**Philosophy and Film**

**Black Mirror: Episode 1, Season 3, *Nose Dive***

“Artificial Intelligence is no match for Natural Stupidity”- *Bumper Sticker*

**Working Questions:**

- What is the appropriate relationship between authenticity and social identity?

- How does social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snap-Chat, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, etc.) affect our understanding of or experience of:

* 1. Ourselves: Identity / Self Worth?
  2. Social Life?
  3. Expectations: What are people supposed to be like?
  4. The Good Life: Ethics?
  5. Psychological Health / Balance?

- Does a difference exist between social media presentations of ourselves and acting differently around peers, teachers, parents, and so on?

- One of the fascinating and disturbing elements of the 2016 Presidential election was the finding that fabricated news articles, reporting fake information, received more attention on social media than real news articles. Business Insider reported:

“BuzzFeed is reporting that at the end of the US presidential election, the top malicious fake news stories actually outperformed legitimate news stories shared by some of the most popular media companies. According to data from a Facebook-monitoring tool cited by BuzzFeed, the top 20 fake news stories collectively got more engagements — shares, likes, and comments — than 20 factually accurate news stories shared by mainstream news outlets.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Is there a relationship between a societal failure to *understand true reporting* and our consumed or posted presentations of the world on social media? Is technology creating the conditions where alternative reality is preferable to ‘the real-world’?

- Finally, what is social about social media?

**Philosophy:**

**What Have ICT’s Changed?**

“Of the many approaches that seek to characterize the nature of the self, two stand out as popular and promising for the task ahead. One is usually dated back to the great empiricist philosopher John Locke (1632-1704). In a nutshell, your identity is grounded in the unity of your consciousness and the continuity of your memories. If this sounds a bit like Descartes it is because it follows his discussion of the ‘cogito’ argument: as long as you are a thinking entity, you are the specific thinking entity that is going through such specific mental processes. Allow your consciousness or memories to be hacked dramatically and you would stop being yourself. This is why you may be willing to have your mind implanted in someone else’s body, but not another mind implanted in your own body.

Then there is a second approach, more recent, known as the Narrative theory of the self. According to it, your identity is a ‘story’, understood as a socio- and/or auto-biographical artifact… We ‘identify’ (provide identities to) each other, and this is a crucial, although not the only, variable in the complex game of the construction of personal identities, especially when the opportunities to socialize are multiplied and modified by new ICT’s (Informational and Computer Technologies)…. And since ICT’s can deeply affect such informational patterns, they are indeed powerful technologies of the self, *as the following examples about embodiment, space, time, memory and interactions, perception, health, and finally education illustrate*.”[[2]](#footnote-2) (Italics Added)

**Revolution or Absent Mind?**

“Computerization resembles other vast, but largely unconscious experiments in modern social and technological history, experiments of the kind noted in earlier chapters. Following a step-by-step process of instrumental improvements, societies create new institutions, new patterns of behavior, new sensibilities, new contexts for the exercise of power. Calling such changes “revolutionary,” we tacitly acknowledge that these are matters that require reflection, possibly even strong public action to ensure that the outcomes are desirable. But the occasions for reflection, debate, and public choices are extremely rare indeed. The important decisions are left in private hands inspired by narrowly focused economic motives. While many recognize that these decisions have profound consequences for our common life, few seem prepared to own up tot hat fact. Some observers forecast that “the computer revolution” will eventually be guided by new wonders in artificial intelligence. Its present course is influenced by something much more familiar: the absent mind.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Identity:**

“What is it that makes a person the very person that she is, herself alone and not another, an integrity of identity that persists over time, undergoing changes and yet still continuing to be—until she does not continue any longer, at least not unproblematically?

I stare at the picture of a small child at a summer’s picnic, clutching her big sister’s hand with one tiny hand while in the other she has a precarious hold on a big slice of watermelon that she appears to be struggling to have intersect with the small o of her mouth. That child is me. But why is she me? I have no memory at all of that summer’s day, no privileged knowledge of whether that child succeeded in getting the watermelon into her mouth. It’s true that a smooth series of contiguous physical events can be traced from her body to mine, so that we would want to say that her body is mine; and perhaps bodily identity is all that our personal identity consists in. But bodily persistence over time, too, presents philosophical dilemmas. The series of contiguous physical events has rendered the child’s body so different from the one I glance down on at this moment; the very atoms that composed her body no longer compose mine. And if our bodies are dissimilar, our points of view are even more so. Mine would be as inaccessible to her—just let her try to figure out [Spinoza’s] *Ethics*—as hers is now to me. Her thought processes, prelinguistic, would largely elude me.

Yet she is me, that tiny determined thing in the frilly white pinafore. She has continued to exist, survived her childhood illnesses, the near-drowning in a rip current on Rockaway Beach at the age of twelve, other dramas. There are presumably adventures that she—that is that I—can’t undergo and still continue to be herself. Would I then be someone else or would I just no longer be? Were I to lose all sense of myself—were schizophrenia or demonic possession, a coma or progressive dementia to remove me from myself—would it be I who would be undergoing those trials, or would I have quit the premises? Would there then be someone else, or would there be no one?

Is death one of those adventures from which I can’t emerge as myself? The sister whose hand I am clutching in the picture is dead. I wonder every day whether she still exists. A person whom one has loved seems altogether too significant a thing to simply vanish altogether from the world. A person whom one loves is a world, just as one knows oneself to be a world. How can worlds like these simply cease altogether? But if my sister does exist, then what is she, and what makes that thing that she now is identical with the beautiful girl laughing at her little sister on that forgotten day?”[[4]](#footnote-4)

In one of the final scenes, of the movie Inception, on top of a sky scraper, Cobb, the protagonist, rejects his sub-conscious projection of his wife. He says, holding her after she had been shot by another character, “I can’t imagine you with all your complexity all your perfection all your imperfection, look at you, you’re just a shade of my real wife. You’re the best that I could do, but I’m sorry you’re just not good enough.”

**Definitions of Deception:**

“A liar can choose not to lie. Misleading the victim is deliberate; the liar intends to misinform the victim. The lie may or may not be justified, in the opinion of the liar or the community. The liar may be a good or a bad person, liked or disliked. But the person who lies could choose to lie or to be truthful, and knows the difference between the two” (Ekman, 26-27)[[5]](#footnote-5).

“It is not just the liar that must be considered in defining a lie but the liar’s target as well. In a lie the target has not asked to be misled, nor has the liar given any prior notification of an intention to do so” (Ekman, 27).

“There are two primary ways to lie: to *conceal* and to *falsify*. In concealing, the liar withholds some information without actually saying anything untrue. In falsifying, an additional step is taken. Not only does the liar withhold true information, but he present false information as if it were true” (Ekman 28).

“By lying, we deny others our view of the world And our dishonesty not only influences the choices they make, it often determines the choices they can make—in ways we cannot always predict. Every lie is an assault on the autonomy of those we lie to. By lying to one person, we potentially spread falsehoods to many others—even to whole societies. We also force upon ourselves subsequent choices—to maintain the deception or not—that can complicate our lives. In this way, every lie haunts our future. We can’t tell when or how it might collide with reality, requiring further maintenance. The truth never needs to be tended like this. It can simply be reiterated. The lies of the powerful lead us to distrust governments and corporations. The lies of the weak make us callous toward the suffering of others. The lies of conspiracy theorists raise doubts about the honesty of whistle-blowers, even when they are telling the truth. Lies are the social equivalent of toxic waste: everyone is potentially harmed by their spread.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

“The contemporary proliferation of bullshit also has deeper sources, in various forms of skepticism which deny that we can have any reliable access to an objective reality and which therefore reject the possibility of knowing how things truly are. These "anti-realist" doctrines undermine confidence in the value of disinterested efforts to determine what is true and what is false, and even in the intelligibility of the notion of objective inquiry. One response to this loss of confidence has been a retreat from the discipline required by dedication to the ideal of correctness to a quite different sort of discipline, which is imposed by pursuit of an alternative ideal of sincerity. Rather than seeking primarily to arrive at accurate representations of a common world, the individual turns toward trying to provide honest representations of himself. Convinced that reality has no inherent nature, which he might hope to identify as the truth about things, he devotes himself to being true to his own nature. It is as though he decides that since it makes no sense to try to be true to the facts, he must therefore try instead to be true to himself.

But it is preposterous to imagine that we ourselves are determinate, and hence susceptible both to correct and to incorrect descriptions, while supposing that the ascription of determinacy to anything else has been exposed as a mistake. As conscious beings, we exist only in response to other things, and we cannot know ourselves at all without knowing them. Moreover, there is nothing in theory, and certainly nothing in experience, to support the extraordinary judgment that it is the truth about himself that is the easiest for a person to know. Facts about ourselves are not peculiarly solid and resistant to skeptical dissolution. Our natures are, indeed, elusively insubstantial -- notoriously less stable and less inherent than the natures of other things. And insofar as this is the case, sincerity itself is bullshit.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. Business Insider: *A report that fake news 'outperformed' real news on Facebook suggests the problem is wildly out of control.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *The Fourth Revolution*: Luciano Floridi, 68-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *The Whale and the Reactor: A search for :Limits in an Age of High Technology,* Langdon Winner, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Betraying Spinoza, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein.* (Taken From Steven Pinker’s *The Sense of Style 15-6).* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Paul Ekman, Telling Lies. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sam Harris, *Lying, 41.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Harry G. Frankfurt, On Bullshit [↑](#footnote-ref-7)