# Enslavement by Technology? Reflections on the IQ2 Debate on Big Ideas

*To the Editor*:

Interesting, I thought, that the negative won the debate on the night by the slightest of margins. Surprising. I wasn't at all convinced, although I guess it is comforting to believe that I have control, I have choice over, how I interact with technology.

Unfortunately, I'm not that delusional, and was much more convinced by Katina Michael's speech, which gave me a visceral sense of how I interact with technology. I laughed at my own neediness when it comes to the tech I rely on in my life. It also freaked me out: why do I feel the desire to check my emails at 3a.m.?!

I view my relationship with tech as an enslavement, since it's become an essential part of my life and though I've reconsidered some aspects of that relationship – I no longer participate in social media, for example – I can't not rely on it in so many other ways. It's become obvious that I've outsourced my mind to my phone, and thus imbued it with power over my life. I've broken out in a cold sweat with just the *thought* that my phone is lost. Indeed, I felt and acted as though I *had* lost my mind!

Corporations and governments are well aware of the power I've given over to my tech, and exploit it consequently, as you would expect, which is another, more insidious aspect of the enslavement. It makes me uneasy to think that governments and corporations can directly access everything in my digital world and in fact do.
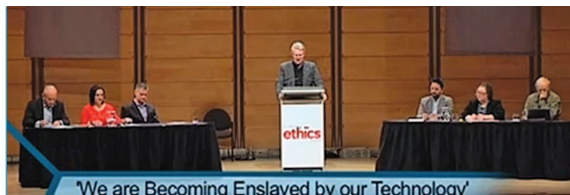
I feel it is time to step back from this runaway train that's pulling me along blindly with the promise of BIGGER and BETTER ways to communicate, do business, stay alive, explore the universe. I'm told that tech allows me to be more efficient, more effective in the world, but is that what I really want? I'm not sure it is.

*–Rachel Eldred*
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*To the Editor*:

The recent IQ2 debate over whether we are enslaved by technology was both entertaining and timely. Katina Michael's rapper arguments got the message across strongly that we denizens of the "infosphere" are challenged by daily threats to our individual freedoms – whether they be sinister data trackers, commercial invaders of our personal space, or Internet-mediated addictions.

Is a monitor so-called because it monitors us as we tap away at the keyboard?



Intelligence Squared (IQ2) debate at the City Recital Hall, Sydney, Australia, August 12, 2014.

Is a screen so named because it screens us away from genuine human contact? Does a cell (phone) lock us into solitary confinement and alienation?

Judging by the audience response to Katina's imaginative performance, the Panglossian "no" case may have won a merely rhetorical victory on the night of the debate.

Such public debate about computing technology is encouraging and reminds us that the word itself derives from the Latin *computare* – to think and consider together – and that the great enterprise of information should be a shared adventure in which human minds freely interact with and are not controlled by the enabling technology.

*–John Holgate*

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*Dear Editor,*

Whether or not we have something to hide, and what that something is, is unfortunately not something we can control. An arbitrary changing of the rules, like a macabre game of musical chairs, can be systematically used to weed out "undesirable" persons. The one-two punch of arbitrary rule change and surveillance has been well tested and with tragic effect. "Nothing to hide" could only work in a (non-existent) perfectly moral, free, and fair society. Invidious – I can't believe anyone is really so naive.

*–Jonathan Seville Bragdon*
*Berlin, Germany*

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Enslave us even more
So we can fulfil the algorithm.
 Amen-
Oh yes, and how about that
Permanent delete feature you've been promising?

Ladies and gentlemen, does this make sense?
Have we forgotten what it means to be free?
 I never told you to switch off your computer completely
 To give away your dishwasher
  Your washing machine
  Your day job
  Or to stop talking to your friends on the phone-
  Or to stop using email altogether
 I'm asking you to get real.
  Go home and have a look in the mirror
  Have a good look at your eyes
   Are they sunken like you've been wearing an Occulus Rift?
   Do you get my drift?
  Think for a change, just don't *do.*
   "Who am I?"
   "Who have I become?"
   "Who have we become?"
  Switch off those devices-
   Stop.
   Think.
   Open your eyes.
   Reclaim your life-
    Your kids, your spouse, your friends
   Go outside and feel the chill
   And see the natural sunlight

You are alive
 But the technology is dead
Your heart is beating
 But the batteries are forever dying.

Do we really wish to be the ones to breathe life into the machine?
What will be the consequences of this *homo electricus* we're building?
The predators will become the prey
 We will become victims of our own creations.
 Yes, driverless cars,
  But who is at the helm steering?
 Out of control
 Out of this world
 Is this really what we mean by calculated progress?
 Do you think we won't be harmed?
 We just can't keep throwing technology at technological problems
  Domino-effect
  Parabolic trajectories-
   What goes up must come down
  Forget the singularity.
Where has all that precious time gone?
 Sucked into vectors of nothingness.
I ask you to listen, to reflect,
 To ask two questions:
  "Why am I here?"
  "What's my calling?"
   It's to embrace
   It's to look up
   It's to be human, once again.