

The minutes of the dissertation defence

Student: Ivan Gutierrez
Date of birth: 17. 5. 1967
Thesis ID: 314898
Study programme: Philosophy
Branch of study: Philosophy
Title: „On the Incorporation of Technological Tools“
Language: English
Language of defence: English
Supervisor: Mgr. Petr Kouba, Ph.D.
Opponents: Mgr. Denisa Kera, Ph.D.
Galit Wellner, Dr.
Date of defence: 19. 6. 2018
Place of defence: FF UK, nám. Jana Palacha 2, Praha 1, místnost č. 218
Date of examination: regular
Chair of the committee: doc. Mgr. Jakub Čapek, Ph.D.
Persons present: According to the attendance list

10:02 The chair of the board doc. Jakub Čapek opened the defence, introducing himself, the members of the board present, and then the opponents present. Then he introduced the student to the persons present.

10:05 The student presented the propositions of his dissertation to the persons present. He highlighted in particular the fact that technological tools do not only connect individuals, but constitute both subjectivity and the world. The goal of the thesis was to clarify this in order to shed some light on both the fears and expectations which technology arouses. The transcendental method was employed when inquiring into the conditions of the possibility of experience, of intentionality, and of the incorporation of technological tools. These parts of the thesis were mainly elaborated in dialogue with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. In the next part of the thesis, he turned to the resources of analytic philosophy, trying to establish an account of agency applicable to tool-use, taking a close look at John Searle's account of intentionality. The notion of autonomy was then developed in order to examine how the analytical framework might be applied to two particular phenomena, namely technologically-mediated privacy and technologically-mediated agency. The student also highlighted the fact that he is not a subscriber to "ivory tower philosophy", but rather prefers direct engagement with people who have done experimental work on the phenomena in question.

10:16 The supervisor introduced briefly to the persons present his evaluation of the student's study and dissertation, given in his written report.

10:22 The opponent Dr Galit Wellner presented the main points of her report and the conclusion, stating that she recommends the submitted dissertation for defence. She put these questions to the student:

1. Why does the student not take into account post-phenomenology and other authors who deal with technology?
2. Why is it necessary to combine both continental and analytic philosophy?
3. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the integration of technology into the body lacks a hermeneutical aspect. Why is this not expanded in the thesis?
4. What is autonomy? The freedom to act or to constitute myself?

10:27 The opponent, Dr Denisa Kera, presented the main points of her report and the conclusion, stating that she recommends the submitted dissertation for defence. She put these questions to the student:

- 1) How is the reader addressed in this thesis? Is the reader addressed at all? Is the reader addressed as a user of technologies or a "Being"? Why do we have to go through the pain of reading different authors if we will always end up in Heidegger's Dasein, Lifeworld, readiness-to-hand and other teleological constructions of goal-directed intentionality that respects anthropocentrism rather than any of the phenomena.
- 2) What explains what? To what body of knowledge is this thesis trying to contribute? What would be the semantic map of the concepts related to the incorporation of technological tools and formation of a complex, technological, but always human, "Lifeworld"? Which is the central topic of the work? Is it to test Heidegger's existential analytic, Merleau-Ponty's embodiment and Searle's intentionality, etc, for audiences indulging in computer games, apps and mediated communication of all kinds? Why does the author not choose more challenging examples of so called "artificial moral agents", in cars etc. that take decisions and bring the issue of deviant causality to the forefront with very practical, design concerns?

3) The thesis describes a world that is complex with emergent properties, but does this really fit the phenomenological obsession with pre-given, pre-reflected meaning and embodiment structures, and how? What is the relation (differences, similarities) between incorporation (of tools, technologies) and embodied, non-conceptual experiences, embedded concerns? There is nothing in the thesis about the experience of designing and building “communication tools” or other technologies. How does the “structure of experience” of any technological tool change once you become literate as a programmer or designer? Why is the supremacy of communication and language over materiality, which shapes the structure of all discussion here about incorporated technology in the Lifeworld and Dasein, never properly reflected?

4) What is an “empirically responsive” philosophy and reasoning and how do they relate to the phenomenological and post-phenomenological notions like Being-in-the-World, Lifeworld or I-technology-world structure? Do the evolutionary accounts of human adaptation to the environment (often random and unintentional) actually confirm the embodied phenomenological Lifeworld? How is the insistence on human uniqueness (and the description of this thesis as an “investigation into the uniqueness of the human technological world”) actually different from any solipsistic yearning or anthropocentric promises that this world was created by God for men? Is the author even aware that such a claim is problematic at a time of empirically visible environmental destruction and loss of biodiversity etc, caused by humans, not to mention the more sophisticated post-humanist critiques of such a limited view of agency?

10:41 The student reacted to the supervisor’s comments and questions.

Ad Dr Wellner’s questions: The student claimed that he had also tried to incorporate other accounts into his thesis and he does mention post-phenomenology in his thesis. However, he thinks that it is basically possible to situate the project as such into phenomenology. Hermeneutic relations were outside the scope of the thesis which had more of an empirical focus, i.e. it dealt with particular technologies. Regarding the question about combining continental and analytic philosophy, his work was not meant as exegesis, but he was trying to put together an account of the condition of possibility of incorporating technology. He did not use Husserl’s accounts because Husserl does not deal with agency.

Ad Dr Kera’s questions: The student pointed out that he needs to decide what to react to as Dr Kera posed a wide range of questions. Doc. Čapek suggests that he answer the question ‘why is

Heidegger still relevant?' The student responded that the Black Notebooks were outside the scope of the thesis. Heidegger was one of the most resourceful authors on the transcendental method, which he uses. Dr. Kera asked if the point of his thesis was really transcendental philosophy or just to show the Heideggerian fundamentals of basically everything? The student replied that he goes far beyond Heidegger and that human uniqueness is not the same as human supremacy. Doc. Čapek suggested a second question: 'What is the core thesis of the work?' The student replied that the core is defining the terms of incorporation, technology, tools etc. and a transcendental analysis of conditions of possibility of technology incorporation.

Dr Wellner asked why was Latour's conception of agency not discussed? The student replied that it would be interesting, but it was outside the scope of the thesis.

Dr Kera asked how does the concept of complex network fit together with the transcendental method? And Dr Wellner supported the question by noting that the concept of social agency by Latour would help precisely with this problem. Dr Kera then added a further question, namely why does the medium have to fit the context, why is it that it does not influence the agency of Being? And why does the student limit the structure of experience only to communication? The student replied that the thesis was not about communication but about the interaction of agents within a network which may interact differently (e.g. also mechanically). He added that he analysed the structure of experience, which is a traditional philosophical method. Dr Kera noted however, that he did not state this clearly and that he seems not to challenge such a starting point.

11:10 The opponents (and the supervisor) commented on the performance of the student. Dr Wellner stating that she is satisfied with the replies and finds the thesis a good basis for future research. Similarly, Dr Kera said that the thesis is a solid piece of work and a good basis for future research. She only wished the student had taken greater challenges.

11:11 The chair of the board opened the discussion.

These persons spoke in the following discussion:

Doc. James Hill raised the question of the compatibility of phenomenology with Searle's reduction of various abilities to the brain. The student replied that he tried to show that Searle's intentional analysis is based not only on neurology but that he also admits that intentionality sinks into background through learning and he also recognises the concept of basic actions, which is not very

far from what Merleau-Ponty says. Thus, the aim was to provide a bridge between these approaches and come up with a hybrid conception.

Dr. Petr Urban asked if the student could explain why autonomy was chosen as a criterion for the evaluation of the changes of our lives through technology. How did he get from authenticity to relational autonomy? The student replied that autonomy was not *the* value of the thesis, but only *a* value and that he chose it because it underlies Heidegger's concept of authenticity and it corresponded to the focus of the thesis which was the incorporation of technology into individual experience. Autonomy itself is insufficient to reflect on privacy and mediated agency, and must be connected with social context. Therefore it had to be extended to relational autonomy.

Dr. Petr Kouba asked if the student would agree that without immunity there is no autonomy? The student replied that he would and that it would be an interesting topic to study and that, although he partially dealt with it in his thesis, generally it was beyond its scope.

Dr. Ondřej Švec asked how far does the project take into account historical determinants? Did the student discover something more concrete than a priori distinctions between home versus alien or private versus public etc.? The student replied that he was interested precisely in such a priori structures which are more basic than their historical instantiations.

11:31 The chair of the board ended the defence itself and the board initiated a private meeting to decide the classification of the dissertation defence.

The chair of the board announced to the student and persons present the result of the defence: The board had voted (by raising hands); the number of the members of the board was 5; the number of the members of the board present was 5; the number of votes in favour of awarding the title of PhD was 5, there were no votes against. The dissertation defence was classified as a pass.


The board determined that the Czech abstract of the dissertation should be revised due to the large number of mistakes.

Recorder: Ota Gál

Name and signature of the chair of the board:

 Jakub Capek

Name and signature of another member of the board:


Ondřej Švec

