

Ethics in a Technological Society

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More technological products are adding up to environmental degradation and further causing great concern to humanity. Many scientists are of the conviction that our world will definitely come to an end if a wars breaks out involving humanity and technology. Technology they say is advancing to an extent beyond the control of those who have made it. Despite this, it is hard for humanity to do away with technology. Both proponents and opponents of technologies will be worried with the extreme of probable impacts, and the debate can be vulnerable or stifled as an end result. How then, can we assure that modern and emerging technologies are valuable, accountable, and sustainable? The focal argumentation in this paper is to ascertain that we are living in an era of technology that guarantees remarkable change. With major technological upheavals coming, improved moral thinking in terms of being better informed and improved ethical deeds in terms of being more proactive are necessary.

Key Words: Ethics, Technology, Society.

Introduction


Ethics are extremely important in our society since they help to determine whether an action is right or wrong. There are different types of ethical systems that are used to determine whether the action is right or wrong. The first is ethical relativism whereby there are no morally right or wrong actions. Instead, right and wrong is determined by the social norms. In this ethical system, the norms of the society which are the basis of determining the action help to preserve the culture of the society. On the negative end, the ethical system confuses what ought to be done with what is currently being done. The second ethical system is the divine command theory whereby moral standards are based on God's laws which are in the divine books such as the Bible for Christians and the Quran for Muslims. Any act that contradicts the law of God is morally wrong. This ethical system creates standards for humans which come from a higher authority and gives reasons why we are all equal and need to behave morally. The third ethical system is the utilitarianism system which is based on the teleological theory. Here, actions are judged based on their consequences. This system states that the end justifies the means. The advantage of this system is that it promotes the well-being of human beings and attempts to reduce human suffering. On the negative side, it is hard to predict the consequences of an action therefore one person may

do it thinking it is good while it renders evil to another. The fourth ethical system is the deontological theory which emphasizes on the morality of the action itself. It states that moral rules are universal and that it provides the moral status for humans. The last ethical system is the virtue ethics which seeks to internalize moral behavior by ensuring people act in a way that spontaneously leads to good (Winston & Edelbach, 2011).

Technology and ethics

Technology has certainly revolutionized our current society and has changed a lot. Technology has revolutionized education, medicine, relationships, religion and much more by making our lives easier. In all aspects which technology has changed our society, it is necessary that ethics are upheld to ensure that the reasons behind the creation and use of the technology are ethical and that it promotes fair, responsible and equitable technological practices (Tavani, 2010).

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Computers are probably the most significant piece of technology that man has become used to since the industrial revolution. Computers have helped human beings by making routine tasks easy and fast. Computers also have the potential to save lives such as by allowing doctors and healthcare delivery professionals to monitor critical information about patients. Computers have also enabled researchers to advance their research by being able to document their findings effectively as well as to develop new concepts. Computers have also revolutionized communication by making it easy no matter the distance between the two parties communicating (Eaton & Kennedy, 2009).

Technological developments do not bring about ethical or moral issues on their own. Instead, moral issues arise from the use of these technological developments. Basic questions are raised about the use of these technological innovations which can bring about a moral issue. Technological developments usually mean change and often they bring about advancements that make normal activities easier. The important thing is to look at what happens to the individual when they adopt this technology (Eaton & Kennedy, 2009).

Ethical issues related to technological advancements

Some uses of technological developments have the capability to bring many innocent victims to be affected by the technology. One good example is nuclear technology which though has the great potential to be used for good to keep peace and tranquility in the world, also has the negative effect of killing millions of people at a go. These millions are innocent victims who die in the name of bringing peace for the future. From a utilitarian point of view, the consequence of the nuclear technology which is destruction of terrorists and other dangerous groups is more beneficial to the world so the consequence justifies the action. However, from a deontological point of view the action itself is unethical.

Another good example is biotechnology. In stem cell research, human embryos have to be destroyed in order to provide treatment options for the future. From the Christian point of view, it has been argued that stem cell research means early life has to be destroyed in order to provide therapy options for later life. The Bible clearly gives it support for the battle against all physical ills. In embryonic stem cell research, however, it is necessary to destroy human embryos. This goes against the Biblical teaching in Jeremiah 1:4-5 and Psalms 139:13-13 that human life begins at conception (Finkel, 2005).

As a result of the destruction of the human embryo in embryonic stem cell research, this is akin to killing a human being since the embryo has all 46 of the human chromosomes and is a fully functioning human with a unique genetic code. It has also been argued that by killing human embryos and also attempting to clone human beings and human cells, humans are trying to play God. Finkel (2005) poised that scientists should not mock God by messing with human life. Christians argue that no matter how great the benefit of stem cell research is for the human beings, it is not justified to kill a human being. Therefore, embryonic stem cell research should be discontinued. However, adult stem cell research should be continued since it does not harm human beings. Scholars have argued that adult stem cell research is well within the will of God and thus should be continued (Finkel, 2005).

Another example of biotechnology is in vitro fertilization. Moral issues in in vitro fertilization come from the deontological, Christian and relativist points of view whereby the action is looked at as unethical. This is because the action itself is wrong and is against the teachings of religion and the societal norms. Gene splicing is another biotechnological aspect which can be seen to be unethical. This is because the technology alters the bacteria itself which may cause more harmful effects than anticipated. However, the research is pursued since its advantages include bringing about better treatment options (Hull, 2005).

Ethical issues in everyday lives

Technology has revolutionized how people work. Jobs are changing and computers are more commonly used in the workplace. People are becoming more flexible in their workplaces as a result of using computers which also allows them to telecommute to their places of work. On the negative sides, since computers are able to do a lot of work such as analyzing and storing data as well as handling such critical activities such as communication and security, more people are losing jobs since their function in companies is no longer required. This is an ethical issue that stems from the utilitarian point of view whereby the action of using computers has the consequence of making people lose their jobs. However, from the deontological point of view, the productivity of workers has improved greatly since they are able to work more effectively and efficiently as a result of using computers.

Looking at this from a relativist point of view reveals that since technology provides employees with more distractions in the workplace, there can be

reduced productivity. For example, in offices with internet connection, many of the employees can get stuck in social networking websites for hours consuming valuable time that should have been spent doing more productive activities for the company.

Technology is also a threat to the privacy of citizens. Technology infringes on personal privacy and privacy of communications. As a result of technological advancements, it is extremely easy to follow people and intrude their lives through surveillance by revealing key aspects of their lives. Also, people have less control of the information that can be accessed by others. Websites collect a lot of personally identifiable information each time a person visits them such as browser type, IP address, time zone, etc. With viruses, websites can collect even more personal information such as bank statements, passwords, credit card numbers, emails, and much more. This infringes on the privacy of the citizens thereby causing an ethical issue.

Processing of information has also been revolutionized by technology. Technology has greatly impacted the gathering, storage, dissemination and retrieval of information. The major ethical impacts relate to how the information is accessed and manipulated. Technology creates the possibility of simultaneous access to information as well as unauthorized access. As a result of manipulation of information, it is possible to merge documents, translate and change its nature electronically. It is therefore possible for a person to manipulate information towards their own advantage. For example, in the workplace, a person can manipulate an accounting document in order to get paid more than they should be paid.

In the gathering, storage, retrieval and manipulation of information, another important ethical issue regards the confidentiality of information. This issue is also as a result of many people being able to access the information simultaneously or also being involved in the manipulation of information. This may be done without the consent of the owner of the information thus also infringing on their right to privacy.

Education has also been revolutionized greatly by technology. As a result of technological advancements it is now possible for teachers and students to communicate over thousands of miles. Instructors are also able to give assignments which students can submit despite the distance. In this way, technology has enabled global learning. However, the ethical issue here concerns the setup where private information is gathered. Moreover, as a result of students going to the internet to research material for their classes, they are exposed to cyber predators

who attempt to cheat the students into being raped or kidnapped.

In health, ethical issues have also arisen as a result of technology. One example is in biotechnology which was discussed earlier. Another good example involves the privacy and confidentiality of medical information. As a result of the manipulation of information in order to store it for easy retrieval, there arises the issue of unauthorized access to medical information. Many healthcare providers have also been known to sell this medical information to other parties such as pharmaceutical companies in order to have an alternative source of revenue. They do this without the consent of the patient (Lowenthal, 1988). Psychological impact and stigmatization is also an ethical issue in health as a result of technological developments. As a result of unauthorized access to medical information, there can be stigmatization of the patient which would have an impact on their psychological development (Deshpande, Joseph, & Prasad, 2006).

Genetically modified foods also cause ethical issues in the health sector since their safety has been challenged. These foods have been commercialized since they are able to grow faster and to withstand harsh environmental conditions. However, their safety is wanting and some have been documented to cause development of carcinogens in the body as well as causing mutilation of genes (Argandoña, 2004).

Technology has also created other ethical issues such as pirating of songs and movies which has had a great impact on the revenue of the music and movie industries. In the creation of artificial intelligence, there is another ethical issue that arises. This ethical issue comes from the Christian point of view since it is believed that all intelligence comes from God. Therefore, by the scientists creating artificial intelligence, it is as though they are mocking God. Though the creation of artificial intelligence on a utilitarian point of view is ethical since it leads to a positive consequence, it is unethical according to the divine command theory.

Conclusion

Technology has brought about many advantages by making everyday activities to be quicker and easier. However, it poses important questions on the ethical nature of the way that the technology is used. These ethical issues arise when the uses of the technological developments are looked at from different ethical systems. Technology has affected different aspects of life such as education, health, relationships, religion and has caused ethical issues in each of these fields.

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