Show Me “Better”

As technology advanced in the late 20th century, the population was faced with the question, “Should we use technology?” While many people answered, “Yes,” to this question, others, such as Wendell Berry, opposed it. In 1990, Wendell Berry wrote an essay with three major flaws: his argument was close-minded and hypocritical, his analysis and chain of reasoning had deep logical flaws, and his standards of a “better” innovation were impossible to fulfill.

Wendell Berry’s argument exemplified the ideals of close-mindedness and hypocrisy, particularly in his ignorance of differing circumstances and his statements regarding environmental protection. One of Berry’s key points against computers was that he and his wife worked together to improve his compositions while typing them on a typewriter. Berry dismissed the thought that not all authors have a person in his or her life that was willing to meticulously type and edit his or her work, on top of that person’s daily responsibilities. Through this denial of alternate circumstances, Wendell Berry’s argument became impractical for those not in a similar situation. Berry’s hypocrisy was revealed in his statements regarding technology’s role in the “rape of nature.” Berry believed he avoided participating in the defamation of our environment and its resources because of his refusal to use a computer, yet his insistence on the use of paper also caused destruction. The production of paper emits ammonia and benzene, which damage our planet’s natural resources. Through these actions, Berry revealed his hypocrisy.

The flawed analysis and reasoning in Berry’s essay is evident for several reasons. Berry viewed streamlined editing as a problem, whereas other writers saw this process as a solution. While Berry and his wife edited and typed his work together as a bonding experience, other authors felt it was a chore. Additionally, Berry’s chain of reasoning was unsound because he gave computers impossible goals such as producing a “better” work of literature than Dante. This in itself is a matter of opinion. It should be noted that the author, not the utensil, creates the product. All of Berry’s points were based in a matter of opinion, in that he preferred to edit with his wife, and he desired for computers to “write works better than Dante’s” in order for them to receive his respect. This thought process, based in opinion, clouded Berry’s judgment when making the decision to use technology.

Technologies of the 1990’s and the 21st century have proved unable to fulfill Berry’s absurd list of necessary attributes for a suitable replacement for existing technology. The list, ranging from the product being cheaper, to finding it at a privately owned shop, is practically impossible to satisfy. His demanding ideals allow no technology available at the time of the essay’s publication, or even now, to be considered “better” than typewriters.

For these reasons, Berry’s essay is outdated and unimaginative even for the 1990’s. His refusal to acknowledge the validity of others’ opinions and his single-minded approach to life render his simply stated views invalid at best.