Designing Matter: Ethics and Technological Design

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ETHICS:

HAS TO DO WITH HUMAN BEHAVIOR, HUMAN ARRANGEMENTS, HOW INDIVIDUALS TREAT ONE ANOTHER, AND HOW SOCIETIES, COUNTRIES OR COMMUNITIES ARE ORGANIZED

EXAMPLES OF MORAL PRINCIPLES:

- ACCORDING TO EMMANUAL KANT, FOR EXAMPLE, WE MUST ALWAYS TREAT ONE ANOTHER AS ENDS AND NEVER MERELY AS MEANS
- UTILITARIANISM WOULD HAVE US MAXIMIZE GOOD CONSEQUENCES WHEREIN THE FOCUS IS ON CHOOSING ACTIONS (HUMAN ACTIONS) THAT WILL PRODUCE GOOD CONSEQUENCES FOR ALL OTHER HUMAN BEINGS

ETHICS:

- **ALSO, OFTEN REFERS TO RESPONSIBILITIES OR OBLIGATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH SPECIAL ROLES AND ESPECIALLY PROFESSIONAL ROLES**

ETHICS:

MIGHT BE THOUGHT OF AS A LENS THROUGH WHICH HUMAN ACTION AND INTERACTION CAN BE VIEWED

TECHNOLOGY:

- **MATERIAL OBJECTS/ ARTIFACTS**
- **INERT AND, THEREFORE, NEUTRAL**

THE QUESTION

SINCE ETHICS IS ABOUT HUMAN ACTION AND TECHNOLOGY ISN'T HUMAN AND DOESN'T ACT, HOW COULD TECHNOLOGY HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH ETHICS?

1. CASES THAT STARTED ME OFF THINKING ABOUT ETHICS AND TECHNOLOGY AND CONTINUE TO REVERBERATE IN MY THINKING

2. A START AT SORTING OUT THE ISSUES – WHAT MIGHT BE THOUGHT OF AS THE BEGINNINGS OF A THEORY OF ETHICS AND TECHNOLOGY

3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF RECOGNIZING THAT ETHICS AND TECHNOLOGY ARE INTERTWINED

PART I

THE BRIDGES OF LONG ISLAND

L. WINNER, “Do Artifacts have Politics?” The Whale and the Reactor: a Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 19-39

WHAT DO THE BRIDGES OF LONG ISLAND SHOW US?

IS THE INTERNET A DEMOCRATIC TECHNOLOGY?

D.G. JOHNSON, "Is the Global Information Infrastructure a Democratic Technology?" Computers & Society 27 3 (1997): 20-26.

FOUR MEANINGS OF VALUES IN TECHNOLOGY:

- **METAPHYSICAL**
- **SUPPORT**
- **MATERIAL/DESIGN**
- **SYMBOLIC/EXPRESSIVE**

WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?

IT WOULD SEEM THAT WE BOTH ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE ARE VALUES IN TECHNOLOGY AND AT THE SAME TIME DENY IT; THIS NEEDS EXPLANATION.

PART II

ARE THE VALUES ‘IN’ THE ARTIFACT (THE MATERIAL OBJECT) OR ‘IN’ THE SOCIAL PRACTICES AROUND THE ARTIFACT.

STS LITERATURE

A REJECTION OF TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM.

TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM = THE VIEW THAT TECHNOLOGY EVOLVES ACCORDING TO A LOGICAL, LINEAR PATH DICTATED BY NATURE AND THEN DETERMINES THE KIND OF SOCIETY WE HAVE

STS LITERATURE

- **RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE VERY NOTION OF TECHNOLOGY**
- **TECHNOLOGY IS NOT JUST ARTIFACTS; IT IS ARTIFACTS TOGETHER WITH SOCIAL PRACTICES, SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE**
- **FOCUS ON SOCIO-TECHNICAL SYSTEMS**

THE ARTIFACT IS THE ABSTRACTION

“DUMPING IN DIXIE”

CONCLUSION OF PART II

TECHNOLOGY IS A PART OF THE MORAL WORLD, NOT JUST BECAUSE IT FACILITATES AND CONSTRAINS BEHAVIOR, BUT BECAUSE IT "IS" SOCIAL RELATIONS AND IT SOLIDIFIES (REINFORCES/ LEGISLATES) SOCIAL RELATIONS AND THIS GOES TO THE HEART OF MORALITY

PART III - IMPLICATIONS

- **STOP BELIEVING THAT TECHNOLOGY IS NEUTRAL**
- **STOP BELIEVING THAT TECHNOLOGY HAS NO ROLE IN OUR MORAL AND POLITICAL LIVES**

PART III - IMPLICATIONS

- **ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ENGINEERS ARE NOT JUST MAKING THINGS, THEY ARE BUILDING SOCIETY**

- **TECHNOLOGICAL DECISION MAKING SHOULD BE MORE PARTICIPATORY/ DEMOCRATIC**