Natural born cyborgs

Natural born cyborgs - of course one may ask or wonder what the term means. Well, the term was invented by Andy Clark, a professor ofPhilosophyand CognitiveScienceat the University of Sussex, UK and chair in Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. So what does he mean by natural born cyborgs? The term denotes us, humans.

For him humans are very much cyborgs as Robocop, Eve 8 among many others. Now, what made him think so? Clark made use of a term called cognitive hybridization, which in turn denotes the tendency of our brain to mix with thetechnologyor to put simply, our dependency towards technology. According to Clark we don't need wires for the term cyborgs to be applied to us. In his exact words he said "…we shall be cyborgs…in the more profound sense ofbeing human-technology symbionts: thinking and reasoning systems whose minds and selves are spread across biological brain and non-biological circuitry." At first glance one might say that Clark's interest is primarily on technology but the truth of the matter is he is more interested in understanding humans, and the nature of human mind.

Clark gave certain interest upon discussing the terms " transparent" and " opaque" technology. According to Clark, the technologies we are living with today are slowly becoming a part of us. From there on he went on to define what he meant by " transparent" and " opaque" technology. According to him transparent technology " are technology that is…integrated with, our own lives…as to become invisible in use."

Having defined what transparent technology is, let us now move on to understanding what Clark meant by opaque technology. By opaque

technology he means " one that...requires skills and capacities that do not come naturally to the biological organism, and thus remains the focus of attention." By this one may go on to conclude that opaque technology is one which is hard to use and thus requires skills if one aims to use it successfully. Let us take the wristwatch as an example of a transparent technology.

If we look back to our ancestors we can say that their way of checking the time is kind of primitive. They made use of checking the position of the sun or listening for the chime of the bell, which indicates the time. However, as time moved on time slowly became a part of us. New technology had been invented and checking the time now is not as hard as it had been before. In this sense, it may not be dangerous to say that wristwatch may now be considered a part us, and thus a transparent technology.

If one is familiar with Heidegger he/she might even see the similarity of Clark's conception of transparent and opaque technology with that of Heidegger's ready-to-hand and present-at-hand concept. To better understand what I mean I will give a brief description of what Heidegger have in mind with the terms stated above. By present-at-hand Heidegger meant an attitude the same to that of a scientist or a theorist.

Like a scientist or a theorist one will be interested in something only because of the facts the object has to offer which they could later on use to theorize about something. We often view things which are present-at-hand in a secondary mode as in the case of a broken fan which lost its usefulness, such as a watch who happened to stop working. Thus, we can see a

connection between Clark's idea of opaque technology and Heidegger's present-at-hand.

On the other hand, ready-to-hand is something more like Clark's transparent technology. We use things without theorizing about that things, hammer or wristwatch for example. In this regard, one can clearly see the similarity between Clark's concept of transparent and opaque technology with that of Heidegger's concept of present-at-hand and ready-to-hand.

I remember making the claim in class that these are both essentially phenomenological treatments of technology. By this I mean to say that we seek to understand what technology is. If we can experience what is meant by technology, first hand, the better. The way the mind works is very complex. Humans never cease to be content. Technology came into being because of our inability to be content. As humans seek to understand more things, to make life easier, technology blooms faster.

And now, we are living in a technological world and there are people among our race who's still not content with the way things are and thus they seek to better understand things. Clark, on his work, Natural Cyborgs, tried to show how humans became so caught up with technology that human lives became intertwined with technology itself. I remember reading something about him wishing to understand how the mind works and if he is to do that then he must understand what technology is all about.

Phenomenology as a method is very useful. By exploring a certain phenomena in order to understand a higher truth behind the phenomena is something great. Phenomenology might be useful in understanding

technology and in this I have no doubt. However, by saying that phenomenology can help to better understand technology I am not saying that this can open all the gates of our understanding towards technology because I strongly believe that no method, not even phenomenology itself can open our minds to everything there is to know about technology or anything in particular.

As we are humans there would always be room for ignorance. We cannot understand things fully no matter how hard we try becauseI believethat there would always be room for questions and for doubts. In this regard, I cannot offer another alternative should phenomenology fails to make us understand everything there is to know about technology.

Dualism is the belief that the body is distinct from that of the soul. In this paper I would make use of Cartesian dualism. It is in the belief of Descartes that though the body and the soul are of different entities both can still interact with one another. It is from Descartes where the term interactionism originated. In his interactionism he said that the body is the one who receives sense perceptions wherein the soul is the one who is responsible for our awareness. According to Descartes the seat of interaction lies in the pineal gland. In his belief the soul houses the body and if the body is acted upon by the soul then their point of interaction happens in the pineal gland.

I talked about Cartesian dualism because if one is to look closely Clark's idea of technology becoming one with us or a part of us is almost the same to Descartes idea of dualism. Both seem to see the body merely as a house. The difference however, is that for Descartes the body is the house of the

soul wherein for Clark the body is the house of technology or something to that effect. Clark believes that the use of technology is essential in understanding how the mind operates because men nowadays are so caught up with technology that we are completely dependent towards technology.

Technology became an important part of us and it seems to solve most of the problems of our world thus Clark concluded, for the same reason that technology may be useful in understanding human mind. However, I don't think that it really solved the mind-body problem present in Cartesian dualism because somehow I can still see flaws on Clark's idea.

Technology for one, though reliable on most time, is still prone tofailure. Somehow, failure may occur or accidents of some sorts because technology is not really that perfect, it's got its flaws. I also don't believe that Clark can avoid radical skepticism because no matter what he does there would always be people out there who would go on to criticize his beliefs. One can't really please everyone and I'm pretty sure that there are still people, purists for one, who would certainly doubt the power technology has. Thus, on my conclusion I say that even though Clark opened our minds to some ideas and although most of what he said holds true, I don't really believe that his idea is perfect enough to avoid skepticisms.

Reference:

Clark, Andy. Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human   Intelligence. Oxford University Press, USA; 2003