

Technology and Society: for Better or for Worse

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A core question that lingers among progressive and conservative individuals is whether technology serves to better society or make it worse, with progressives supporting the former and conservatives the latter. However, to fairly consider whether technology is beneficial or detrimental to the welfare of mankind, one requires a balanced and sober approach to the discussion. Tim Wu writing for the *New Yorker* examines the topic of whether technological advancement is good or bad for humanity.¹ Wu concludes that overall biological evolution is preferable and beneficial to the wellbeing of men than technological evolution.² A contrary opinion is expressed by a *Press Wire* article reporting that 81% of Americans polled affirmed that the internet made lives better.³ The question as to whether technology is good or bad for society depends, therefore, on the value perspective that either side of the debate takes on a given form of technology. The premise and scope of the discussion is to argue that benefits and detriments of technology to mankind are contingent on the values attached to such advancements; hence, subjective depending on the interpretation of the user of that technological advancements.

In an ethnographic study examining the lives of the “Oji-Cree”, people who inhabit the North Polar regions of the Earth and living under hostile snow-like conditions, Wu notes how technology has improved the life expectancy of such people.⁴ Prior to their introduction to modern transport, medicine, and hunting tools, the Oji-Cree survived on old fishing methods

¹1. Wu, Tim. "As technology gets better will society get worse?" *New Yorker*, February 06, 2014.

²2. Wu.

³3. Vrge Strategies. "Americans believe tech makes their lives better but society worse, new study finds." *Press Wire*, May 31 2018.

⁴4. Wu.

such as harpooning.⁵ Consequently, many died during the harsh winter season due to hunger. Today, modern fishing has allowed people to flourish. However, there is a downside to the introduction of other new technologies in the community.⁶ For instance, alcohol and processed foods have resulted in heightened rates of obesity in the community, and brought about laziness among alcoholics leading to societal decline. Judging from the perspective of one who weighs out the benefits of biological welfare versus technological welfare, Wu concludes that technology has, overall, been bad for the Oji-Cree people.⁷

Accordingly, it is undeniable that technological advancements have brought about various advantages associated with how human beings interact, share knowledge, and socialize.⁸ From the use of smartphones, social media and other interactive forms of communication technologies that connect people who are separated by space and time instantaneously, the use of such technologies have resulted in blurring far distances. Hence, have made the world appear to be a global village.⁹ Consequently, education has become more ubiquitous, enabling learning in environments where it was previously thought to be difficult to implement learning; for instance, the introduction of online diplomas, degrees, and doctorate programs by virtual varsities.¹⁰ That

⁵ 5. Wu.

⁶ 6. Wu.

⁷ 7. Wu.

⁸ 8. Sutton, Brian. *The effects of technology in society and education*. (Theses, New York: The College at Brockport State University 2013), 51.

⁹ 9. Sutton, 41.

¹⁰ 10. Sutton, 32.

notwithstanding, the disadvantages of ubiquity cannot also be ignored, the age of the internet revolution has led to the toppling of governments in the Middle-East such as Libya and Egypt, owing to Twitter and Facebook information highways. Equally, people are generally anti-social compared to the days when the internet was unheard of. People categorized under the Generation Z age group, for instance, spend more time with virtual friends than with real-life people; hence, deteriorating the social fabric of community interactions.¹¹

Another growing concern about the development of technology regards privacy.¹² Progressives view the giving up of personal data as a necessary sacrifice that accompanies the advancement of technology. The argument that privacy is for people who have something to hide often becomes the defense.¹³ However, it remains elusive to verify with certainty the extent to which ubiquity can interrupt social privacy and impact society specifically at the point where no privacy at all is attainable.¹⁴

Conclusively, the position to support, defend, or acknowledge the use of technology as a social benefit or otherwise depends significantly on whether the stance taken is agreeable to whoever is proposing it. For this reason, the question is not whether technology serves society by

¹¹ 11. Sutton, 41.

¹² 12. Anderson, Jana, and Lee Rainie. "The future of well-being in a tech-saturated world." *Pew Research*, April 17, 2018.

¹³ 13. Vrge Strategies. 2018.

¹⁴ 14. Anderson & Lee. 2018.

making it better or worse, rather, how much technology can society tolerate regardless of whether it makes things better or not.

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