

Kobayashi Memorial Socrates Program

The Aspen Institute's Socrates Program has 25 years of history and has provided forums for exploring contemporary issues through expert-moderated dialogue. As one of the Yotaro Kobayashi Scholarship-funded programs, the sixth Kobayashi Memorial Socrates seminar will take place from Friday, June 9 to Sunday, June 11, 2023, in Nara, Japan.

Dystopia or Democracy? Rethinking Technology's Role in Society

moderated by William Powers

Since the late twentieth century, new technologies have been reshaping how individuals navigate their lives, as well as how businesses and other organizations operate. More recently, it's become clear that these same technologies are having a profound influence on the workings of democracy. But what kind of influence?

A decade ago, there was widespread optimism that, by giving everyone a global voice, social media platforms would be a boon to democratic societies. Today there's rising concern that they represent a threat to democracy itself. Five billion people are now on social media, discussing everything from their hobbies and family lives to the climate crisis and other major challenges. But rather than fostering constructive discourse among users of diverse backgrounds and views, the platforms tend to herd us into ideological echo chambers where our existing beliefs are confirmed and other points of view vilified.

With polling in crisis and news outlets increasingly serving partisan agendas, there's currently no reliable source for public opinion. This is a critical factor in the social disintegration and loss of trust plaguing democracies around the world. Is the online public square hopelessly broken? If technology has put us on the road to dystopia, how can we change course and use it to build a healthier, more democratic world?



William Powers is a writer and technologist. He is co-founder and CEO of Public Mind, a non-profit technology organization launching in 2023. Its mission is to strengthen democracy by objectively reporting on public opinion as reflected in online social discourse. He is the author of the book *Hamlet's BlackBerry: Building a Good Life in the Digital Age*. A New York Times bestseller, the book took him into the technology world, including five years at MIT as a research scientist working on ways

artificial intelligence can help build better societies. He lives in Massachusetts and is a visiting scholar at the Max Planck Center for Humans and Machines in Berlin.



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Date : Fri June 9, 2023 – Sun June 11, 2023

Topic : Dystopia or Democracy? : Rethinking Technology's Role in Society

Moderator : William Powers

Location : Hotel Nara Sakurai no Sato
2220-1 Takaya, Sakurai City, Nara Prefecture, Japan
Tel: 81- 744-48-0620
<https://hotelnarasakurai.com/>

Language : English

Preliminary schedule:

Day 1 (Fri.) 1:45 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Introduction
2:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Seminar Session 1
Opening Ceremony

Day 2 (Sat.) 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Seminar Session 2
Lunch
Cultural Activity
Dinner

Day 3 (Sun.) 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Seminar Session 3
12:00 p.m. – 12:15 p.m. Closing Remarks
Adjourn

Eligible applicants:

Young leaders between the ages of 30 to 50 who are active or expected to be active in the fields of business, government and civil society. The regular seminar tuition* will be covered fully, if you are selected as the Yotaro Kobayashi Scholarship recipient**.

*The regular seminar tuition is **\$3,000**, which includes lodging, materials, meals, and an excursion. The tuition does not include travel.

**Non-scholarship application with no age restriction is also available. Please contact us for details.

Application due date:

Please fill out and submit the application form by email to the Yotaro Kobayashi Scholarship Office by **Friday, March 10, 2023**. The office will review the application and contact you with the result around one week after the application due.

Seminar readings:

Seminar readings will be provided to you approximately 6 weeks prior to the seminar.

Inquiries and applications:

For further information and the application form, please contact below:

office@aspeninstitute.jp

Elina Akiyama

The Aspen Institute Japan