



PHILOSOPHY  
department

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“Detech and Disconnect: Longtermism,  
Technology, and Well-Being”

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FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2025

**4:00–6:00PM** A&H Building, Room 0426. Snacks will be provided.

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The relationship between technological development and human well-being is highly complex. Plausibly, perhaps controversially, more of the former does not always lead to improvements in the latter. There might well be a ‘sweet spot’ of technological development that enables us to flourish without putting us in great peril. But then it will be important to theorize about how we might identify and stop in that spot, achieving a stable equilibrium, working to ensure equitable access to well-being enhancing technology without racing forward into disaster. Focused on so-called “artificial intelligence” and related technological developments, ethical longtermists such as William MacAskill and others focused on existential risk have engaged concerns about technology and well-being, but often embrace something of a “techno-optimist” perspective, suggesting that more tech is the best response to fears about bad tech. At the opposite extreme, Ted Kaczynski and others have argued for a “no tech” perspective, arguing that the world technology system is too highly integrated and uncontrollable to keep good elements without also bringing about the much, much worse. A third, “fatalist realist” perspective suggests that there is nothing (either nothing at all, or nothing morally attractive) that can be done to restrict, slow, or reverse technological development. I argue that all three views should be rejected, and that we should work to develop and improve tools to enable us to “detech”—to slow or reverse technological development when it becomes clear or plausible that continuing in that direction has negative expected value or substantially increases catastrophic risks—in an ethical and sustainable way. Possible ideas in this regard will involve alteration of social and moral norms, institutional practices regarding ethical review of technology, new applications of doctrines concerning legal liability for harm caused by technological innovations, and innovation concerning political licensing and regulation. We should also take seriously that some of the ways in which we might reduce risk or lessen harm is through “disconnecting” systems and communities that are currently interlinked.

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