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In Defense Of Technology

Mike Kelly

During the Middle Ages, i.e. the “Dark” Ages, man’s worldview was largely dominated by mysticism, irrationality, and collectivism. The universe was widely perceived as epistemologically unknowable and metaphysically malevolent, dooming man to suffering and tragedy. Given the widespread political and social instability, as well as the ravages of unstoppable plagues and warmongering nations, such conclusions were not totally unreasonable. The Enlightenment and its corollary, the Scientific Revolution, delivered western civilization from the Dark Ages into an age of reason, science, and individualism. What was once perceived as unknowable, uncertain, and malevolent, became knowable, certain, and benevolent. The universe became a place where man could flourish, instead of rot in his own misery. As science took hold, the world seemingly became more knowable, more livable, and more suitable for the pursuit of human desires and happiness. This rational, scientific, and individualist worldview was reborn in the Scientific Revolution, and its subsequent development of technology.

Technology is the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes. It allows society to become more intelligent and more advanced. Each accomplishment is utilized, and then used further as a stepping-stone for the next great achievement. Each good new invention, method, idea, or application of existing knowledge makes life easier and ultimately proves to be beneficial for society.

To say the least, technology has played an important part of human life, and in nearly every human endeavor. Yet, amidst its record as a tool enabling man to live in a world that was otherwise thought to be unlivable, technology has come under strict scrutiny in modern society. Among such scrutiny has been claims that technology has destroyed valuable knowledge, created an environment of social isolationism, led to environmental degradation, and resulted in mass destruction and killing that would otherwise not be possible. These claims misunderstand technology and its role in human endeavors.

Each of these claims against technology will be dealt with, but each

commits a common error that must first be made explicit. That is, they treat technology as a primary factor, as opposed to a tool. In other words, technology is not an end in itself, but is only a tool or a means to an end. Wars were fought far before nuclear weapons were created; yet these weapons were only created because of the human drive to destroy each other. The atomic bomb was created with an evil desire, and technology was only used as a tool to create it.

Technology has been criticized for hindering intelligence and basic skills, but this is not the case. Through abstraction – the quality of dealing with ideas rather than events – it allows us to become more intelligent, not less so, by increasing our brainpower. The human brain has a memory storage capacity equivalent to that of four terabytes. With a limit on our brain capacity, we should embrace technology because it allows us to use the black box theory. The black box theory is when we only need to be able to read inputs and outputs from an object and then derive an idea from them. In other words, we do not need to know how the input gets to the output; we just need to know what the expected input is and what the output means.

For example, take a look at a car: most people do not know exactly how it works. What most people do know is that the gas pedal enables the car to accelerate and the steering wheel makes the car turn. We are not expected to understand how a four-stroke engine works, or how a rack-and-pinion steering system works; we just need to understand how to use the car. We can call these more sophisticated/complicated ideas, such as operating a vehicle, “high level concepts.” With abstraction, we are saving brain capacity by just assuming a black box instead of learning how each “black box” works. This allows us to use our limited brain capacity to store high level concepts, inherently making us more intelligent creatures.

People do not become socially isolated as a result of technology. Introverts will be introverts with or without technology. Technology allows them to be more social than they would be without it. If they will not include themselves in “real life” social situations, those who prefer solidarity can gain access to alternative social environments through online social networks. Introverts are able to contribute to society more anonymously. This allows society’s advancement to become partially attributed to these introverts, where normally they would not contribute to society because

their behaviors inhibited these actions. Technology is not the reason behind these isolated behaviors; it is just a means of acting on them. If people are going to be reclusive, technology, if anything, allows them to be more social than not.

Reading is an essential part of learning, and with the use of technology, everyone can learn more. Technology catalyzes reading, it does not inhibit it. With paper, people are limited physically by how much they can carry. With technology, people can carry all of their readings with them, as well as download them on the go. Currently, anyone can reach information quicker than ever before. This allows society to expand and develop ideas faster. If we combine this with our high level concepts, society is now becoming more intelligent and creating even more, higher level black boxes. Computers help us to create these high level black boxes and allow us to automate things that are not intellectually challenging, allowing society to focus more on new concepts, rather than spend time learning what we already know. This is all only possible with the help of technology.

Technology helps people live longer and healthier. Technology does not kill us, we kill each other. With inventions like the pacemaker or the MRI, can anyone say that technology itself is killing us? Sure, technology includes basic and advanced weaponry, but weapons are not the cause of violence. Weapons are only a means of expressing violence and they would not exist without those who seek to do harm in the first place. Advancements in medical technology have empirically increased our lifespan in ways that would not have been possible in pre-technological eras. This has been shown to be the case time and again, with the ravages of treatments such as bloodletting and the lobotomy, as well as the eradication of polio in the past century, serving as examples.

Technology has and will continue to create a better environment for society. It has and will continue to make society more intelligent through its aiding of abstraction. Technology has and will continue to help everyone contribute to society, regardless of one's extroverted or introverted disposition. Medical technology has and will continue to expand the duration and quality of our lives. Society has and will continue to flourish from technology and its benefits. It has and will continue to do all these things, only on the condition that technology is no longer blamed for phenomena of which it is not responsible.