**Action and Enquiry in the Age of Constant Connectivity**

2022

A Summer school held by School of Philosophy at Zhejiang University

**Basic Info:**

**Instructor:** Prof.Nikolaj Jang Lee Linding Pedersen (Underwood International College, Yonsei University)

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**Organizer**: Jie Gao, Davide Fassio (Zhejiang University)

**Teaching Assistant**: Xian He (Zhejiang University)

**Time:** 2022. 8.15/17/19, 1.00pm - 4.00pm (Beijing Time)

**Platform：**Zoom

**Introduction:**

Since the second half of the 20th century computer technology has undergone continued, rapid development. As a result, we enjoy constant connectivity through smartphones or other computer devices. We shop and make travel arrangements online or via apps. If you’re wondering about the 2022 team roster of the LA Lakers, chances are that you use a search engine such as Baidu or Google to point you in the right direction. Films, series, and other video content are streamed through online platforms such as iQiyi, Youku, Netflix, or YouTube. Social Networking Services (SNS) shape and drive social interaction. People connect via WeChat, WhatsApp, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. News is often consumed online or via apps, and discussion of current affairs is frequently mediated through online platforms.

In many ways our daily lives have become more convenient due to constant connectivity. However, constant connectivity should also give us pause and trigger reflection on its potential significance. This course invites pursuit of this kind of reflection by exploring the potential significance of constant connectivity in relation to action and enquiry.

The course is divided into three 3-hour sessions.

The first session (classes 1-4) focuses on constant connectivity and action. As is widely known, data analysis is now applied for a wide variety of purposes—e.g., in online shopping and personalized advertising, public health, crime prediction, biomedical research, and insurance. We will focus on potential applications of data analysis in relation to the information trail that many people leave behind online—in particular, in the form of Likes on social media. Is it possible to apply data analysis to Likes and obtain an accurate psychological profile of the user? If so, might this psychological profile be used to manipulate user in various way—and might this kind of manipulation, if it occurs, pose a threat to the user’s autonomy?

The second session (classes 5-8) and third session (classes 9-12) focus on constant connectivity and enquiry. Due to constant connectivity we have swaths of information at our fingertips at any given time. Isn’t this a good thing? For, how can constant, easy, and quick access to a massive body of information fail to improve the conditions for enquiry? The second session (classes 5-8) explores this question through a discussion of the mechanics of a major search engine, fake news, and empirical findings concerning the spread of respectively true and false information on social media.

The third session (classes 9-12) zooms in on the phenomenon of deepfakes, offering an exploration of their potential impact on enquiry. Might the increasing presence of deepfakes undermine trust in our senses? Might it undermine the evidential force of videos and audio—types of content that were previously considered as conclusive evidence? What can be done to counter the potential epistemic threats posed by deepfakes?

**[Schedules:](https://www.nikolajpedersen.com/)**

Day 1 (classes 1-4): Action in the Age of Constant Connectivity

* Topics:
  + Data analysis (applications).
  + Privacy.
  + Psychological profiling (human-based *vs*. algorithm-based).
  + Action and autonomy.
* Readings:
  + Blaauw, M. 2013. The Epistemic Account of Privacy. *Episteme*, 10: 167-177.
  + Mele, A. 1995. *Autonomous Agents: From Self-Control to Autonomy*. New York: Oxford University Press. [Only excerpts!]
  + Youyou, W. et al. 2015. Computer-based personality judgments are more accurate than those made by humans. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112: 1036-1040.

Day 2 (classes 5-8): Enquiry in the Age of Constant Connectivity (I)

* Topics:
  + Search engines.
  + Fake news.
  + Social media and the spread of information.
* Readings:
  + Brin, S. & L. Page. 1998. The anatomy of a large-scale hypertextual Web search engine. *Computer Networks and ISDN Systems*, 30: 107-117.
  + Gelfert, A. 2018. Fake news: a definition. *Informal Logic*, 38: 84-117.
  + Vosoughi, S., D. Roy & S. Aral. 2018. The spread of true and false news online. Science, 359: 1146-1151.

Day 3 (classes 9-12): Enquiry in the Age of Constant Connectivity (II)

* Topics:
  + Deepfakes.
  + The epistemic role of recordings and videos.
  + Evidence and the senses.
* Readings:
  + Rini, R. 2020. Deepfakes and the epistemic backstop. *Philosopher’s Imprint*, 20: 1-16.
  + Rothman, J. 2018. In the age of A.I., is seeing still believing? *New Yorker*. URL: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/11/12/in-the-age-of-ai-is-seeing-still-believing>