The Necessity of Philosophy's Connection to Society

For philosophy to play such a role in critical moments, it must not distance itself from the context of societies. It must hold the pulse of society, especially in the foundational layers of human minds. Only in such a position can philosophy be problem-oriented.

Let me talk frankly. we speak of the need for philosophers to be active and engaged in the face of deep changes in the world, yet philosophy—by becoming an academic profession and falling prisoner to the industry of article-writing—has withdrawn from this role. This is the contradiction we face.

If in the past we witnessed the emergence of transformative philosophical ideas, these ideas did not appear only in universities. They emerged through serious conversations woven into the fabric of society itself—in public spaces, in dialogue with people's real concerns. This is what we miss today.

Today, philosophy has become isolated. It speaks to itself in academic journals and conferences, while the world transforms without philosophical guidance. The great philosophical problems of our time—about technology, justice, meaning, and human existence—are being decided by economists and engineers, not philosophers. And this is a profound loss.

Philosophers must first put an end to this fragile condition that has brought philosophy to the brink of disappearance. They must step out of the universities and return to the marketplace of human concerns. This is not optional—it is the first task.

Of course, for philosophers to enter the public space, they need freedom. They need the ability to speak without red lines. They need to cross boundaries that others fear to cross. Philosophers should not face pressure from governments or multinational companies when they speak their critical views openly. They should not be given political labels or attacked for their ideas. This freedom is not a luxury—it is necessary for philosophy to do its work.

Without this freedom, philosophers become servants of power, not voices of truth. And then philosophy dies, not just in universities, but in the hearts of people who need it most.

2. How a Problem is Born in the Philosopher's Mind

A philosopher who is not problem-oriented is not a philosopher. A problem does not enter the philosopher's mind from outside; rather, it is born in their mind through their engagement with humans and society, in a dynamic process. Also, a problem is not fixed; the problem itself is constantly changing and evolving, and the philosopher's art is to deeply understand the changing problem.

Part 3: Plurality of Philosophical Problems and Relativity

1. Plurality of Intellectual Habitats

Every philosopher encounters a problem in their own intellectual habitat, while in the world of philosophy, there is no single habitat. On the other hand, every philosopher, in their own habitat, looks at humans and human societies through their own specific lens; therefore, problems, even if they have the same title, are not identical. To the extent that there are multiple viewpoints on one point, the problem or problems related to that point are also multiple.

Philosophy does not try to create one single answer to problems. Each philosophical problem can have many different answers. But what matters is this: which answer helps keep the core of human being alive and strong? This is the real measure. Not which answer is the most "correct," but which answer supports what it means to be human. Different answers can all be true in their own way, but we choose the one that strengthens human existence itself.

2. The Challenge of Relativity and the Importance of Dialogue

Some believe that neither the birth of philosophical problems nor the recognition of a problem is open to dialogue, because it is an individual matter, and the dominance of relativity leaves no common points among people. In this case, the importance of dialogue and even criticism comes into question.

3. Critique of the Postmodern View

However, this postmodern interpretation probably does not align much with the history of philosophy and its realities. The fact that philosophers consider dialogue useful for themselves and highly effective is enough for us to turn to dialogue and use it in the process of becoming problem-oriented and then problem-recognition.

4. Common Concern of Philosophers

Of course, there is another historical reality: most philosophers, both in identifying and analyzing problems and in seeking answers, share a common concern, which is establishing free thought and preserving human freedom and will.

Part 4: The Nature of Philosophical Problems

1. Clarifying Expectations from Philosophy

However, expectations from philosophy must be clarified. The question is: what kind of problems should philosophy pay attention to? More clearly, what problems are philosophical problems?

2. Four Characteristics of a Philosophical Problem

A philosophical problem must at least have these four characteristics:

1. Being foundational

2. Universality and global scope

3. Connection to the existence and truth of human being

4. Existential and practical importance

3. Distinction Between Philosophical Problems and Other Problems

Therefore, it must be acknowledged that a philosophical problem is neither a religious problem, nor a scientific problem, nor an economic problem, nor a political or social problem in the sense of detailed and everyday issues. I would like to talk here about the difference between a scientific problem and a philosophical one.

Science cannot and should not replace philosophy, because science by its nature deals with details and functional laws of material things, not their essence, and therefore cannot both raise philosophical questions and answer them. In fact, the decline of philosophy is not only impossible—it is dangerous. This is because humanities and social sciences, when facing the challenges of the world's future, cannot use science and technology without the guidance of philosophy and reflection on meaning and being.

Philosophy plays a role that cannot be replaced. Ontology—the philosophy of being—reveals things and objects for what they truly are. It shows us the relationships between things and objects. Through this work, philosophy naturally places before us a set of must-dos and must-nots. Humanities and social sciences without this philosophical understanding would become nothing more than empty tools. They would not be able to answer the deep questions about what we should do—not just what we can do.

Science tells us what is possible and what works. Philosophy of being reveals what things are and how they relate to each other. From this understanding naturally comes a set of principles for human action. Without this, human and social sciences cannot face the challenges ahead.

Part 5: Problem-Recognition and Its Importance

1. Two Sides of the Coin: Problem-Orientation and Problem-Recognition

Problem-orientation—meaning the ability to give birth to a problem from the intersection of the mind with objective realities—is only one side of the coin. The other side is problem-recognition.

2. The Role of Problem-Recognition in Discovering Solutions

For philosophers, correctly recognizing the problem is discovering half of the solution. As Gaston Bachelard said: "No scientific truth is formed without posing a problem." Or as Paul Feyerabend said: "Intellectual progress is the result of engagement with problems, not following methods."

Problem-understanding in philosophy requires an integrated approach: philosophy must use all available tools of rational thinking—whether formal logic, mathematical methods, historical analysis, or experimental methods—to explore the deep and fundamental roots of problems.

However, one of the main weaknesses in traditional and even modern problem-understanding methodology is the undervaluation of history. Both traditional and contemporary philosophers tend to underestimate the importance of history and historical linguistics—not that they deny it exists, but they simply do not give it sufficient weight. Many contemporary philosophers discover problems as if they were born yesterday, without paying attention to the history of how the problem has changed, to its past origins, and to how the problem has transformed from one historical form to another. These historical oversights are precisely where fundamental errors occur: we may end up not truly understanding the problem, but only recognizing one of its temporary appearances in the present moment. From this perspective, perhaps Continental philosophers have been more successful.

Well, after this long introduction, let me now focus on the new philosophical issues that will arise in the future of technology—especially artificial intelligence, which I believe will play a central role in the technological world.

3. The Weakening of Deep Thinking in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The spread of artificial intelligence is seriously weakening people's ability to think deeply. This is a real danger that can challenge what it truly means to be human. For many philosophers today, this has become a critical issue because it threatens our ability to reflect, think critically, and be creative.

4. The Crisis of Individuality and Human Agency

In the last few centuries, industrialization already started to reduce human individuality and the feeling of being in control of one's own life. Now, with artificial intelligence, this danger can become much greater. In the AI era, people may be pushed aside not only as workers, but even as the main decision-makers and active agents of their own lives.

5. The Crisis of Work and the Loss of Life's Core Meaning

Work has always been one of the most basic parts of human life. With the arrival of advanced AI and robots, work now faces an unprecedented threat. Machines will replace humans in a huge number of jobs. This is not just an economic problem – it is an existential and philosophical crisis.

Work is much more than just earning money. It is part of our identity, a source of meaning, and the reason many people feel valuable. Widespread unemployment caused by automation could take away one of the most important things that makes life feel meaningful. The big questions become:

1. If humans no longer work, how should we live?

2. What will give life meaning in a world without work?

3. How can we keep human dignity when we no longer have agency through work?

6. The Collapse of Creative Culture and Cultural Diversity

On the other side, Culture and cultural diversity were already in danger because creative culture was increasingly turned into just another commercial product. Now, with AI algorithms taking over the creation of music, art, films, and books, this danger is even greater than ever. Cultural homogenization driven by AI can dramatically reduce the richness and variety of human culture.

7. The Threat to Logical Analysis and Philosophical Big-Picture Thinking

Meanwhile, In the future, people may gradually lose their ability to think logically in depth and to see the big philosophical picture. If we rely too much on AI to process information and make decisions for us, our own deep cognitive skills and capacity for philosophical reasoning will become weaker.

8. The Danger of AI Tyranny

In the future, humanity could fall under the control of artificial intelligence and lose its freedom and free will. This control could appear in the form of monitoring and shaping behavior, limiting

real choices, and taking away personal autonomy. Such a situation would seriously threaten the ethical and political foundations of democratic societies.

9. New Emerging Issues: Genetic Engineering and Human-Machine Merging

Besides all the above, there are other developments that will fundamentally change the human future:

1. Genetic engineering and the fate of humanity: Changing human genes can completely transform what a human being is, social justice, and the meaning of natural life, and it could even lead to the creation of evil beings.

2. Directly connecting the human brain to microchips and Quantum computers: When the mind is linked directly to machines, the border between human and machine disappears. This raises deep questions about identity, consciousness, and what it means to be human. Some people even expect that connecting the brain to new generations of computers might help humans overcome death.

3. Turning humans into half-robot (cyborg) beings: The possibility of becoming part-biological and part-artificial creatures brings enormous ethical, existential, and social challenges and it raises many philosophical questions.

Conclusion

In this talk, I explained the difference between problem-orientation and problem-analysis, and showed why both are necessary for serious philosophical work. My central point was the urgent need to revive the role of philosophy in the global community—a role that has been greatly weakened in recent decades. Philosophers must rediscover the transformative power of philosophy, and people everywhere must realize that without philosophical guidance, the core of human existence is at risk.

I also highlighted artificial intelligence as the main challenge we face today. Although I briefly mentioned genetic engineering and microchips, my focus was on the impact of AI on the future of

human existence. I do not deny the positive aspects of new technologies, but the key task of philosophy is to understand how we can protect the essence of being human in an age shaped by AI.

All these points lead to one conclusion: we are facing profound philosophical questions that must be addressed with seriousness and clarity. The future of humanity—and even the meaning of being human—depends on the answers we give today.

Thank you for your attention

Digitalization Is Not Merely a Technical Change, but a Reconstruction of the Very Meaning of Society

Prof. Thomas Bauer

Thomas Bauer (born in 1945 in Germany) is an Austrian philosopher and theorist of media and culture; Specialized in communication sciences, cultural sociology, and philosophy; one of the key figures in European media studies.

In the context of media change, I begin from the assumption that when we talk about "reality," we are in fact talking about the way we construct it. Reality is culturally produced: we construct the past, the present, and the future through culturally embedded forms of understanding. Therefore, when we talk about media change, we are really discussing how a society understands itself and communicates this understanding.

Communication itself is not an objective entity standing outside us. It is a way of interpreting what we believe communication to be. Media, communication, and society are metaphors of description: we describe what we observe and what we think. Consequently, the world is not simply "as it is," but as we construct and communicate it. For this reason, reflecting on how we think about communication and media is crucial for understanding what we expect from the environment in which we live—one essential dimension of which is the future. The future, too, is a metaphor, a descriptive category emerging from how we understand time—past, present, and future.

When discussing media change, we must therefore examine not only its structures but the characteristics of this change. In current debates on digitalization—driven by science, politics, industry, and civil society—we encounter a phenomenon that permeates all areas of life. Digitalization promises solutions, addresses risks, and generates far-reaching controversies. My intention here is to look behind the seemingly sober technological façade of digitalization from a media-change perspective that understands change as an innovation-driven or evolutionary process under complex conditions.

Such a perspective focuses on the evolution of hybrid socio-cultural constellations and interprets innovation as a co-evolutionary process. Drawing on complexity theories and selection paradigms, it highlights the analogies between biological and technological evolution. Technology may then be interpreted as an institution and a governance mechanism—an intermediary and an actor situated within a distributed agency between humans and machines.

In this regard, I refer particularly to the Austrian scholar Michael Latzer, now living in Switzerland, whose work has illuminated how media change mirrors societal transformation—its challenges as well as its opportunities. Although digitalization is not a new phenomenon, situating it within the broader context of 20th-century debates allows us to understand continuities and ruptures. Digitalization's main characteristics can be summarized, following Latzer, as a co-evolutionary "digital trinity": datafication, algorithmization, and platformization. These form a symbolic image of human evolution reflected in technological transformation and in the pursuit of an emerging techno-cognitive convergence—one that increasingly resembles an implicit everyday "religion," rooted in our belief in change and our faith in the future.

These features manifest themselves in the emerging immersive digital social order. With this in mind, we can distinguish two phases of digitalization. The first took place in the second half of the 20th century; the second, still unfolding, began in the early 21st century. Although it is vital to focus on the second phase, it is helpful

to recall the foundational similarities and differences between the two. The central socio-technical innovations have changed, as have the character of change and its expected consequences.

From a technological perspective, the first phase was marked by the spread of digital computing, the shift from analog to digital telecommunications and broadcasting, and mass internet penetration following the creation of the World Wide Web. These developments reshaped economic conditions through corporate convergence across previously separate sectors such as broadcasting, telephony, and the internet.

This co-evolutionary cycle also reached the political sphere. Policymakers, responding to digitized and convergent markets, promoted the liberalization and partial privatization of formerly monopolistic national communication sectors. Thus, 20th-century digitalization was largely confined to communication policy and traditional players in the ICT sector. Its political and economic effects centered on liberalization and privatization.

In this context, classical media still appeared as professionalized and institutionalized forms of communication. Today, however, with the rise of new and social media, social communication has become radically individualized. Responsibility, truth, and trust are increasingly delegated not to institutions but to technological and economic mechanisms. This is one of the major challenges we face.

Thinking about the future therefore requires us to recognize that the future does not simply "arrive" as an external force. It becomes what we imagine it to be. The world reconstructs itself as we communicate it. Understanding the future thus demands that we observe how communication and its mediality are changing. Unlike the first phase, the second phase of digitalization now permeates all spheres of life. Yet structurally it remains driven by co-evolutionary dynamics similar to the earlier phase. According to Latzer's notion of the "digital trinity," three processes shape the media society: datafication, algorithmization, and platformization.

Datafication produces big data—an asset class that restructures domains of life. Algorithmization automates selection processes,

assigning relevance to data and extracting economic, social, and political value. Platformization reorganizes markets and business models, commercializing the social sphere and enabling deeper datafication and algorithmization. Together, these processes spiral ever deeper into modern societies, following their own logic.

The changing media landscape transforms not only structures but meanings. Media should not be understood merely as external systems we use to communicate. Rather, media—and more importantly, mediality—are qualities of society itself. Just as we can speak of the mediality of communication, we can speak of the mediality of identity, religion, politics, and life. We understand ourselves only in relation to an "other," whether another individual or another culture. Identity is constructed through communication, and so is authority—whether individual or collective.

The future, therefore, becomes intelligible only when we understand our present situation not merely structurally but meaningfully. Meaning is not determined by structures; it emerges through use, interpretation, and cultural practice. Media is not simply a tool for communication; it is the language of communication, the language of society, the language through which we observe, interpret, and present ourselves and others. Observation always reflects an interest: we observe others in order to understand ourselves.

Thus, when we observe another culture, what we truly observe is our own culture in relation to that culture. This is essential because it shows why the plurality of cultures, languages, and traditions is a blessing: each provides an interpretive lens through which we understand ourselves. Reality is not merely what exists; it is what we observe and how we interpret what we observe.

To understand the future, we must therefore understand how we think, how we observe, and how we construct meaning. This cultural-studies approach enables us to grasp the meaning of the future.

Finally, while technology allows us to delegate certain complexities—as in past eras we delegated complexity to religion,

politics, or economics—we must recognize that complexity is not a property of systems alone but of the ways we contextualize them. Meaning emerges where usability, ethics, and aesthetics converge. Nothing is ethically meaningful if it lacks usability and aesthetic coherence; nothing is usable if it lacks ethical grounding and aesthetic form.

Therefore, if we want to cultivate the future—of society, of media, of institutions such as family, politics, or culture—we must reflect deeply on what we consider meaningful: ethically, aesthetically, and practically.

Thank you very much.

The Myth of Artificial Intelligence and the Need for a Neo-Luddite Movement Grounded in Human Dignity

Prof. Robert Hanna

Robert Hanna (born in July 2, 1957) is a Canadian philosopher with a radical Kantian orientation; works on philosophy of mind, logic, free will, ethics, philosophy of nature, critical metaphysics, and modern philosophy from the Enlightenment to today.

Good morning from Vancouver Island, Canada. Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in this conference and to present this talk.

No digital computing system or digital technology, no matter how sophisticated or tricked out with high-tech bells and whistles, will ever be able to equal or exceed the essentially embodied innate mental capacities or powers of rational human animals. Not even in principle can such systems or technology match or surpass our capacities or powers.

To be sure, digital computing systems or digital technology can carry out certain operations much faster and more accurately than we can, but that is not a fact about the nature, scope, and limits of our mental capacities or powers; it is rather only a fact about the applications of these powers to certain mechanical tasks, and no more philosophically exciting or significant than the quotidian fact that we can build machines that can move faster than we do, lift

heavier weights than we do, or make more accurate measurements than we do.

In other words, digital computing systems and digital technology are artificial but not intelligent in the sense in which we are intelligent. And to that extent, the term "artificial intelligence" is simply an oxymoron or two-word paradox.

The widely held yet profoundly false contrary belief – namely that digital computing systems or digital technology can equal or exceed the essentially embodied innate mental capacities or powers of rational human animals – is what I call the myth of artificial intelligence, or the myth of AI for short.

Codologically, the myth of AI is a myth with no causal powers of its own. Nevertheless, just as nuclear-war technology and biological-weapons technology are neither intelligent nor super-intelligent yet still pose an all-too-real dire threat to humankind in the brute raw sense that their use can kill everyone and destroy the earth as we know it, so too the myth of AI poses an all-too-real dire threat to humankind's embodied or physical existence – especially insofar as people believe that nuclear weapons technology and biological-weapons technology should be controlled by so-called intelligent or so-called super-intelligent digital computers that run or will run drones, killer robots, missiles, and other deadly machines.

Their worry is that these super-intelligent digital computers could, on their own, become morally satanic, run amok, and destroy humankind, which would then survive only by uploading the sets of algorithms that constitute their so-called minds into shiny new digital technology. This accelerationist and transhumanist apocalyptic mindset is especially characteristic of very, very rich technocrats and their scientific lackeys.

But leaving aside accelerationist and transhumanist fantasies, the authentic bottom-line worry is just that high-powered digital technology will be misused by the people who create and control this technology – your Googles and your OpenAIs – against the interests of the rest of humankind.

Moreover, and more importantly, I think, the myth of AI poses a different yet equally dire threat to humankind's cognitive, affective, and practical existence – in short, to humankind's conscious and self-conscious existence – even if humankind continues to exist in the embodied or physical sense.

Digital computing systems or digital technology that can supposedly equal or exceed rational human-animal intelligence are sometimes called artificial general intelligence, or AGI. Nevertheless, AGI is no more really possible than is Sonny the NS5 prototype robot in the 2004 movie *I, Robot*. Science fiction and futuristic fantasy are just fine as artistic genres, provided that we don't also start to believe them and act on that belief.

But the myth of AI is pernicious since it leads us not only to seriously depreciate and underestimate our own mental capacities, but also – by means of our excessive use and reliance on digital technology – furiously to neglect or even impair our own mental capacities or powers. This is particularly true in the case of the recent rollout of large language models, LLMs, or chatbots like ChatGPT. This is what I call the invasion of the mind-snatchers.

And to the extent that we knowingly or unknowingly disseminate and perpetuate the myth of AI, we also seriously misapply and misuse our own mental capacities or powers.

That all being so, in view of the two existential threats posed to humanity by the myth of AI, the only remaining really important philosophical questions are:

1. Why does the myth of AI persist?

2. What can philosophy do about it?

As to the first question, I think that the persistence of the myth of AI can be explained by a combination of six essentially ideological causal factors:

1. A dogmatic or at least irresponsibly uncritical commitment to the false doctrine of Cartesian dualism, whether substance dualism or property dualism.

2. A dogmatic or at least irresponsibly uncritical commitment to the fantasy of post-humanist or transhumanist spiritualism.

3. A dogmatic or at least irresponsibly uncritical commitment to the false doctrine of intellectualism about the nature of rational human animals and rational human cognition.

4. A dogmatic or at least irresponsibly uncritical commitment to false – that is to say reductive, whether reductive or non-reductive – materialist or physicalist views about the rational human mind, especially including computational functionalism.

5. More generally, a dogmatic or at least irresponsibly uncritical commitment to the false, what I call mechanistic worldview.

6. The hegemony of what I call the military-industrial-digital complex, which amasses and reaps immense wealth and political power precisely by means of effectively and relentlessly disseminating and perpetuating the myth of AI, while at the same time hypocritically issuing public warnings about the dangers of runaway AI.

The first five factors are classically philosophical factors, so they're at least in principle open to critical rational argumentation, refutation, and correction. But the same is not the case with respect to the sixth factor, which is essentially social-institutional and political in nature. Sadly, however, I think that it's more than merely reasonable to hold that the hegemony of the military-industrial-digital complex is the principal cause of the persistence of the myth of AI. As Garrison Lovely cogently and crisply puts it:

"The debate playing out in the public square may lead you to believe that we have to choose between addressing AI's immediate harms and its inherently speculative existential risks … But when you look at the material forces at play, a different picture emerges. In one corner are trillion-dollar companies trying to make AI models more powerful and profitable. In another corner, you find civil-society groups trying to make AI reflect values that routinely clash with profit maximization. In short, it's capitalism versus humanity."

Nevertheless, radical social-institutional and political change for the better – or even the best – is really possible by means of what Michelle Maiese and I have called the mind-body politic and its enactive-transformative principle in our 2019 book *The Mind-Body Politic*. So, to end this section on an upbeat note, there is at least some rational hope for debunking the myth of AI by devolving and enactively transforming the military-industrial-digital complex.

Now, to address the second question: what is to be done by philosophy? What I'm proposing is a view I call dignitarian neo-Luddism with respect to digital technology.

Dignitarian neo-Luddism with respect to digital technology says that not all digital technology is bad and wrong, but instead all and only the digital technology that harms and oppresses ordinary people – i.e., people other than digital technocrats – by either failing to respect our human dignity sufficiently or by outright violating our human dignity, is bad and wrong. And therefore all and only this bad and wrong digital technology should be rejected – but not, except in extreme cases of digital technology whose coercive use is actually violently harming and oppressing ordinary people (for example digitally driven weapons or weapon systems being used for mass destruction or mass murder), destroyed, but rather only simply refused, non-violently dismantled, or radically transformed into its opposite, its moral opposite.

What I strongly believe is that we all ought to be dignitarian neo-Luddites with respect to digital technology. Why? To be sure, there are many ways in which digital technology can be bad and wrong in the dignitarian sense – including invasive digital surveillance, digitally driven weapons and weapons systems, algorithmic bias, and digital manipulation and nudging – and of course there are also ways in which digital technology can be bad and wrong in the utilitarian sense (for example putting many people out of work). But the principal reason for being a dignitarian neo-Luddite with respect to digital technology is that our excessive use of and indeed addiction to digital technology is systematically undermining our innate capacities for thinking, caring, and acting for ourselves.

This is pre-eminently true with respect to the new chatbots – for example ChatGPT and others – and what I've called the myth of AI more generally, but also to an increasingly important degree true of our excessive use of and addiction to smartphones, desktop and laptop computers, the internet, social media, and so on and so forth – including of course Google Meet and Zoom.

When you combine our excessive use of and addiction to chatbots and AI with our excessive use of and addiction to smartphones, desktop and laptop computers, the internet, social media, and so on, the result is nothing less than an all-out existential attack on our rational human mindedness or intelligence.

So if I'm correct, then the members of the military-industrial-digital complex are systematically harming and oppressing ordinary people like us by not only enabling but also effectively mandating our excessive use of and addiction to digital technology, which in turn systematically undermines our innate capacities for thinking, caring, and acting for ourselves – and thereby systematically undermines our human real personhood and thereby violates our human dignity.

Therefore we ought to ban all giant AI experiments and LLM chatbot technology while they are still in their infancy, just as we ought to have banned all atomic-bomb experiments and nuclear-weapons technology while they were still in their infancy – perhaps immediately after the Trinity test on 16 July 1945, when it was already obvious what their existential threat to humanity would be.

Perhaps dignitarian neo-Luddism with respect to digital technology will become a worldwide, world-changing social and political movement comparable to the Ban-the-Bomb anti-nuclear-weapons movement. I wholeheartedly hope so.

If we ban all further giant AI experiments and LLM chatbot technology right now, when it's already obvious what their existential threat to humankind is, then the world will be a substantially better place – just as the world would have been a substantially better place if we had banned the A-bomb and nuclear-weapons technology immediately after 16 July 1945.

Therefore philosophy's role in the future can be to lead the way forward for humankind by vigorously defending and publicising dignitarian neo-Luddism with respect to digital technology.

Thank you.

Only Through a Fully Care-Centered Democracy Can We Save Ourselves from an Ultimate Collapse

Prof. Maurice Hamington

Maurice Hamington is an American philosopher in care ethics, feminism, feminism, and American pragmatism; Professor at Portland State University; focuses on politics, social justice, and contemporary ethical issues.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to address this group. I have been deeply impressed with all of the presentations and have taken many notes. My name is Maurice Hamington. I teach at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. The title of my talk is Centering Care in the Modern Social Compact.

First, I want to thank Professor Muhammad Asghari and everyone else who worked so hard to put this conference together – organising something like this is no easy task. I am going to take the conversation in a slightly different direction today, from the perspective of feminist philosophy – specifically feminist care ethics.

In this presentation I will briefly introduce care ethics and care theory, address the alarming global trend of democratic backsliding, propose what it means to place care at the very centre of a renewed modern social compact (including the idea of a terrestrial care compact), and end with some thoughts on the philosophical task of hope.

Democratic Backsliding: A Crisis of Care

There is an organisation called the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) that every year produces a report tracking democracies around the world. Their most recent findings are stark:

● For the first time in over twenty years, the world has fewer democracies than autocracies.

● In 2024 only 29 liberal democracies remain – the least common regime type.

● Nearly three out of four people in the world – 72% – now live under autocratic rule. This is the highest number since 1978.

Coming from the United States, I am particularly concerned because we have gone from a full democracy to a near-autocracy in a very short period of time.

Let us move forward a little. Why does autocracy matter for care? Because autocracy systematically reduces social well-being:

● Individual freedoms are suppressed.

● Journalism is undermined.

● Infrastructure is disinvested.

● Economies decline, particularly in equitable distribution.

Studies repeatedly show that autocracies exacerbate the crisis of care we are already living through.

Now let us turn to the next part. We urgently need a vision of a caring democracy – something to give us hope in these bleak times, a vision of something better where care is at the centre of government and of government's agreements with its citizens.

Care Ethics and Care Theory – A Brief Introduction

Care is the basic human need that sustains us and allows us to flourish. Care ethics is a relational approach to morality that values context, emotion, and moral imagination. Care theory is the broader umbrella that includes ethics, aesthetics, epistemology, ontology –

everything related to care. Embodied care (the topic of a book I wrote about twenty-five years ago) reminds us that the body is the primary place where we first learn and understand care. Even when we think about large-scale care – infrastructure, policy – we still draw on bodily metaphors.

Just a couple of months ago I became a grandfather for the first time. Watching my granddaughter with my daughter, I can see how she already understands care in her body, even though she has no words for it yet. In philosophy we often forget that we are embodied beings.

Care is like the air we breathe – so essential that it is often unnoticed. We love to tell the story of human history as competition and survival of the fittest, but another equally true story is that care, compassion, and cooperation are what have brought humanity this far. Care is not only needed when we are born, ill, or dying – we need caring relations all the time, even when we are at our strongest.

Now let us turn to one of the most important definitions of care. Joan Tronto, one of the leading political philosophers today, offers the most quoted definition of caring:

"On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web."

Let us go a little deeper. Care ethics places relationship at the centre of morality. It is contextual, emotionally open, and concerned less with adjudicating isolated dilemmas and more with how we live and relate over time. It was first named in the 1980s by scholars such as Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings (initially as interpersonal morality), and later expanded into political philosophy by Tronto and many others. Understandings of care exist worldwide – in indigenous traditions and across the Western tradition (Hume, Dewey, Jane Addams, etc.).

Let us look at the current situation. Today care ethics and care theory are enjoying a golden age: international, interdisciplinary, and growing rapidly. This year alone I have made six international trips to present on care ethics. There are journals, podcasts, conferences, and even a new Routledge book series on care aesthetics.

Now let us address the important distinctions. Many of us now prefer the broader term care theory because "ethics" in the Western tradition is too often reduced to right/wrong adjudication. Care theory is:

● non-binary (thinks in continuums),

● not extreme altruism (includes legitimate self-care),

● non-perfectionist (we strive to do better, never to be perfect),

● process-oriented (care unfolds in ongoing relationships),

● both humanist and non-humanist (applies to animals, technology, the environment).

Let me turn to my most recent book. In my latest book Revolutionary Care (2024) I address the question "What is good care?" The word "care" has been misused throughout history – by colonial powers, by abusers – so we need criteria. I propose three core skills:

1. Humble inquiry – acquiring knowledge of the cared-for without preconception.

2. Inclusive connection – engaging empathy and moral imagination, especially toward those who are unfamiliar.

3. Responsive action – care must be enacted in the world, responsively.
These skills together create an emergent normativity: the right thing to do emerges in the relational situation rather than being imposed in advance.

Now let us move to care political theory. Care political theory puts relationships and care at the centre of public policy and

practice. Joan Tronto has shown that care and democracy are inseparable: you need democracy within care to avoid paternalism, and you need care within democracy to keep rules from becoming empty formalism. The recent U.S. experience is a painful case study.

Let me say a few words about terminology. I deliberately speak of a social compact rather than "social contract" to move away from neoliberal transactional language. Centering care in that compact makes care the primary objective. Virginia Held argued already in the 1990s that care ethics challenges contractualism and points beyond it.

Now let us go to a higher level. A care compact today cannot be only for humans. Democratic backsliding harms the planet as much as it harms people – environmental protections are usually rolled back under autocracy. We need a terrestrial care compact.

The concept of the "terrestrial" comes from Bruno Latour (though he was not a care theorist, much of his work is deeply relational). Kenneth Jorgensen describes it as "a new story of humans as more-than-humans … necessitating links between humans and the larger complexes of which we are part." Terrestrial agents can be human or non-human; the earth itself has agency we must learn to perceive and respond to.

And finally, let us turn to the task of hope. As Professor Reza Gholami reminded us, it is the job of philosophers to provide hope. History is full of bleak moments that seemed insurmountable, yet ideas carried us through. Care can ground a constructive, pragmatic vision – not just a return to the past, but something genuinely better: a caring democracy, a terrestrial care compact, even a caring populism that cuts across political divides.

If you would like to read more, I co-edited (with Sarah Munawar) a recent open-access special issue of Philosophical Investigations (Summer 2025, Vol. 19, Issue 51) titled Caring and Time, with contributions from Australia, Canada, France, India, South Korea, Spain, Tanzania, and the United States. The editor-in-chief is our conference organiser, Professor Muhammad Asghari.

You are also very welcome to visit my website for further resources on care, and I would be delighted to continue the conversation with any of you.

Thank you very much.