Chapter 6
Technoethics: Nature and Cases

Peter Heller
Manhattan College, USA

ABSTRACT
Technoethics relates to the impact of ethics in technology and technological change in biological, medical, military, engineering, and other applications. Accordingly, new questions arise about the moral right and wrong of corresponding technological issues. These, in turn, generate novel trade-offs, many of them controversial, involving the desirable versus undesirable ethical aspects of the new invention or innovation from a moral viewpoint. The discussion in this chapter suggests that frequently much can be said on both sides of an ethical argument and that therefore, at times, agonizing decisions must be made about which side has the greater moral merit based on numerous variables. The minicases sprinkled throughout the text and the longer automobile engineering case at the end are used as illustrations.

INTRODUCTION
The term “technology” (or its abbreviated prefix “techno”) can be defined in a variety of ways. An acceptable one is that it is the systematic knowledge and applications that can describe any current activity closely related to science and engineering and viewed as providing the means of doing useful work. Technology may be embodied in a physical reality or in a tool, a method, technique, skill, or know-how.

“Ethics” may be defined as a code or set of principles by which people live. Ethics is about what is considered to be morally right and wrong. When people make ethical judgments, they are voicing prescriptive or normative statements about what ought to be done, about moral duty and obligation, not descriptive statements about facts. In short, ethics involves concepts like good, right, just, duty, obligation, freedom, and responsibility and how these relate to what people should do.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6122-6.ch006
TECHNOLOGY-RELATED ETHICS OF THE AMISH

But having said all this there is no gainsaying the fact that not everyone is sold or is willing to replace religion or any philosophy hook, line, or sinker with technology, considering it a world view. For instance, limits on technology are the signature mark of the Amish sect even in the 21st Century. Riding in horse-drawn buggies and living unplugged from the public grid clearly distinguish the various Amish communities totaling over 275,000 from mainstream Americans and their love affair with gadgets and “new and improved” processes.

Yet, the Amish do not categorically condemn technology but only selectively. Nor are they technologically illiterate; quite the opposite, despite their (generally) eighth or 10th grade education. Rather, various Amish communities selectively sort out what might help or harm them. For instance, they limit the use of telephones to one often housed under a shed in a community so as not to discourage face-to-face contact. More significantly, the Amish modify and adapt technology in creative ways to fit their cultural values, social goals, and ethics. Similarly, they discourage a refrigerator in every kitchen since their communal ones keep their milk, their primary produce, fresh. While they tolerate solar panels to generate sufficient electricity to power a saw or sewing machine, they are not all plugged into the electric grid. Accordingly, at the end of the day, Amish technologies are diverse and ever-changing and selective (Kraybill et al., 2013). Minimally, they are discriminating. They ask whether any particular technology provides tangible benefits or damage to the community (Fecht, 2013). Modern antibiotics or diagnostic and surgical techniques are acceptable. So is the use of mowers, hay balers, or generator-powered wood-working equipment. The latter are sometimes driven by compressed air. On the other hand, technology used primarily for entertainment or merely convenience is rejected as frivolous or unnecessary.

Too, the technology that changes the relationship to the community or causes pride or attracts attention such as plastic surgery, automobiles, or computers is unacceptable. So would any other equipment or procedure that would alter the nature of the community itself or reduce face-to-face contact such as e-mail or undermine harmonious community solidarity, cultural identity, or ethics.

Furthermore, any technology threatening the religious precepts of the Amish is shunned. For instance, an item that is available only to some and not all. In other words, the Amish ask whether a particular piece of technology imposes human dominion in a useful and responsible way or not. So, a particular technology that tends to the sick, relieves misery or pain, or makes the environment more sustainable and attractive is acceptable (Herzfeld, 2009). Technology that pushes community members apart is not.

But there are other contrarians of technology, scholars among them, outside the Amish community. A good example would be the late Neil Postman of New York University. In an address to a 1998 conference, he declared that “The human dilemma is, as it has always been, [that} it is a delusion to believe that technological changes of our era have rendered irrelevant the wisdom of the ages and the sages” (Postman, 1998). And yet, as Postman admits elsewhere, “...we discover, always to our surprise, that it has ideas of its own, that it is quite capable not only of changing our habits but of changing our habits of mind” (Kelly, 2010).

WORK-RELATED ETHICS

This section is not about employees putting their hands in the till in their workplace or various kinds of fraud or corruption or even sabotage. Rather, it is about the fact highlighted in an Op-Ed article in The New York Times entitled “Where Have All the Jobs Gone?” (Bernstein, 2013). This is about
Related Content

Ethical Consumerism: Contextual Issues of Ethical Decision-Making Processes: An Exploratory Study
Ebtihaj A. Al A’ali and Abdul Redha Al-Sarraf (2016). Ethical and Social Perspectives on Global Business Interaction in Emerging Markets (pp. 133-149).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/ethical-consumerism-contextual-issues-of-ethical-decision-making-processes/146093?camid=4v1a

Sexual Harassment of Women in Workplace in India: An Assessment of Implementation of Preventive Laws and Practicing of Therapeutic Jurisprudence in New Delhi
www.igi-global.com/chapter/sexual-harassment-of-women-in-workplace-in-india/178273?camid=4v1a

Corporate Social Responsibility in Tourism and Hospitality: Relationships and Applications
Vikrant Kaushal and Suman Sharma (2016). Corporate Social Responsibility in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry (pp. 144-161).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/corporate-social-responsibility-in-tourism-and-hospitality/147197?camid=4v1a

The Role of a Strategic and Sustainable Orientation in Green Supply Chain Management
www.igi-global.com/article/the-role-of-a-strategic-and-sustainable-orientation-in-green-supply-chain-management/188420?camid=4v1a