

Technological Advancement and the Circumvention of Morals

Michael Spellings

Mankind has evolved from the essence that separates humans from beasts: the ability to use the mind for reason. Reason is the ability to analyze, create, deduce, and formulate. It is reason that enables human beings to strive to invent; it is through invention that mankind has developed society and created a better world, or is it?

Rousseau, in his "Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts," argues that man has sidestepped the design of the creator and invented his own set of morals, based on the technology he creates. Rousseau reasons that science, technology, and art attempt to create falsehoods derived from people themselves. People use their ability to digress from moral and religious teachings in order to portray a world more conducive to their own intentions. Such fields as science are held captive to their own public as scientists must revamp their societal views in order to become accepted. Original creations are often viewed with disdain and must be justified in order to receive a proper niche in society. Because of this, morals are betrayed, as is evident in the present day debate on stem-cell research, cloning, and the creation of artificial intelligence.

At one point in time, current masterpieces such as Salvador Dali's *The Great Masturbator* and Francisco de Goya's *The Executions of the Third of May*, were viewed unfavorably by the greater portion of society; however, as time went on, moral views have been shaped, possibly by those who created works of art and new sources of technology. Inevitably, as time moves on and the human capacity to create technology that questions the very need for a God increases exponentially, two imperative questions must be asked: does society create morals around our new inventions, or should society adhere to well established but constraining morals and abstain from such Godlike technological advancements?

The question for all time, indeed! Philosophers have long been confounded by the same moral issues that confronted Albert Einstein with the creation of his theory of relativity, which resulted in the deaths of thousands. Had Einstein not developed $E = mc^2$, many innocent lives could have been spared in 1945; however, had he not, mankind would be without the theory of relativity, which offers so many useful scientific applications not pertaining to death and destruction. Was such a technological advancement justified despite the moral constraints? The paradox itself is the reasoning of Rousseau: technology changes morals, which existed prior to such a creation.

Rousseau was surely ahead of his time. Today, it is quite possible that Rousseau would have been a politician, rather than a philosophical theorist. However, Rousseau's foresight creates another paradox: if people were taking notice of such moral imperatives many years ago, why has society not noticed and embraced this reasoning? It is evident from Rousseau's writing that he possessed an understanding of what was to come in the future and set out to inform the public of such issues, only to be ignored. Rousseau forces his readers to acknowledge the power that technology has over morals: "Technology was born from our vices and from our pride, and it encourages us towards idleness while it destroys the sense of religion without re-establishing morals" (48).

Dr. Ronald Martin of Lynchburg College offered a parallel to Rousseau's argument when he suggested that technology replaces tradition. In a speech fraught with ethical questions stemming from technological advancement, Dr. Martin became Rousseau. Dr. Martin presented the audience with such questions as: What forms of technology have changed daily life? Is it ethical to use basic eugenics to choose smart eggs? These arguments originate from C.S. Lewis's stance that science and technology are used to control nature. Nature no longer controls people because people have developed numerous methods of controlling nature itself. This is not to say that technology is powerful enough yet to prevent hurricanes and tornadoes, but rather that to a certain extent, the creation of life can be controlled. The idea of the perfect baby, created by taking out portions of DNA strands that would otherwise result in some

genetic disease, is foreseeable because of the advancement of technology. Surely this technological development is a far cry from the invention of the wheel, but when one thinks back to how basic advancements have been up until now, it is not difficult to understand that future scientific progress will carry serious ramifications.

The most important issue addressed by Dr. Martin was the ability for technology to alter the world for our future. This matter is of crucial concern to posterity. One day, should society's morals be so eroded as to cast a blind eye to the creation of the "perfect human;" the existence of mankind as we know it will hang in the balance. Lewis's "last men" will be free from nature, but in the process of controlling nature, will they be killing life itself (329)? Should technological advancement change society so much that mothers and fathers can choose every last detail desired in a child, it would lead to the creation of the perfect human being. Inevitably, this perfect human will naturally become better than those who created it. In effect, each new generation will render the preceding generation inept and useless. By that reasoning, morals will become subject to the subsequent generation; thus, no moral knowledge will be passed on. Instead, each generation will simply create new morals, based on a new society altogether. What right then, if any, do present-day people have to mold mankind in their own vision? Here the question of paramount importance arises: if technology is singularly available to those who have the ability and the money to use it, do the rich automatically have Godlike control over those less fortunate who do not have access to such technology? A master race indeed, but by whose authority?

Hitler attempted just such a control over nature in his "final solution." Hitler believed in the creation of a master race, pre-ordained by the Nazis, to become the rulers of the world. The means by which this horrible ideology was enacted still boggle the mind today. This master race was to be accomplished not only through the breeding of "pure blood" only, but also through the eradication of all those the Nazis believed to be inferior: Jews, Catholics, Blacks, basically any non-Aryan humans ("Holocaust Documents" 383, 386). Because of this desire to create a better human race, morals and ethics were not merely overlooked; they were changed. Technology presented Hitler and his Nazi party with the ability to control and change nature, in a way unrestrained by morality.

The lesson to be taken from the history of Nazi Germany is more applicable today than is obvious at first glance: technology has, and will, change the moral fabric of society; it is up to the present generation to heed this warning and not allow such societal travesties of immense proportions ever to occur again. On a less hopeful note, one must recognize the writings of Rousseau; this has happened in the past and is happening at present. Can civilization itself afford to ignore its responsibility yet again? Absolutely not! However, because of recent technological developments, it will not be long before new ethical barriers are broken and then justified in the name of those same technological advancements. It may be of far greater importance for society to study and calculate the ends, before it justifies the means; but then again, perhaps we are only fighting fate.

Works Cited

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