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I argue that technological determinism is one of the most important philosophical theories of technology and thus should be studied in length. Traditionally technological determinism is conceived as a doctrine included by technological autonomy or vice versa. However, we should make a distinction between these two claims about technology; I defend a specific version of technological determinism but reject technological autonomy.

The question of technological determinism is whether technology is one of the prime movers of society or not. To get a clear picture of the concept of technological impact, we should look into a general philosophical discussion of determinism. The traditional metaphor of determinism has been a Laplacean determinism which sees the world as great clockwork which makes it possible to predict any future state from the sufficient knowledge of present state. This makes free will impossible. However, we may take a compatibilist view on determinism, and maintain that things are both caused and still humans have free will. In relation to technological determinism this means that there is no contradiction in saying that technology changes culture, but we may still have some powers to influence technology.

Our idea of technology also affects our understanding of technological determinism. That is why I explicate Jacques Ellul's theory of characterologies of technology and criticize them by using Andrew Feenberg's theory of instrumentalisation. Thus I hope to reach a coherent view of essential features of technology which I shall call modified technological essentialism.

Traditional understanding of technological determinism has overemphasized the role of instrumental rationality as a threat to traditional human values. Although technology may diminish some old values it necessarily creates new ones. This is why the characterisation of technology is so important for our understanding of technological determinism; the question whether technology is neutral or value-laden determines our understanding of technology's impact on society. From this viewpoint technological voluntarism, belief that technology is essentially neutral collection of instruments to whatever ends we may pursue, is the directly opposite view on technological determinism.

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