Chapter 5.27
Mobile Phone and Autonomy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is to offer a critical study of what the human living condition would be like in a new era of hi-tech mobilization, especially the condition of self-government or autonomy, and how, in the Thai perspective, the condition affects culture. Habermas' analysis of individuation through socialization and Heidegger's question concerning technology and being are used in the study, and it is revealed that we are now confronted with a new technological condition of positioned individuals in the universe of communication through mobile phones. This situation surely will be realized in a world highly mobilized by the phenomenon of connectedness. This means that we are concerning ourselves with our concrete individuality for our self-expression in that universe. I offer an interpretation that we would hold this kind of individuality to be valuable because of an effect from technological thinking. In addition, comparing this view on individuality with Buddhism, I found that the view offered here is not similar to the Buddhist concept of self as a construction. I offer an argument to show that these concepts are basically different for ethical reasons; while the Buddhist concept still preserves the nobility of the moral agent (Buddhism, after all, is a religion and needs to concern itself with morality), the concrete individuality discussed here is considered only as an instrumental value in a world of hi-tech mobilization.

PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE

Does the formulation of autonomy come from inside or outside an individual? From the investigation in the theory of subjectivity comes Habermas' individuation through socialization; one can achieve greater autonomy when he or she is engaged in a process of social integration to become socialized individuals (Habermas, 1992). His approach is sketched out in an intersubjective understanding that emerges from communicative action when individuals enter a public sphere to share their volition or opinion in order to make a reasoned agreement that later becomes a so-called universal law (Habermas, 1990). It is interpreted that, while Kantian pure reason inside us is the source of autonomy (as interpreted in Guyer, 2003), Habermas' theory of communication

sheds light on the question by suggesting that an outer source, the process of socialization by communication, is the case.

If we accept for the sake of argument that Habermas' theory of communication is suitable to explain autonomy, one question still remains, particularly in our time of modernity: Can the same explanation be applied simultaneously to communication on mobile phones, especially the hi-tech ones? Habermas' theory primarily aims at our communication when we are face-to-face with those with whom we are communicating, but we did not see how a situation will be realized when the communication occurs between a distance, not a face-to-face one. The term *hi-tech mobile phones* that I used here means a kind of cellular phone that can be a credit card, Internet connection, e-mail port, voicemail junction, and so forth, according to the usage of Myerson (2001). We may imagine that it will be like a pocket personal computer. This concept of a hi-tech mobile phone somehow would be realized in the future. It sticks with its owner everywhere he or she goes, even in water (if waterproof and not easily broken). However, its dominant characteristic is that it is an important item of personal belongings. Its owner is the only one to hold and use it. If we were to routinely share the mobile phone with another person, there would be no difference at all between it and a public telephone or a house telephone. Therefore, a real mobile phone has a characteristic of being able to identify its owner in order for it to become the most efficient way to communicate with the one with whom we are trying to connect in such a way that is not possible when one receives (or sends) a call from (to) an unexpected person. Certainly, the communication on mobile phones is not a face-to-face one; we are not in a position of being body-to-body with him or her with whom we are talking. Sometime in the future, there might be a great development in mobile phone technology so we can see faces on the screens of mobile phones, but still,

we normally do not consider this a face-to-face communication.

My topic, "Mobile Phone and Autonomy," may lead someone to think that the mobile phone itself becomes a thing that keeps us always in control. It sticks with us all the time; we have to use it in our daily lives, and we find it so indispensable that we will never reject it. Therefore, it is a channel through which another person can reach us directly and control us so that we behave according to the rules of social conduct. We may be afraid of being monitored by an online e-policeman through the channel of our mobile phone, and that feeling would prevent us from doing something illegal. In that kind of social management, everywhere we went surely would be known by the police, so if we did something against the rules, we could be abruptly caught, or we could be tracked down by the system in our mobile phone. Or we would be shocked by a dangerous flow of electricity caused by a police officer through the battery of the mobile phone to prevent us from escaping the scene. However, even though it seems that those situations might be possible in the near future or that someone might want to say that a side effect of using a personal mobile phone is a utopian society in which people dare not commit a crime, I do not have any intention in this chapter to talk about these surveillance roles of the mobile phone. As the highest status of moral development, autonomy or self rule of a moral agent is not explained as fear of being punished by the law. Autonomy is understood as a concept of self-expression as an agent who has his or her own freedom and intention to do according to his or her volition for his or her end for himself or herself. Moreover, the concept of autonomy always goes along with the concept of rationality rather than with emotion or any stimulus that does not stem from pure reason. I consider the concept of autonomy only in a dimension that involves rationality. It is possible that in the mobilization era, people will be aware of being

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