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This is a graded discussion: 2 points possible due 22 Jan at 18:30

Reading Reflection # 6

Jackson Herron

20 Jan at 11:04

16 32

Answer in 200-400 words.

1. Describe a unique example - not directly from the reading - of a technology that has been, or could be, used for political ends (i.e. used to structure the arrangements of power and activities in society.)
2. Do you agree with the author's argument that nuclear energy is an 'authoritarian political technology'?

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Write a reply...

Michael Horner (https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208938)

21 Jan 2019

1. ***Describe a unique example - not directly from the reading - of a technology that has been, or could be, used for political ends (i.e. used to structure the arrangements of power and activities in society.)***

A technology that is often used for political ends is the surveillance camera or "closed-circuit television". While the technology is identical to the video camera, its usage as a means for protecting property and remotely observing others is a consequence of the society that it resides in. It is used by those in power, who control property or people, to ensure that certain standards are met. Like many of the technologies described in the reading, it also replaces the job that would be otherwise accomplished by a physically present human observer.

The presence of security cameras also has passive behaviour modifying properties. Those who

believe they are under surveillance will act as if someone were watching even if they cannot be sure. They may also feel a sense of unease if they are unsure that they are being watched. This erodes the notion of personal privacy, which has political implications and opens up additional avenues for the rights of the individual to be infringed upon.

1. ***Do you agree with the author's argument that nuclear energy is an 'authoritarian political technology'?***

I agree that nuclear energy fits with the author's self-defined term "authoritarian political technology". A nuclear power plant is a very complex machine and, like a ship at sea, requires the cooperation of all staff, and relies upon physical security for ideal operation. Nuclear power plants have high consequences for failure and, like many government institutions, use fear (through screening of employees) and the threat of violence (from a meltdown or irradiation) to ensure that they are properly maintained.

However, I do not agree that these attributes are intrinsic to nuclear energy, and instead are associated with how modern nuclear power plants tend to be structured. Nuclear power, at its core, is essentially glorified steam power and as such can be scaled to remove concerns about proliferation. Negatively painting nuclear power as "authoritarian" ignores the technical requirements of other power plants which necessarily must adhere to high safety standards and follow a rigid administrative structure.

Reply

Katie Reeder

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/11862)

22 Jan 2019

3/3. I agree that nuclear power is not inherently authoritarian. But I would add is that nuclear (since it is a centralized source of power that can produce so much energy) could allow for a state or private monopoly on energy production to develop.

Reply

David Ontaneda

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/27548)

22 Jan 2019

2/2

I love the example of CCTV. It's such a blatant example of technology used for control. Add AI and you have a 1984 style setting for political oppression. Definitely adds controversy to a relatively simple technology (at least in the case of CCTV) that has so many useful applications.

Great distinction between the technology and how the technology is structured. I think that is a key theme here, where technology doesn't necessarily have to be authoritarian or politically charged, yet it's implementation is where the politics comes into play. I don't know enough about nuclear energy to be able to understand how it can be glorified steam power, but the plutonium argument seems pretty unique to nuclear.

Reply

Melissa Prado

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/3017)

22 Jan 2019

I could also see why because of the potentially lethal consequences of these operations, nuclear power would require extreme physical security in order to work well.

Together with surveillance cameras, you can mention all the constant data collection that exists through websites and social media, which create a profile for each of us as individuals and predict certain behavior.

Reply

Ashna Misra

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/94031)

22 Jan 2019

Glanced at your #1 and think you may find this article interesting, I read it in my urban geography class.

Graham.pdf (https://canvas.ubc.ca/files/3816080/download?download_frd=1&verifier=TLxu4VG9FEQcHtQlgCTZrCmeivRGnkAW8USWAEVT)

Reply

Taran Bains

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208520)

21 Jan 2019

1. I wanted to focus on how technology can be inherently sexist. Although I do not think that any of it is on purpose, I still think it is a problem. We order Alexa around but rarely consider why it is voiced by a woman. It is almost impossible to separate your biases from your work. The internet of things, an increasingly relevant topic, refers to having smart appliances for everything, such as your fridge, washing machine, dishwasher and car. These smart objects would all be able to send data back and forth to communicate. The dishwasher would know when you would need more dishwashing liquid and order it from Amazon, and the heating/AC system would be automatic based on your day activities. But this system can appear ignorant or indifferent to women's experiences. As the Internet of things expands, it will continue to collect and send data to networks. "This presents profound problems for vulnerable members of society, including survivors of domestic violence. Wearable technology can be hacked, cars and phones can be tracked, and data from a thermostat can reveal whether someone is at home. This potential is frightening for people who have experienced rape, violence or stalking. Unsurprisingly, technology is used by abusers: in a survey of domestic violence services organisations, 97% reported that the survivors who use them have experienced harassment, monitoring, and threats by abusers through the misuse of technology." Even machine learning can be biased if the data that you are feeding the machine is biased and the characteristics that it is looking for are ones that a biased programmer wrote.

Maybe its not the same as deliberately building shorter overpasses to prevent buses from passing through, but not considering how things affects different minority groups counts as forms of oppression.

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/07/technology-sexist-society-even-worse-women-potential (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/07/technology-sexist-society-even-worse-women-potential)

2. I don't believe I understood the argument completely, but when comparing nuclear to solar, it did seem to make more sense. With solar, you would typically have solar panels on people's roofs. They would be generating their own electricity for their home and car, as well as selling to their neighbours or back to the energy company. The consumer has control. They have direct access to it. Nuclear energy being 'authoritarian political technology', as well as coal, oil and gas are not like this at all. This energy is produced behind closed doors and then delivered to the consumers at a "reasonable" cost. It is controlled by an authority, so in this sense I do agree with the argument.

Reply (2 likes)

Michael Horner
(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208938)
22 Jan 2019

2/2

1. I agree that the IoT is something that can be abused for political purposes.

2. If a large solar farm is selling power, would that make it authoritarian?

Reply

Melissa Prado

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/3017)

22 Jan 2019

A really good way of connecting the roles in society to the development and use of technology. The voice of a woman may also reflect how in society we are grown into the idea that we should follow rules and order as a woman. The use of technology is a factor that is a will continue to change our human to human relationship dynamics.

Reply

Katie Reeder

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/11862)

22 Jan 2019

2/2. Alexa was an awesome example! I've read about how wearable technology can make people obsessive over personal metrics (like steps in a day, calories brunt,,etc.) but had never considered the ways that wearable technology could make people, in this case, women, more *unsafe*.

Reply

Ashna Misra

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/94031)

22 Jan 2019

1. Describe a unique example - not directly from the reading - of a technology that has been, or could be, used for political ends (i.e. used to structure the arrangements of power and activities in society.)

An example of technology cementing political infrastructure is the water distribution system in Jakarta. The current water distribution system vastly under serves the communities who need it most, the poor, and generally only reaches high class communities. Yet, these communities often have private groundwater wells. These private wells deplete the shallow aquifers slum residents

normally use, because they are unable to access municipally distributed water, and create a positive feedback loop. In this case the centralized system of water distribution continues to put low income citizens in an oppressed state where their lack of access to clean water leads to less income, decreased health, exposure to environmental contaminants, and increased flooding. Breaking the reinforcement of these social structures requires a hybrid distribution between centralized agencies and informal networks.

Source : http://www.ijurr.org/article/spatial-practices-institutionalization-water-sanitation-services-southern-metropolises-case-jakarta-kampung-kojan/

2. Do you agree with the author's argument that nuclear energy is an 'authoritarian political technology'?

I agree with the author to a certain extent. It is true that nuclear power does have characteristics inherent to centralized infrastructure. This is largely because of nuclear power's high cost (uranium or plutonium), hazards, and large power generation. These characteristics are a result of nuclear's goal to harness fission's immense energy power.

It would be difficult to make traditional nuclear power economically feasible for decentralized communities. However I do think there are "genuine possibilities for creative intervention by different social systems" unlike the author (pg 134). There is no reason independent communities cannot band together for their energy purposes, while keeping all other social infrastructure separate, and democratically run a nuclear station. Beyond this theoretical innovations in nuclear power are creating smaller generating stations that would allow for more decentralized power options.

Reply (2 likes)

Taran Bains

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208520)

22 Jan 2019

I would not trust a local community running their own mini nuclear power plant (if that is what you meant), but having smaller ones would work. But even then, you want you nuclear power plant to be far away from you just in case something happens. It is definitely an interesting thing to think about and consider. Also the thing about Jakarta was very interesting and infuriating, like why do we do this sort of crap to our own people !

2/2

Reply

Michael Horner

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208938)

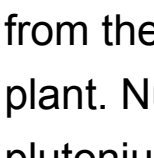
22 Jan 2019

2/2

1. Good example. It definitely seems political and it would be in the government's best interests to consider the feedback loops it creates.

2. What would "democratically running a nuclear station look like?

Reply



Antonio Rodriguez

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/15905)

22 Jan 2019

1. A technology that has been used for political ends is GMO seeds. GMO seeds affect all farmers and especially those that do not have the expensive GMO seeds. Companies such as Monsanto create big problems for smaller farmers. When using their patented GMO seeds, it is very easy for winds to germinate neighboring farms with these GMO genes. There have been many court cases files by Monsanto against smaller neighboring farms for using their patented seeds, which happens when collecting the GMO-germinated seeds of the previous harvest. Also, pesticides are sprayed which might not affect the GMO plants, but hurts neighboring non-GMO plants, reducing their crop yields and sometimes forcing them to buy the expensive GMO-seeds from Monsanto. This restricts the freedom of small farmers neighboring large GMO corporation farms.

The GMO seed industry is also 'authoritarian' in the sense that within these big companies, there is a clear hierarchy of labor and plans of the company. There is also governmental influence as the FDA need to inspect and regulate the contents and quality of the seeds and crops.

2.

I believe that nuclear power is not a democratic technology in the sense that not anyone can set up a nuclear plant and control it for themselves. There is internal politics in a nuclear power plant from the owners and managers ‘controlling’ the workers, and having a plan for the company or plant. Nuclear energy also affect the society around them if they start using materials like plutonium that have toxic by-products for the surrounding communities. Nuclear plants need to also be regulated by the government to make sure nothing dangerous could happen. They want to

avoid catastrophes like Chernobyl.

‘

Reply (1 likes)

Ashna Misra

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/94031)

22 Jan 2019

1. Amazing! I was actually going to write about this too so great minds obviously think alike. I think it's super great that you drew onto the labour hierarchy because GMO seeds are a link between highly skilled "science" trades and the generally manual agriculture industry. It's possible you could have linked the corruption between the FDA and corporation interests and bridge how North American democracy and capitalism blend into a system called "corporatocracy" but that could be for personal fun/research.

2. I largely agree with your response for this but also think that "safety" is not necessarily equivalent to centralized control. You could argue that it is even more important to have a democratized power scheme because of the need for public transparency. However, this would rely on having an extremely skilled and educated body of people who have both interest and ability to voice opinions.

2/2

Reply

Taran Bains

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208520)

22 Jan 2019

Besides having some sort of disaster with the power plant itself, a natural disaster, such as an earthquake or tsunami also brings its own set of problems. The GMO-seeds is very interesting, and like, it takes some money to sue a huge company like that and they can easily just provide some sort of settlement and continue doing what they're doing.

2/2

Reply

Jackson Herron

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/31047)

22 Jan 2019

1. Describe a unique example - not directly from the reading - of a technology that has been, or could be, used for political ends (i.e. used to structure the arrangements of power and activities in society.)

The example I am choosing to examine is social media platforms on the internet. I believe that social media has the power to advance democratic society by making connections and knowledge sharing easier. For example, events and movements can be easily organized and spread through social media (e.g. the Me Too Movement). People have the ability to voice their opinion/politics on social media, and it is basically another platform for public discourse that didn't exist previously. How else in the past would you go about telling all your friends your political views at once? However, as we all know, the internet can be a nasty place and social media can also increase discontent in society - especially when it becomes an echo chamber for people of a particular viewpoint. This is pretty clear if you go and read a thread of one of Donald Trump's tweets. Basically people are willing to say things online that they probably wouldn't otherwise. Furthermore, as was seen in the last US Presidential election, social media can be 'engineered' by creating fake accounts and news stories to sway public opinion and to advance a certain political aim. It is widely believed that Russia used this tactic to get Trump elected, because they thought he would weaken the legitimacy of American democracy on the world stage - am attempt that unfortunately seems to have worked. In general though, with proper oversight and protection, I think social media can advance democratic ideals.

2. Do you agree with the author’s argument that nuclear energy is an ‘authoritarian political technology’?

I do agree that nuclear energy requires a strong central state in order to safeguard and provide oversight of the technology, but I do not think that nuclear energy inevitably leads to authoritarian society. A good example of this is France, where the majority of the electricity is generated by nuclear energy, yet the country is a strong democracy. I think nuclear's 'authoritarian' tendencies are not so strong as to sway the entire political system. Furthermore, newer generations of nuclear power plants are safer and more distributed, thus can be more 'democratic' if they are owned and operated at a more local level. Nevertheless, a strong central government is probably the best and only way to prevent proliferation of material for nuclear weapons.

Reply

Antonio Rodriguez

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/15905)

22 Jan 2019

- Very good point about social media, I had not thought about it. But yes it is incredible influencial and people can use it for political ends.

-Also it is very hard to regulate the internet now that these big social media companies have so much power.

-I think these nuclear power plants would still have an 'authoritarian' hierarchy within the plant and would restrict worker's freedoms by sticking to the companies plan. But you are right that there would be little affect to governmental politics.

2/2

Reply

Ashna Misra

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/94031)

22 Jan 2019

1. OMG I love that you decided to talk about my #1 vice. I think this is an interesting example because you could actually go both ways. For example in China where social media is heavily regulated and censorship words change by the day. If increasing use/democratization of voices and ideas leads to confusing echo chambers where people just get emotionally charged would a more centralized system be better? That said I do think social media is more democratically inclined.

2. Agreed on all accounts, especially about weapons.

2/2

Reply

Olivia Locke

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/189754)

22 Jan 2019

1. Describe a unique example - not directly from the reading - of a technology that has been, or could be, used for political ends (i.e. used to structure the arrangements of power and activities in society.)

I would argue that large Hydro Dams, much like Nuclear Energy, are inherently ‘authoritarian

political technology'. When being constructed they often lead to the displacement of entire communities. Very frequently these are indigenous communities and poor communities. Government involvement is typically required to organize the displacement of groups of people, and the construction of these mega-projects. And it is only a government with wide sweeping decision-making abilities that can dictate that certain groups of people in rural areas must be displaced to produce power which will largely benefit those in urban settings.

Having an authoritarian aspect to it does not necessarily mean that hydroelectric technology is directly used for political ends; however, those who have the most political power are able to complete these projects which will benefit themselves even to the detriment of those with less political power. Those who have been displaced will often lose the ability to provide for themselves from their land and will therefore need to join in a capitalistic structure they were not previously a part of. Even if only as a by-product, this does lead to a differently structured society.

http://mitdisplacement.org/hydroelectric-displacement/

2. Do you agree with the author's argument that nuclear energy is an 'authoritarian political technology'?

Yes! Very much so, this is a perspective I had never considered before but found very compelling. Before this reading I would say that I prescribed more to the view point that you need to look at the context to understand the political importance of an object or technology. One aspect that was not really mentioned but I think adds to the authoritarian aspect of nuclear power is the longevity of nuclear waste. When a group decides to build a nuclear power station they are not only asserting that it is currently possible to have the required control over all aspects of the running of it, but also that this power structure will stay in place in the future and be able to deal with the nuclear waste for an indefinite period of time. I think in a completely democratic society, where all voices are heard, it wouldn't be fair to make this sort of decision, because you are burdening future generations with this waste that will be a problem well beyond the life of the current decision makers and that they have not agreed to inherit from you

I found the example of the parkway quite striking, this was obviously a design created specifically to exclude, but I would guess there have been many similar design choices which were made unintentionally which lead to social inequality. This makes it seem important that projects of any type are intentionally designed with equality in mind and thinking of how different choices may inadvertently exclude certain people.

Reply

Jackson Herron (https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/31047)

22 Jan 2019

2/2 - Good example with hydroelectric dams, and its local too! These huge projects require a strongly centralized authority to develop, cause forced displacement people from lands, and are benefit the power-consuming urban masses.

I agree that nuclear power has authoritarian tendencies, though I do feel these tendencies are manageable and do not necessitate a 1984-type regime. Also it's my opinion that nuclear waste is fairly manageable concern - but that's certainly up to debate!

Great response!

Reply

Antonio Rodriguez

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/15905)

22 Jan 2019

- Very interesting point about the hydro-electric dams, they are very relevant as the site C construction is starting up. There needs to be more consciousness about these displacement issues and apply a policy to mitigate it.

-I also agree about this. I had not thought about how the plant would affect the future generations.

2/2

Reply

Alexis Lytle

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/38541)

22 Jan 2019

Describe a unique example - not directly from the reading - of a technology that has been, or could be, used for political ends (i.e. used to structure the arrangements of power and activities in society.)

The technology I have chosen is autonomous vehicles. The discussion surrounding driverless cars raises questions related to many social structures, including:

- Ethics
  - How can we equip an autonomous program to make life and death decisions?
  - What does it mean for humanity if we are able to simulate the concept of morality in a machine, if that has thus far been what sets us apart from other living beings on earth?

- Legislation
  - How will we build and modify roads and traffic laws so that autonomous vehicles and human driven cars can exist in the same system?
  - Is the ultimate goal to eliminate human driven cars altogether, or simply decrease the proportion over time?
- Safety
  - What would happen in emergency scenarios when the autonomous traffic system fails?
  - How vulnerable would this system be to bad-faith actors (e.g. terrorists)?
- Labour
  - Would the net outcome of autonomous vehicles mean an increase in jobs (due to the production and maintenance of the cars and systems) or a decrease (due to driving focused jobs becoming obsolete)?
  - Since many of the workers in these positions do not have other skills or training, would an increase in other types of jobs even benefit the people who need it?
- Economic Inequality
  - What will happen to those who cannot afford an autonomous vehicle, especially if they become a requirement?
  - Is is possible to set up the system so that marginalized groups are actually better served than they currently are?
- Other
  - Would humans be losing the opportunity to develop important skills (e.g. driving, decision making)?

There are many answers to these questions, some of which are conflicting. Regardless of any one perspective, it is clear that autonomous vehicles will indeed impact the structure of power and activities in our society.

Do you agree with the author's argument that nuclear energy is an 'authoritarian political technology'?

This is difficult for me to answer, given that I am not familiar with nuclear power and its relevant policies to date. However, I agree with the author's sentiments that it is a very dangerous technology if not properly managed, and that the most obvious and straightforward way to ensure a high level of control is to also have a highly controlled political structure. I do not think this means that authoritarianism is the only method with which to implement global nuclear energy, nor do I think this means it is the best way in all aspects. Overall, I believe the author did not discuss enough of the trade-offs that such a government would present (e.g. security vs liberty), and did not explore what any alternative structures would look like.

Reply

Olivia Locke

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/189754)

22 Jan 2019

2/2

I found your post about driverless cars interesting, I think the way that they will differently affect people of different levels of wealth is very interesting and worth being aware of. I think it is very similar to the change that was observed when cars were first added to the road ways. Before this roadways were for all people, you could walk, cycle, or drive your horse on the road. Since the development of faster cars the roadways have become only for cars in a way that vastly restructures our cities. I listened to a really interesting podcast about this recently. I will try to find it.

Reply

Olivia Locke

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/189754)

22 Jan 2019

https://slate.com/technology/2018/09/from-horseless-carriages-to-autonomous-cars.html

Reply

Jackson Herron

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/31047)

22 Jan 2019

Awesome response! I like how you structured the ways in which autonomous vehicle technology is political nature, and left the questions unanswered. It remains to be seen if this technology can advance egalitarian society, promote ceaseless consumerism, or privilege the wealthy and powerful above the rest. Makes me think about the topic of robots/AI in general...

I agree with your critique that the author not discuss enough in depth about tradeoffs and policy of nuclear energy. For example, how France has successfully implemented the technology. However, I do agree with him that safeguarding the technology necessitates a strong central power structure in society.

Reply

Katie Reeder

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/11862)

22 Jan 2019

1.

The smartphone is a technology that has shaped the arrangements of power in society. But it is not inherently 'authoritarian' or 'democratic'. It has both promoted and undermined democracy. For example, the pro-democracy uprisings known as the Arab Spring (2010) were powered by young activists who used the Internet and social media to communicate. Smartphones were significant to the movement, as they were able to capture protest footage, allowed protestors to tweet on site, and helped them coordinate with other activists through messenger apps. Urban planners can also use the location services feature of smartphones to understand traffic flows at different times of day, helping them to make commuting more enjoyable and accessible for the working people. Smartphones are used by the city to alter the activity of commuting- which is not exactly bad. At the same time, data collected from smartphones (location, search history, etc.) is analyzed to inform political campaigns and personal profiles are constructed to help advertisers target. Those are just a few of the ways that smartphones restructure the balance of power and activities in society.

2. The author of this article quoted Denis Hayes, an environmentalist who claimed that nuclear power is 'authoritarian' by nature. I disagree. If nuclear is one of several sources of energy for a nation, nuclear power does not inherently lead to authoritarianism. I understand the rationale- nuclear power production is centralized and generates a massive amount of energy. In theory, a handful of companies or the state could have a monopoly on our power supply. I think that technology shapes- but do not *determine*- arrangements of power and political organization.
As the article argues, what matters is not the technology, but the social and economic conditions of the society into which the technology is introduced. A democratic nation could encourage citizens to purchase a stake in state nuclear plants. Conversely, an authoritarian state could build and operate nuclear facilities, gaining a monopoly on power generation. How a technology restructures society is partially dependent on the technology itself and partially dependent on how the technology is developed and implemented.

The author also mentioned how some advocates for the solar claim that community renewable energy systems, particularly community-based solar projects, have qualities that lend themselves to democracy. Decentralized and miniaturized power generation democratizes ownership of power. But it does not *ensure* that power will redistribute in a society. Small scale solar could be introduced by an authoritarian state (where none of the proceeds are given back to citizens) as is the case in China. But if community solar power plants could be financed by ordinary citizens and can be located anywhere, it’s no longer necessary to restrict ownership to utility companies, which may help to transform an energy monopoly to an energy democracy. Again, the political and social

structures really shape how the technology will affect a society.

Two neat articles! Both touch on how the physical qualities of different energy sources shape democracy.

1. A quick article about the ways coal and oil impact democracy differently
https://energytransition.org/2017/08/how-coal-and-oil-impact-democracy-differently/

2. Article by economist Thomas Friedman. He suggests that higher oil prices are linked to lower Freedom House Ratings in oil-producing states. **https://nature.berkeley.edu/er100/readings/Friedman_2006.pdf (https://nature.berkeley.edu/er100/readings/Friedman_2006.pdf)**

Reply

Alexis Lytle

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/38541)

22 Jan 2019

2/2

Smart phones are a really interesting example in that they have become a major component of everything from large scale political uprising to simple every day tasks. It is also interesting to note how laws and policies are still catching up to such an ubiquitous technology, e.g. upskirt photos (this isn't a super great link, but it is recent and gives a quick background on the legal grey area: **https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/5623843/upskirting-meaning-definition-photos-criminal-offence-uk/ (https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/5623843/upskirting-meaning-definition-photos-criminal-offence-uk/)**)

Reply

Olivia Locke

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/189754)

22 Jan 2019

2/2

Interesting point with smart phones. I like how you say it has "both promoted and undermined democracy". These days there is a lot of discussion of social media being used to undermine

democracy so it is interesting to hear the flip side to that.

I think I interpreted the case for Nuclear energy being inherently authoritarian differently than you. I like your point about the context being important and I agree that having nuclear power doesn't inherently lead to an authoritarian government, but I think that having nuclear power does lead to specific aspects of authoritarianism in an otherwise non-authoritarian government.

That Petropolitics article looks really interesting!

Reply

David Ontaneda

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/27548)

22 Jan 2019

I think that the fact that our transportation system is still dependent on fossil fuels is a case of politics inhibiting technological innovation as opposed to dictating it. The power structures in place that benefit from the fossil fuel industry, including both oil companies and car manufacturers, would be destabilized if there was a rapid transition toward renewable fuels, both with electric or hydrogen vehicles.

Another case where technology that is specifically designed with political intentions, or at least consequences, is Monsanto GMO corn developments. This is not to say that GMO is inherently bad, but rather I argue that the way in which Monsanto (now Bayer) implemented the technology is incredibly predatory. They sell seeds that are considered their IP so when farmers wants to reuse seeds they are subject to lawsuits by Monsanto for IP infringement. To avoid this farmers are required to buy new seeds each season, which is also a case of technology not being efficient.

B.)

I do agree that Nuclear energy is inherently authoritarian in that it is a centralized technology. As opposed to solar which can be implemented in a decentralized way, Nuclear will centralize power over energy. The arguments on how plutonium protection also dictate its authoritarian nature make a lot of sense as well.

Reply

Alexis Lytle

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/38541)

22 Jan 2019

2/2

This is a good example of how a technology might not be inherently political, but can carry great political weight depending on the social and economic context that it is used and created it.

Very true that nuclear power must be centralized, but to what degree do technological centralization and political authoritarianism influence one another?

Reply

Melissa Prado

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/3017)

22 Jan 2019

Nuclear power has been a huge topic of discussion in the past decade. Leading countries intent to generate a lot of their electrical power through nuclear energy, thus creating a need to speed on the construction for its development. An interesting example. I read about as that Sweden was the only country in which the discussion of the implementation of nuclear power was made more or less a formal nation-wide discussion. Once this happened the population spoke to swing from the approval of the 10-year nuclear program, and therefore the government cut its target to one-seventeenth of its former size. The argument that nuclear power is an authoritarian political technology is somehow valid for me. The potential consequences of the implementation of this technology involve society and the environment, making this a political topic. One of the arguments raised in this article was that “if we accept nuclear power plants, we should also then accept a techno-scientific industrial elite”, I do not fully agree with this argument, but I can see how together with the adaptation of nuclear power there needs to come to a strict and specialized control for it. It is an extremely political topic because of the fear a certain part of the population has towards it, and the support it receives from another.

I found the example of the world’s first gene-edited baby created in China, which has sparked a lot of discussion among scientists. It is important to mention that this kind of gene editing is banned in most countries since gene editing is experimental and is still associated with off-target mutations and could cause genetic problems early or later in life. He Jiankui, said he had altered embryos during fertility treatment with the goal to try and give a trait that will make someone able to resist possible future infection with HIV. There was no independent confirmation of his claim and there were not any publications in journals either.

https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/nov/26/worlds-first-gene-edited-babies-created-in-china-claims-scientist

Reply

David Ontaneda

(https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/27548)

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2/2 I like how you included the example of sweden. The nordic countries have the highest educated basic labour force, and therefore if nuclear energy was to be decentralized in any place it would be there.

I could see how gene editing could become political, definitely reinforcing class and racial injustices.

Reply