

How society shapes technology

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The Number 16 September How Society Shapes Technology Robert Pool's work How Society Shapes Technology challenges the generally held view that it is technology that shapes the society and drives the history. Pool, a scientific writer, claims that it is history and society that determine the development of technology. My goal in this essay is to discuss Pool's ideas and express my viewpoint on the problems that he arises.

To begin with, it is hard to disagree with Pool's vision of a society as a force to shape technology. It is the society that generates the demand, and scientists and engineers just respond to it by inventing new things. Indeed, "public opinion and demands directly affect the market-place with respect to products and systems" ("Society Shapes Technology") For example, people today enjoy artificial food like fast food, soft drinks or food that has extra smells. As a result, flavor researchers are inventing more and more super-strawberry and other aromas and additives that attract consumers and satisfy their elaborate tastes (Khatchadourian, "The Taste Makers"). Yet, if the society changes the attitude to artificial food as the root of many illnesses and a threat to people's health, people will predictably stop buying tasty but unnatural things. This will mean flavor researchers will not need to work on artificial additives in their labs anymore, and the technology will be left behind.

Similarly, I agree with the view that best does not always win. As Pool examines the reasons why gas powered cars won over steam powered engines known as Stanley Steamers, he comes to the conclusion that the latter had more engineering merits than the former. Pool writes, "although the internal combustion engine did have some advantages in performance and convenience, steam-powered cars had their own pluses: they had no

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transmission or shifting of gears, they were simpler to build, and they were smoother and quieter to operate” (Pool 14) Still, internal combustion engines came into use due to the factors completely unrelated to technology. Those were the spread of hoof-and-mouth disease and a lack of business and promotion skills demonstrated by Stanley twins (Pool 14). Today some inventions are coming into use very slowly because corporations do not want spend money. It seems, this is the case with wind mills or solar energy use. As far as I am concerned, Pool’s work means a lot for the future of humanity. First of all, it helps engineers and laymen understand that technology does not function independently. The spread of any invention is a result of decisions made by humans. Therefore, both scientists and ordinary citizens have to take the responsibility for the development and use of technology. In this respect, remembering about irreversible world disasters such as Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, the Exxon Valdez, etc serves as an urge to start changing our attitude to technology and to rethink the ideas of technological determinism, a theory that says technology shapes the development of any society and determines its values. As Pool unveils the interplay between the social, political, economical and other forces with technology, it becomes clear that technology does not follow a predetermined path of being inevitably invented. This means all forces in the society, if united, may stop the development of some technologies that they find threatening or harmful. As for engineers and scientists, Pool’s work teaches them to start their technological developments only after thinking what their technology may bring to its end users.

Secondly, How Society Shapes Technology helps people become technologically literate. Pool provides an insight into the essence of <https://assignbuster.com/how-society-shapes-technology/>

technology as a human-dependent thing and traces its development throughout the history. It leads to realizing the fact that any the development of destructive inventions could have been prevented, which would have saved millions lives. For example, if politicians had not supported the invention and use of the atomic bomb, thousands people who died after Hiroshima bombing would have been alive.

To conclude, Pool's work provides the basis for a few important inferences. Recognition of society as a shaping force of technology helps discard the theory of technological determinism, a theory that relieves scientists and the society of the responsibility for the development and use of technology. This helps start a new line of technological literacy among all citizens - the one that stresses responsibility for the safe and undestroyed future.

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