

# Reflecting on Feenberg's "Questioning Technology"

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First of all I agree with Feenberg A. (1991, 1999) that technology is neither a "neutral" set of tools that is "standing ready to serve the purposes of their users" nor an "autonomic" system of the laws of nature. It is foolish to believe that technology is purely instrumental, that is "indifferent to variety of ends it can be employed to achieve" (Feenberg A., 1991). One can argue that the same technology can be used for many different purposes, both good and bad, so the argument of the technology being purely instrumental is fairly valid. On the other hand, we may also argue that technology is capable of seamlessly blending into people's lives and influencing social and cultural changes regardless of those changes being bad or good.

Probably because technology is closely associated with and based on science, it is naïvely viewed as an autonomous progressive force that evolves at the natural pace as one "law of nature" after another is discovered. Maybe one of the best examples that undermines technology as being an "autonomic" system is the history of keyboard layout. The present layout of keys on keyboard seems natural, but first typists used to type on a different keyboard. Soon typists were able to type so fast that the keys of typewriters jammed. Unable to improve the technology (i.e. typewriters) producers introduced "improved" key layout that would slow down typing. With wide introduction of computers the problem of jamming keys in typewriters had disappeared but we still use keyboard layout that slows down the

typing speed. Would our society be different if we had a different keyboard layout? It is impossible to find an answer on this question and the answer is not important. The important conclusion is that technology can evolve in many different directions and the social forces that control that evolution can structure the future of our society.

I believe that technology is evolving as a reflection of certain political and social forces. For example, the creation of atomic weapons was caused by the political situation before and during WWII and social pressure to find means of defending against enemies. However, the threads of these political and social forces frequently lie in the hands of dominant classes of the society that want to retain their positions of power. The dominant social forces are not necessary forces of evil; their goals may not reflect the principal needs of the society and lack the long-range vision of public good. It seems that they follow the technophilic essentialist philosophy by attempting to use technology for efficient organization of bureaucratic systems of control over society and even nature.

I also agree with Feenberg A. (1999) that development and use of technology is dialectical in nature. One of the postulates of dialectic materialism proposed by Hegel and Engels portrayed everything as the unity of opposites which can be interpreted in the our context as unity of different and frequently opposing social forces that contest technology and eventually bring it to serve the needs of the public. In other words, when a dominant social group introduces another technology that should increase efficiency and make people more productive, other social groups may find a different use for this technology that would benefit society in a different way.

## References

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