



CONCOURS CENTRALE-SUPÉLEC

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2020

4 heures

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L'usage de tout système électronique ou informatique est interdit dans cette épreuve.

Rédiger en anglais et en 400 mots (plus ou moins 10 %) une synthèse des documents proposés, qui devra obligatoirement comporter un titre. Indiquer avec précision, à la fin du travail, le nombre de mots utilisés (titre inclus).

Ce sujet comporte les 4 documents suivants :

- une image du film *Modern Times* (*Les Temps modernes*) sorti en 1936 ;
- un extrait d'un débat tenu en 2014 à l'Université de Stanford entre Zoltan ISTVAN, défenseur du transhumanisme, et John ZERZAN, philosophe américain du primitivisme ;
- un article intitulé *The New Luddites* de l'analyste américain Will OREMUS sur les répercussions des technologies de rupture, publié dans *Slate Magazine* en 2014 ;
- un passage d'une nouvelle de l'auteur de science-fiction Ray BRADBURY, intitulée 'The Pedestrian', publiée en 1951.

L'ordre dans lequel se présentent les documents est arbitraire et ne revêt aucune signification.



Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*, a 1936 comedy film written and directed by Charlie Chaplin in which his iconic Little Tramp character struggles to survive in the modern, industrialized world. The film is a comment on the desperate employment and fiscal conditions many people faced during the Great Depression, conditions created, in Chaplin's view, by the efficiencies of modern industrialization.

A Stanford University Debate: Transhumanism vs. Anarcho-Primitivism

by Zoltan ISTVAN, *The Huffington Post*¹, 11/20/2014

Last Saturday night at Stanford University, I had the honor of publicly debating the world's leading anarcho-primitivist philosopher John Zerzan. As a transhumanist, I differ from Zerzan on just about every topic. According to Wikipedia, anarcho-primitivism “advocates for a return to a non-‘civilized’ way of life through deindustrialization.” Transhumanism advocates for the continued use of science and technology to improve and change the human species. Simply put, Zerzan encourages everyone to give up civilization and go back to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. And I encourage everyone to do more to speed up technological and scientific progress. It was a meeting of polar opposite views.

EXCHANGE I:

*Zoltan Istvan*²: Imagine what the world would look like if we gave up some of the technologies we have, if we gave up progress, if we essentially gave up civilization. The world would be very difficult, at least for all of us in the modern world today. John Zerzan and a lot of anarcho-primitivists are asking us to give up the modern world that we have evolved through, that we have adapted to, that we have created.

*John Zerzan*³: I consider transhumanism an unhealthy fantasy. Primitive lifestyles — a time before domestication— didn't destroy the natural world, didn't objectify women, didn't have armies and temples and war, didn't have everyone working their ass off, like we have now.

EXCHANGE II:

Zoltan Istvan: I'm going to begin with a story, perhaps one of the luckiest things I've done in my life. I was the first foreigner to visit basically an untouched primitive tribe in the island nation of Vanuatu in 1995. I returned and filmed the tribe six years later for the National Geographic Channel. The problem there is that almost half the people born in the village don't survive to adulthood. What anarcho-primitivists are forgetting, that while primitive lifestyles might be more natural and harmonious with nature, people like that don't have the medicines, technology, and science to stop basic diseases and early death. The village lived in a constant state of mourning due to the frequent deaths of its people.

John Zerzan: Zoltan said people could get to be astronauts if they wanted. I don't think that's a healthy thing a person would want, to tell you the truth. Consider what it takes to take a picture of the Earth from the moon. There's a massive industrial basis for that. In fact, there's an industrial basis for so many of the nice modern things we have today. Except the cost is the destruction of this planet, destruction of the biosphere. That is unmistakable.

EXCHANGE III (closing statements):

Zoltan Istvan: This question sums up the difference between transhumanists and anarcho-primitivists: Why is being an astronaut cool? Zerzan said he didn't think it was “cool.” It's the symbolism of the question: Who are we? What are we doing on Earth? Where are we going? Transhumanists want to survive and thrive. We want to conquer nature. For a lot of humans that want to become more than they are — being an astronaut, being a scientist, being an explorer... conquering disease, conquering death, conquering the things that plague humanity— these are some of the coolest, most beautiful, most meaningful experiences that humans have ever had.

In short, a lot of the problems, a lot of the suffering, a lot of the dilemmas that the human race faces will be eliminated, cured, fixed, and overcome by technology — and that is something that is going to make us all better.

John Zerzan: We haven't talked about the one big issue in the world: overpopulation. It turns there are two big institutional events that created the unnatural population levels on Earth. The first is domestication in our species. The second is the Industrial Revolution, which is the basis for all modern technology, and which occurred because of millions of people doing grunt work. You have to basically enslave millions of people to have your toys.

I read on Zoltan's website a quote he wrote: “We didn't evolve through billions of years to remain animals.” But we are animals. And some transhumanists want to become machines. I don't quite get that. Zoltan and I are really on opposite sides.

¹ **The Huffington Post** is a politically liberal American online news aggregator and blog.

² **Zoltan Istvan Gyurko** (born 1973) is an American writer, futurist, philosopher and transhumanist.

³ **John Zerzan** (born 1943) is an American anarchist and primitivist philosopher and author.

What if technological innovation is a job-killer after all?

Innovation is supposed to be the cure for economic doldrums. But what if it's the cause? More specifically: Is it possible that the ever-increasing automation of everything from factories to retail sales to journalism will destroy more jobs than it creates?

It's a question that economists and workers have been asking since at least the Industrial Revolution. And in the past, the answer has generally been a straightforward "no." Automation makes certain low-skill human jobs obsolete, sure, but it also ushers in new categories of high-skill employment, from engineering and equipment operation to banking and blogging. Its greatest effect is to increase productivity, which should raise incomes and stimulate demand for new products and services.

Yet the current jobless recovery, along with a longer-term trend toward income and wealth inequality, has some thinkers wondering whether the latest wave of automation is different from those that preceded it.

[...]

Replacing manual labor with machines on farms and in factories was one thing, the worriers say. Those machines were dumb and highly specialized, requiring humans to oversee them at every stage. But the 21st century is witnessing the rise of far smarter machines that can perform tasks previously thought to be immune to automation.

Today's software can answer your calls, organize your calendar, sell you shoes, recommend your next movie, and target you with advertisements. Tomorrow's software will diagnose your diseases, write your news stories, and even drive your car. When even high-skill "knowledge workers" are at risk of being replaced by machines, what human jobs will be left? Politics, perhaps — and, of course, entrepreneurship and management. The rich will get richer, in other words, and the rest of us will be left behind.

All of which has brought John Maynard Keynes' concept of "technological unemployment" back into the academic discourse, some 80 years after he coined the phrase. On Wednesday, Pew Research and Elon University released a report titled "AI, Robotics, and the Future of Jobs." The report compiles and summarizes the results of a sort of expert opinion survey in which the researchers asked 1,900 economists, management scientists, industry analysts, and policy thinkers one big question: "Will networked, automated, artificial intelligence applications and robotic devices have displaced more jobs than they have created by 2025?"

The results of the survey were fascinating. Almost exactly half of the respondents (48 percent) predicted that intelligent software will disrupt more jobs than it can replace. The other half predicted the opposite.

The lack of expert consensus on such a crucial and seemingly straightforward question is startling. It's even more so given that history and the leading economic models point so clearly to one side of the question: the side that reckons society will adjust, new jobs will emerge, and technology will eventually leave the economy stronger. Even Keynes in 1930 assured his readers that technological unemployment would be only a "temporary phase of maladjustment." This view has been so widely held for so long that the dissenters have taken on a derogatory label: Luddites. The original Luddites were handloom weavers in England who smashed and burned power looms and mills on the theory that technology posed a fundamental threat to human well-being. Who'd have thought that half the mainstream experts in the United States in the year 2014 would share the Luddites' basic view of automation's effects on the labor market?

"Automation is Voldemort: the terrifying force nobody is willing to name," declared one respondent quoted in the Pew report. "Good-paying jobs will be increasingly scarce," said another, NASA program manager Mark Nall. "I'm not sure that jobs will disappear altogether," allowed Justin Reich of Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet and Society, "but the jobs that are left will be lower paying and less secure than those that exist now."

[...]

⁴ The **Luddites** were 19th-century English textile workers who protested against newly developed labour-economizing technologies, primarily between 1811 and 1816. The term has since developed a secondary meaning: a "Luddite" is one opposed to industrialisation, automation, computerisation or new technologies in general.

⁵ **Slate** is a daily magazine on the web offering analysis and commentary.

[...]

He turned back on a side street, circling around toward his home. He was within a block of his destination when the lone car turned a corner quite suddenly and flashed a fierce white cone of light upon him. He stood entranced, not unlike a night moth, stunned by the illumination, and then drawn toward it.

A metallic voice called to him:

“Stand still. Stay where you are! Don’t move!”

He halted.

“Put up your hands!”

“But-” he said.

“Your hands up! Or we’ll shoot!”

The police, of course, but what a rare, incredible thing; in a city of three million, there was only one police car left, wasn’t that correct? Ever since a year ago, 2052, the election year, the force had been cut down from three cars to one. Crime was ebbing; there was no need now for the police, save for this one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets.

“Your name?” said the police car in a metallic whisper. He couldn’t see the men in it for the bright light in his eyes.

“Leonard Mead,” he said.

“Speak up!”

“Leonard Mead!”

“Business or profession?”

“I guess you’d call me a writer.”

“No profession,” said the police car, as if talking to itself. The light held him fixed, like a museum specimen, needle thrust through chest.

“You might say that,” said Mr. Mead.

He hadn’t written in years. Magazines and books didn’t sell anymore. Everything went on in the tomb-like houses at night now, he thought, continuing his fancy. The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the gray or multi-colored lights touching their faces, but never really touching them.

“No profession,” said the phonograph voice, hissing. “What are you doing out?”

“Walking,” said Leonard Mead.

“Walking!”

“Just walking,” he said simply, but his face felt cold.

“Walking, just walking, walking?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Walking where? For what?”

“Walking for air. Walking to see.”

“Your address!”

“Eleven South Saint James Street.”

“And there is air in your house, you have an air conditioner, Mr Mead?”

“Yes.”

“And you have a viewing screen in your house to see with?”

“No.”

“No?” There was a crackling quiet that in itself was an accusation.

“Are you married, Mr Mead?”

“No.”

“Not married,” said the police voice behind the fiery beam. The moon was high and clear among the stars and the houses were gray and silent.

“Nobody wanted me,” said Leonard Mead with a smile.

“Don’t speak unless you’re spoken to!”

Leonard Mead waited in the cold night.

“Just walking; Mr Mead?”

“Yes.”

“But you haven’t explained for what purpose.”

“I explained; for air, and to see, and just to walk.”

“Have you done this often?”

“Every night for years.”

The police car sat in the center of the street with its radio throat faintly humming.

“Well, Mr Mead”, it said.

“Is that all?” he asked politely.

“Yes,” said the voice. “Here.” There was a sigh, a pop. The back door of the police car sprang wide. “Get in.”

“Wait a minute, I haven’t done anything!”

“Get in.”

“I protest!”

“Mr Mead.”

He walked like a man suddenly drunk. As he passed the front window of the car he looked in. As he had expected, there was no one in the front seat, no one in the car at all.

“Get in.”

He put his hand to the door and peered into the back seat, which was a little cell, a little black jail with bars. It smelled of riveted steel. It smelled of harsh antiseptic; it smelled too clean and hard and metallic. There was nothing soft there.

“Now if you had a wife to give you an alibi,” said the iron voice. “But-”

“Where are you taking me?”

The car hesitated, or rather gave a faint whirring click, as if information, somewhere, was dropping card by punch-slotted card under electric eyes. “To the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies.”

He got in. The door shut with a soft thud. The police car rolled through the night avenues, flashing its dim lights ahead.

They passed one house on one street a moment later, one house in an entire city of houses that were dark, but this one particular house had all of its electric lights brightly lit, every window a loud yellow illumination, square and warm in the cool darkness.

“That’s my house,” said Leonard Mead.

No one answered him.

The car moved down the empty riverbed streets and off away, leaving the empty streets with the empty sidewalks, and no sound and no motion all the rest of the chill November night.