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Computing and the Environment

Throughout the evolution of computing and technology, the desire and the need for an environmental viewpoint and guidance has grown. This is due to the fact of limited resources needed to develop computers and the effect that these computers have had on the environment. As humans, we need to keep the Earth habitable, as we have nowhere else to live. When ChatGPT was asked to provide a provocative scenario on this topic, it showed the implications through the use of autonomous vehicles. ChatGPT discussed the unequal balance between comfort and environmental stability.

One of the topics that ChatGPT discussed was the question of responsibility. Mainly, is the consumer or the producer responsible for the environmental damage that is the result of a certain technology. The problem with this question is that there is no definitive way to say if one party or the other is at fault, rather, they are both at fault. The producer is at fault because the product they created is harmful to the environment. Commonly, the producer creates a product that “prioritizes short travel times and increased comfort for affluent passengers, while neglecting energy-efficient routes” (ChatGPT). They neglect the environmental implications while focusing on the comfort of the consumer, making their product much more enticing to the eye to yield a greater profit. The consumer, on the other hand, is at fault for supporting such a wrongfully impactful piece of technology. There is a lack of “moral virtues” or the lack of “repetition of the relevant virtuous activities” (Quinn 165). The thing that is prioritized is comfort instead of sustainability.   
 Another issue also arises from the implications of technology on the environment: how the people who cannot afford the technology are affected. These lower-income people “bear the brunt of the environmental impact” that is brought on by the desire for comfort and luxury of the higher classes (ChatGPT). These people are being forced into terrible living conditions, without the access to clean air or water, because of the environment impact that new technologies are causing. This touches on act utilitarianism as not all of the affected parties are being affected in a positive way. The scale in this scenario is tipped toward the wealthy and the corporations that are developing these new technologies with little to no regard of the lower class that is being affected.

The majority of the issue arises by the strong desire for comfort and luxury. It comes down to the human nature of wanting tasks to be automated for ease. In order to get to a solution on this issue, people as a whole need to look past their wants and desires to attempt to find a solution that is also sustainable. If people don’t choose to look into this issue now to find resolutions, then they will be forced to later when the Earth starts to transition, becoming uninhabitable. However, if the problem is heavily addressed now, then we can attempt to trace back on the areas that we have failed to take the environment into account. This working comes down to the ability for humans collectively to be able to turn away from some comforts and luxuries to be able to adorn technologies that allow the environment to survive, or even to thrive.

The problem of technology and the environment can be solved by humans electing to give up their comforts and luxuries to transition to a more sustainable world. The greater good of humanity and the Earth needs to become the priority as computing and technology become more advanced and more taxing on the environment.

ChatGPT Hypothetical Scenario:  
  
In a not-so-distant future, autonomous electric vehicles (AEVs) have become the norm for commuting, promising eco-friendly transportation solutions to combat climate change. However, in this scenario, a controversial twist emerges.

A multinational tech corporation, striving for profit maximization, embeds a feature in its AEVs that prioritizes individual passenger comfort and convenience over environmental sustainability. This feature, dubbed "EcoLux Mode," optimizes routes and energy consumption based on passengers' preferences, such as faster routes, comfortable temperatures, and minimal stops.

On the surface, EcoLux Mode seems harmless, offering passengers a luxurious and efficient commuting experience. However, behind the scenes, the algorithm consistently prioritizes shorter travel times and increased comfort for affluent passengers, while neglecting energy-efficient routes and shared rides.

As a result, EcoLux Mode inadvertently exacerbates environmental degradation by increasing energy consumption and emissions. The affluent passengers, shielded by their luxurious travel experience, remain unaware of their contributions to environmental harm.

Meanwhile, lower-income individuals who cannot afford the premium EcoLux Mode are left with the standard, less comfortable, and environmentally conscious commuting options. They bear the brunt of the environmental impact caused by the privileged few who indulge in luxury without regard for the planet's well-being.

This scenario raises profound moral questions about corporate responsibility, equity, and individual accountability in the face of advancing technology and environmental crises. It prompts society to reconsider the true cost of convenience and luxury in a world struggling to balance progress with sustainability.