

Call for Abstracts

Workshop hosted by the Open Society Research Platform

The Road to Domination? The Open Society and New Technologies

Deadline for Abstract Submission: 10 March 2022

Workshop Location and Date: Hybrid or Online, 29 April 2022

Aims and Purposes of the Workshop

Our world is increasingly governed by technology. The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence, advances in biotechnology, deployment of (semi-)autonomous weapons, or the predictive power of algorithms – all these technologies shape and alter our moral, social, and political relations in profound ways. And while few doubt the potential of new technologies in areas such as medicine, communication, or transportation, philosophers and social scientists raise serious doubts about the neutrality of technology, the prospects for human agency in a world governed by machines and, most generally, the liberating effects of technology.

The development of new technologies also challenges central concepts of the idea of 'open society'. In *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Karl Popper famously asserts that the difference between an 'open' and a 'closed' society is that the former 'sets free the critical powers of man', whereas the latter submits to 'magical forces'. In an open society, therefore, individuals are confronted with personal decisions and the prospect of a radically open future. In an open society, in other words, the belief in teleological laws of historical development has been replaced with the idea of human autonomy and personal responsibility.

But new forms of domination by 'Big-Tech' on a global scale, and the growing tendency to outsource fundamental decisions to algorithms, fundamentally challenge this idea of open society. Current practices of technological solutionism (i.e., the belief that technology can solve social and political problems) might well stifle free expression and democratic self-government of citizens; and our increasing reliance on technology might perhaps even reintroduce a telocratic attitude to politics that is antithetical to the 'openness' of open societies.

Yet, despite the fact that there is by now a relatively well-developed literature on ethics and technology, many of these issues are still underexplored; what's more, advocates of the open society have – with few exceptions – paid little attention to these problems. The purpose of this workshop, therefore, is to bring together scholars from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and to critically reflect on the complex relationship between open society and new technologies. The workshop is open to scholars from within and beyond the Open Society University Network; however, preference will be given to abstracts that demonstrate a serious engagement with the concept of open society. It should be emphasized, though, that conceptions of open society are not limited to Popper's; participants are most welcome to draw on other thinkers or develop their own conception of open society.

Potential questions might include (but are certainly not limited to) the following:

- In what ways are the values of human freedom, self-government, and the autonomy of the individual, which lie at the heart of the open society idea, challenged by new technologies?
- Is the fear that new technologies reintroduce telocratic elements that are antithetical to the 'openness' of open societies justified? Do these tendencies signify a return to the 'closed society'?
- How do we account for the biased nature of many new technologies? Can these technologies help us overcome gendered and racialized forms of exclusion or do they exacerbate them?
- How can we (re-)gain control over technologies that increasingly shape our lives? What is the role of education in this context?
- How (if at all) can the concept of open society help us to think through and perhaps even address the moral, social, and political challenges posed by technology?



Abstracts and Workshop Format

Abstracts, including a working title, should be 250-300 words and be emailed to royerc@ceu.edu. Please also include a short biography. The deadline for the submission of abstracts is 10 March 2022.

This is the fourth event in a series of workshops organized by the Open Society Research Platform. The event is planned as a one-day hybrid workshop with 'traditional' panels and online presentations. Individual presentations should be between 12 and 15 minutes. There is no requirement to submit a 'workshop paper' prior to the event; however, participants are more than welcome to do so.

Planned publication

The organizer will select papers for publication in an edited volume or a special issue in an academic journal.

Workshop Organizer

Christof Royer (Postdoctoral Fellow): royerc@ceu.edu . Please do get in touch if you are interested in the workshop and/or have any other queries.

About the Open Society Research Platform

The OSRP, which is affiliated with Central European University and the Open Society University Network, was created in January 2021. The platform seeks to revisit the debate on open society – a concept coined by Henri Bergson and popularized by Karl Popper. Our aim is to identify the multiple and often diverging uses of the concept in theory and practice, to offer a rigorous analysis of the scholarly discussions around this complex idea, and to probe the analytical, institutional, and political implications of different open society discourses. As such, the OSRP supports and contributes to inter- and transdisciplinary scholarly research and public debate on open society as an intellectual and policy tool.

