Confronting the Future of Modern Technology

In his essay, *Why I Will Never Buy a Computer*, Wendell Berry advocates strongly for resisting technological innovations that damage the environment or deteriorate human relationships. His beliefs stem from life as a farmer, and because environmental irresponsibility directly affects his land and livelihood, he naturally shows apprehension towards products and industries that harm the environment. Additionally, he perceives computers as an innovation that isolates people and stultifies meaningful relationships. For Berry, technology must not interfere with living a meaningful life. However, in his pursuit of the ideal, moral experience, it is not always clear whether his discussion fully addresses the complex nature of technological innovation.

While Berry thoughtfully identifies valid concerns about technological advancements, his arguments often approach solutions as binary, rather than discussing the complex nature of these controversies. Berry widely condemns large energy companies because they often harm the environment, ignoring that those same companies power our homes and drive innovation. Instead of accepting the good that corporations accomplish and separately attacking their pollution of the environment, Berry broadly indicts the companies, ignoring the benefits they provide to society. This line of reasoning demonstrates that while Berry discusses important worries brought by technological innovation, his all or nothing attitude blinds him to the nuance of the controversy.

Berry states, “I do not see that computers are bringing us one step nearer to anything that does matter to me: peace, economic justice, ecological health, political honesty, family and community stability, good work.” As Berry openly relies his bleak view of computers’ future he fails to appreciate the technology’s potential for growth. At their core, computers are communicating machines. Imagine a future where the public can share and mobilize support for ideas, where governments can obviate conflict through clear dialogue, and where news can be shared freely without the inference of controlling governments. If we want to pursue the goals that Berry champions, we must also pursue the communication revolution that computers may offer.

In the same way Berry’s experiences as a farmer inform his convictions about technological advancement, his lifestyle and wealth facilitate his ability to comfortably hold his position. While an entry level writer at a big newspaper may feel equally strongly or greater than Berry about the need for environmental consciousness, he or she may require the use of a computer to make ends meet for his or her family. Regardless of the validity of his concerns, it becomes evident that Berry’s privilege affords him his moral position.

Although Berry’s stubborn moral rigidness may occasionally overshadow his positive intentions, he thoughtfully considers important questions that society has to ask itself as computers and technology transform. Critical subjects like the effect of advanced communications on human relationships and the ever-increasing industrialization on the environment are called to mind in Berry’s essay. While his specific interpretations of these issues may be skewed by privilege, uncompromising morality, and accepted traditions, Berry intelligently prepares readers to confront the debates that will dominate and shape the future of modern technology.