

# Freud and postman on technology

Technology



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That tomato will have implications on the environment, the people who consume it, and the business world that is in charge of its distribution. When one takes all of the aspects of technology into consideration, it is easy to see how Sigmund Freud and Nell Postman adopt an ambivalent stance relative to technology in their respective essays *Civilization and Its Discontents* and *The Judgment of Thames*. In *The Judgment of Thames*, Postman writes, "it is not always clear, at least in the early stages of a technology's intrusion to a culture, who will gain the most by it and who will lose the most" (Postman 12).

This statement by Postman shows his belief that in the beginning stages of newly introduced technology, the technology itself is neutral. If technology itself is neutral, it is the users of the technology, the skeptics, and the environment who will ultimately predict the winners and the losers. Let's think about the automobile for an example and the effects that it has produced on our world thus far. Such positives may include countless jobs for assembly line workers, abilities to travel long distances with relative ease, improved perceived social status, and a certain cultural uniformity within certain societies.

Negative elements stemming from the automobile may include irreversible damage caused to our environment from the oil and fuel that is necessary to run the automobile, an increased segregation of classes based on the social status that certain automobiles carry, and also the 33,687 deaths that were motor vehicle related in 2012 in the U. S. Alone (All Injuries). The automobile, when viewed as a technology, must be taken as neutral. After gaining an understanding that the automobile will not remain neutral, it is

the job of everyone to monitor the positive and negative effects that it carries.

Finding a path in the middle of the positives and negatives will ultimately help to utilize the strengths while minimizing the damaging effects. Postman takes a similar stance when he writes, "A bargain is struck in which technology gives and technology takes away" (Postman 5). Freud has a comparable attitude of ambivalence toward technology in his work *Civilization and its Discontents*, but delivers his views in a much more philosophical manner. Freud looks at technologies and whether or not they are one of the main causes of happiness or unhappiness.

Freud writes, "If there had been no railway to conquer distances, my child would never have left his native town and I should need a telephone to hear his voice" (Freud 9). Freud understands the powerful technological advancement that is the railway, but looks at it as if it had kidnapped his child from the family. The invention of the telephone has allowed Freud to stay connected to his child, and thus offsets some of the negatives of the railway. It is technologies that act as confounding factors.

In the case of Freud's above statement, the railway was the causal factor (the factor that caused the observed effect) and the telephone was the confounding factor (a factor other than the railway which will positively or negatively affect his relationship with his son). If one views a technology as neutral at its conception, it is then important to realize the technology is most likely here to stay. The technology itself will not be undone, as it is likely to expand in many directions.

Once an individual gains an understanding that technology cannot be completely put away, moral implications and obligations of the technology must be discussed by all whom are affected by it, and must be taken into serious consideration. Postman writes, " It is not possible to contain the effects of a new technology to a limited sphere of human activity' (Postman 18). As with the tomato discussed in the introduction, one cannot look at it solely from a technological standpoint that through the advancements in farming bioengineering, it is now able to grow larger, faster, more flavor, and impervious to certain predators.

Morally, one must look at the tomato and understand that bioengineering may cause problems with previously unseen food allergies and also the possible disruption of a balanced ecosystem. Many individuals do not take the large number of moral and ethical implications of technology into inconsideration as Freud realizes when he writes, " We cannot see why the systems we have ourselves created should not rather ensure protection and well-being for us all" (Freud 13). Indeed, ignorance is bliss for a large portion of our societies.

A greater understanding of all implications that technology entails will help to develop a deeper understanding that every organism in our world is but a small piece on the giant chessboard of technology. Taking an ambivalent stance toward technology as Freud and Nee have done will accomplish little in correcting problems associated with technology. Both authors understand the respect that technology deserves and the power that it wields, but they offer few solutions of how to better the world through its uses while minimizing the negative costs.

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The answer, ironically, is most likely in the form of new technologies that can aid and assist the pre-existing technology. Postman writes, " New technologies compete with old ones" (Postman 16), but he fails to mention that new technologies may positively impact challenges with existing technologies. Such is the case with the world's dependency on crude oil. As the discovery of new sources of oil is branching out further and deeper into our planet, and as existing wells seemingly dry up, the carrying capacity of our globe lowers by the day.

Recent technological advancements in the oil industry, such as the case of the Hawkins Oil Field in Texas, are allowing companies to extract millions of barrels of oil from sites that were once considered to be dry and/or outdated. At the Hawkins Oil Field, new technological methods are being used such as the injection of nitrogen into existing wells that will help obtain approximately 40 million gallons of oil over the next 25 years (Oil Field Extension). This technology, like all others previously discussed, carries positives and negatives.

The environmental impact is positive as it will help to lower the emissions of the facility. The economic impact is both positive and negative as the new methods of injection are costly to the plant, but may actually lower the The world's obsession with new technologies appears it will not subside any time in the foreseeable future and will most likely continue to grow exponentially. It is of the utmost importance that we, as a whole, view these technologies as idle from their invention while gaining an understanding that they will not remain idle.