

The Myth of Autonomous Tech: Designers, Responsibility, and Biological Extension

Deconstructing Accelerationist Fatalism through Vital Normativity

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Abstract

Modern discourse oscillates between viewing technology as a neutral tool or as an autonomous destiny. Both stances mask human architectural choices; genuine technical emancipation lies in Intelligence Augmentation as vital extension.

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Two symmetrical illusions paralyze modern discourse: the instrumentalist alibi and the fatalist myth of autonomous technology.

Instrumentalism treats technical artifacts as morally neutral vessels. A rifle, an automated credit-scoring engine, or a deep neural network are declared innocent; virtue or vice supposedly depends entirely on the user's intent. This naive view ignores how material architectures structure choices before any user arrives. Machines establish thresholds, enforce operational disciplines, and eliminate alternatives.

Fatalism takes the opposite stance. Revived in Silicon Valley accelerationism from Jacques Ellul's technological system, it depicts megatechnics as a self-augmenting titan. In this narrative, technical systems have broken free from human guidance, pursuing their own evolutionary path toward speed and computational throughput. Human beings become obsolete biological friction.

These positions appear opposed. They are structurally complicit. The instrumentalist alibi protects technical systems from systemic critique. The fatalist myth protects engineers and institutions from moral and political accountability.

1 The Abdication of the Architect

The supposed autonomy of contemporary algorithms is a psychological projection. It is the alienated externalization of decisions made by living designers, software architects, and state or corporate patrons.

When an automated administrative pipeline denies disability benefits without explanation, or when a predictive model assigns punitive risk scores to marginalized communities, defenders appeal to computational destiny: "The

algorithm identified the optimal distribution; technology follows its own evolutionary logic."

This rhetoric provides cheap absolution. It allows executives, bureaucrats, and computer scientists to displace moral responsibility onto an impersonal mathematical artifact. Code possesses neither desires nor systemic momentum. What the public experiences as the unstoppable march of an autonomous system is the accumulated weight of concrete human choices: objective functions, metric proxies, optimization trade-offs, and venture funding. The myth of autonomy disguises institutional priorities as natural law.

Normativity never originates in machines. Norms originate in living bodies.

2 Canguilhem and the Vital Root of Technique

In *The Normal and the Pathological* (1943) and *Machine and Organism* (1952), Georges Canguilhem demolished the Cartesian reduction of living organisms to mechanical clocks. Descartes analyzed biology by comparing anatomy to hydraulic fountains. Canguilhem demonstrated the historical reversal of this relationship: machines are historical derivations modeled on living bodily functions.

Life is normative activity (*activité normative*). An organism establishes positive and negative values, institutes physiological thresholds, and reshapes its milieu to maintain its existence. A living agent introduces novel values into the physical world.

Technique is a biological strategy. It is the direct material projection of the organism's normative drive against physical friction. A flint blade, an optical lens, a steam engine,

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Dimension	Intelligence Augmentation (IA)	Artificial Intelligence (AI)
Ontological Status	Vital prosthesis & cognitive scaffold	Simulated autonomous agent
Locus of Agency	The embodied organism in practice	The disembodied algorithmic pipeline
Locus of Meaning	Grounded in the human <i>form of life</i>	Projected onto statistical syntax
Accountability	Explicitly located in designers & operators	Diffused into the “autonomous system”
Normative Role	Expands capacity to institute new norms	Enforces historical distributions from past data

and a compiler are physical prostheses through which an embodied agent negotiates environmental resistance and broadens its perceptual horizon.

When a technical system imposes rigid, pathological constraints upon human life, technology has not overthrown biology. A dominant group of human designers has weaponized an apparatus to impose their economic or political norms upon others, hiding behind the claim that the apparatus runs itself.

3 The Critical Bifurcation: IA versus AI

This biological insight dictates a fundamental demarcation in technical design, formalized in 1962 by Douglas Engelbart: the divergence between Intelligence Augmentation (IA) and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

In *Augmenting Human Intellect*, Engelbart defined computing as the expansion of human problem-solving capacity. IA treats the technical object as an open cognitive and material prosthesis. Like a stonemason’s chisel or a mathematician’s paper, an augmentative system preserves the living agent as the sole locus of judgment, exploration, and value. It expands human perception, structures memory, and clarifies multi-dimensional relations while keeping meaning, verification, and moral consequence anchored in the embodied thinker.

The AI paradigm pursued an opposing ambition: automated human substitution. Grounded in the dogma that thinking is mere syntactic calculation, AI builds automated systems to displace human decision-making. In practice, this does not eliminate human judgment. It buries human choices inside uninterpretable statistical matrices, providing a veneer of mechanical authority.

4 Reclaiming the Normative Cut

Technical objects are neither innocent neutral tools nor unstoppable leviathans. They are reified human decisions, material epistemic incisions, and prosthetic extensions of vital intent.

Overcoming technological fatalism does not require smashing machines or retreating into bucolic nostalgia. It requires demolishing the fiction of machine autonomy and exposing the human architects behind every system. Whenever an algorithmic deployment claims the inex-

orable authority of mathematical necessity, the critical imperative of Epistechonology is immediate:

Which vital norms were privileged? Whose friction was suppressed? And which designer chose to hide behind the machine?

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