

TEC 154 2014S, Class 02: What is Technology?

Overview

- Preliminaries.
 - Note Takers.
 - Admin.
 - Approaching the readings.
 - Questions.
- Defining "Technology", revisited.
- Weinberg: Can Technology Replace Social Engineering?
- Berry: Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer.
- Florman: Technology and the Tragic View.

Preliminaries *-----

Note Takers

- Today's note takers: DB and CO.
- You don't need to take notes on the administria. (Unless you hear something that I don't seem to have out there already.)
- Please provide a summary of what you took to be the important points.

Admin

- Attendance!
 - Respond as you wish (politely).
 - Please preface future comments with your name.
- Please use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation in your questions
- If you borrowed books from me, please put a "Rebelsky Lending Library" stickers in each of them so that you and I can remember that you've borrowed them.
- Feel free to write in and highlight the books you've borrowed from me.
 - Good readers write.
 - There are some interesting studies on how students use previously marked-up books.
- The course Web remains in a bit of a state of flux. Expect it to change a bit over the next week.
- I got over 200 email messages from students on Tuesday.
(Yes, it's my fault for having students submit homework via email.)
 - So that I can navigate my inbox, It's very important to me that you take the time to title your email messages correctly.
- Apologies for distributing photocopies of one wrong reading. I'm not quite sure what happened.
 - If you didn't read Weinberg, just listen to the discussion.
- For Friday, read

- Marx, Leo (1987). Does Improved Technology Mean Progress?
[Teich 10th, ch 1, pp. 1-12]
- Pool, Robert (1997). How Society Shapes Technology.
[Teich 10th, ch 2, pp. 13-21]
- Winner, Langdon (1980). Do Artifacts Have Politics?
[Teich 10th, ch 7, pp. 50-66]
- If you need copies, let me know and I'll get them ready outside my office later today.
- Take a look at my comments on your questions for the first set of readings (should be up tonight). I will admit that I was generally a bit harsh, but I find that early critiques lead to better questions.
- Extra credit:
 - CS Table, Friday, noon, Day PDR: 3D printing (including body parts).
 - Theatre Gigante, Friday night

General approach to the readings

Understand before you critique.

- Our goal is to learn from the authors
- So, even though there's a lot to critique about these authors (particularly if we treat them as if they'd written today), let's see what useful things they have to say.

While we learn from the authors, we also learn from each other

- Please pay attention to your colleagues and react thoughtfully
- I will do my best not to impose my own perspective (too much)
- Even though I've led discussions on these materials many times, I find that there's always something new I learn when I discuss them with a new group of students.

Starting Questions

- What is the author's thesis/primary claim?
- Where in the essay can we find this thesis stated?
- Does the author stake any subsidiary claims?
- What is the structure of the argument to support that claim?
- How might the author's approach be used to evaluate a technology?

Your Questions

Defining "Technology", revisited *-----

Weinberg: Can Technology Replace Social Engineering? *-----

Berry: Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer *-----

Florman: Technology and the Tragic View *-----

Notes from CO *-----

Introduction:

- Definition of technology on first day of class was applied knowledge (Luke added that technology provides solutions to various industries)
- So, technology can be thought of as applying knowledge to solve problems

Weinberg:

- Technology cannot replace social engineering, but it can serve as a supplement to speed up the process of solving certain problems
- Chaya suggests that the title of the piece could lead us to the thesis (Can Technology Replace Social Engineering?)
- Thesis in-text: "Technology will never replace social engineering. But technology has provided and will continue to provide to the social engineer broader options, to make intractable social problems less intractable; perhaps, most of all, technology will buy time-- that precious commodity that converts violent social revolution into acceptable social revolution"
- What is the significance of Weinberg's discussion of the impact of the IUD? (An attempt to decrease population growth by providing an alternative to birth control that does not require daily action)
- Jaya suggests that Weinberg may be using the example of the IUD to show that there is no easy technological fix to certain problems. (Citing the problem of using IUDs in a "machismo" place, where the more babies means the better. Here, there would need to be a change in social behavior)
- Other student suggests that IUD example may be important to look at because the solution decreases the social component of the problem so successfully that technology can actually combat the social issue.
- Other evidence that Weinberg uses to support his thesis:
- H-Bomb (Decreased the amount of deaths in war because it took destructive power to such an extreme level)
- Conservation of Resources (Cannot expect for people to decrease certain behaviors like how much they drink

or eat, technology must address these problems. Weinberg suggests that in 10 years (from 1960 something)

that all coasts will be lined with nuclear powered desalination plants....)

- It is better to implement a safer car (for example, adding a seatbelt) than it is to improve driving behavior
- Elimination of poverty (not a particularly strong example, as this problem is around)
- Jaya proposes a good question to consider when reading Weinberg. These are not the exact words, but it was close to Is social engineering driven by technology or is technology driven by social engineering?

Berry:

- Critiques consumer culture, not a fan of huge industries
- Technology is dominated by inescapable economic models, Berry would rather have a more localized economic model
- Thesis: We need to think about the indirect effects of the technology we create. We need to recognize where energy comes from and how it is attained. (Rebelsky).
- Rebelsky likes the following 9 standards proposed by Berry for technological innovations (9 is difficult however)
- The new tool should be cheaper than the one it replaces
- It should be at least as small in scale as the one it replaces
- It should do work that is clearly and demonstrably better than the one it replaces
- It should use less energy than the one it replaces
- If possible, it should use some form of solar energy, such as that of the body
- It should be repairable by a person of ordinary intelligence, provided that he or she has the necessary tools
- It should be purchasable and repairable as near to home as possible
- It should come from a small, privately owned shop or store that will take it back for maintenance and repair
- It should not replace or disrupt anything good that already exists, and this includes family and community relationships (Technology and the Future, p. 36)

Florman:

- Luke suggest that Florman's main point is that as the human race it is our duty to challenge our limits, prove our our value, and achieve as much as possible. Also refers to top of page 46 in Technology and the Future.

FLORMAN DISCUSSION CONTINUES ON FRIDAY

Extra Credit Opportunities:

- Friday @ Noon, 3D Printing of Body Parts (CS Table)
- Friday Night, Theatre Gigante
- Wednesday @ 5PM, Men's Basketball
- Saturday @ 1PM, Men's Basketball

Notes from DB

Notes from discussion:

It is understood that individuals are going to have negative reactions to some readings of this course. Our goal, however, is not to critique the readings but to understand them.

Did the readings provide us with new views for understanding our definition of technology developed in the previous class?

- First response to this question was simply, "No." (Lexy)
- It was brought to our attention that Florman discusses both the positives and negatives of technology (Pierce)
- Technology could potentially play a role in social engineering problems (Luke)
- Technology provides solutions
- Technology can be defined as applied knowledge (Zack)
 - Applying knowledge to problems
- Weinberg implies that technology is only used to solve problems (Ethan)
- Florman treats technology as a force not entirely under human control (Amy)
 - Other authors think it comes back to the creator
 - Florman says technology can morph
- Florman believes that technology contains bumps in the road (Amy)
 - Things are out of our control

Is our definition of technology changing? (Rebelsky)

- Capitalistic being added to definition (Amy)
 - We are trained to think that new is better

What is Weinberg's thesis? (Rebelsky)

- Can technology replace social engineering? (Chaya)
- Can technology help speed up the process of social engineering?
- Technology will make social engineering work better
- Author's support is flawed (Jaya)
 - Birth control example
 - Motivating through fear?
 - Not as black and white
 - IUD (Rebelsky)
 - Pill vs IUD
 - Solutions to overpopulation
 - Both fix but one is easier (IUD "once and done") (Danielle)
 - Weinberg is saying that just b/c one is easier doesn't mean it should be done (Jaya)
 - It seems Berry would say that the easier way out (IUD) is cheating (Dana)
- Making it more efficient

What are the exact words of Weinberg's thesis? (Rebelsky)

- Page 33, last sentence in 3rd paragraph (Amy)
- Are you convinced? (Rebelsky)
- Examples: H-bomb (Amy), conservation of resources (Ethan), safer car (Fabian), elimination of poverty (Rebelsky)

- Class doesn't buy it
- Technologies available were limited - 1966 (Tyler)

Berry's thesis? (Rebelsky)

- Computers are evil (Pierce)
- Reasons for liking article: (Amy)
- Value placed on people
 - Technology replaces people
 - These types of far out views are needed
- Writing in a vacuum (Ethan)
 - Society where we don't have super corporations
 - More economic models
- Question of why would his wife be replaced by a computer? (Mike)
- She could still edit his work
- Limited view of the computer (Rebelsky)
- Stop using your wife and use a computer
- Indirect effects

Berry's main points (Rebelsky)

- Indirect consequences
- 9 questions about technology
- #9 concerns intangible good
- People's lives are good
- #9 impossible? (Confusion about goods) Berry does not mean a physical good

Florman's thesis?

- Page 46, 4th paragraph (Luke)
 - Our duty is to challenge our limits
 - Prove our value in society
- More on Florman next class!

5 key points of class

- Technology may not be able to replace social engineering, but it can speed up the process of solving problems
- Weinberg's thesis can be found on page 33, the last sentence of the 3rd paragraph
- Indirect consequences/effects of computers (and technology in general) need to be considered
- Berry's 9 standards for technological innovation on page 36
- Florman's possible thesis is that we must challenge and test our limits as well as prove our value in society

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