A Technological Renaissance

In 1440, Johannes Gutenberg invented the world’s first printing press. The Gutenberg Press was an innovative catalyst. When Mark Twain spoke about the gravity of this cutting edge way of spreading knowledge, he stated, “What the world is today, good and bad, it owes to Gutenberg.” Not only did the printing press start the Renaissance and bring Europe out of the Dark Ages, it encouraged learning among common people and made books infinitely easier to obtain. However, according to Wendell Berry’s qualifications, the Gutenberg Press does not amount to any of his expectations. It is not cheaper, smaller, or more energy efficient than the quill that was used prior to the press; in his terms the Gutenberg Press would been deemed an unsatisfactory way of producing books. In Wendell Berry’s essay, *Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer,* Berry emphasizes his skepticism and unwillingness to concede to the boomer-mentality that modern technology stands for because he does not believe it to be beneficial to himself or society.

Although a lot of Berry’s reasoning for his indictment of the innovation of new technology is grossly erroneous, he makes a few valid points pertaining to the fact that technology has the potential to do more harm than good in many instances. He touches on the fact that technology does not necessarily help to make anything “better” than it is, in fact he believes it is detrimental. He says, in his qualifications of technological innovations, “it should not replace or disrupt anything that already exists, and this includes family and community relationships.” His argument about not wanting to buy a computer for these reasons is not wrong in the sense that it pertains only to his lifestyle as a distinguished writer. However on a larger scale, technology has the potential to make a big difference.

Berry’s reasons for abstaining from buying a computer are clearly listed in his essay; however, there are major flaws in his reasoning. His qualifications for a device to be considered better than its precursor does not pertain to any innovative ideas or inventions that are around today. He believes that technological advances must be less expensive, smaller, and do work notably better than the devices they are replacing. Even the typewriter he and his wife use is bulkier and more expensive than plain paper that was used prior. As Nathaniel S. Borenstein stated in a letter addressed to Mr. Berry, “I tried to imagine a tool that would meet Barry’s criteria for superiority to his old manual typewriter. The clear winner is the quill pen. It is cheaper, smaller, more energy efficient, human powered, easily repaired, and nondestructive of existing relationships.” Wendell Berry does not accept the idea of a computer, and gives faulty reasons for his dislike of the advances in the world of technology.

The progression of technology is responsible for advances all over the world. Had Johanne’s Gutenberg tried to live up to Mr. Berry’s unrealistic expectations of how innovation should be achieved, a Renaissance of learning would not have come about.