A Response by the Readers of Harpers to Mr. Wendell Berry

Mr. Wendell Berry possessed his own ideas on what constitutes ethical technological innovation. His ideas do not fit the reality of what can and cannot happen due to human and technological limitations. He does not recognize the natural formation of new relationships and the simultaneously happening disconnect of old relationships. Primarily, Mr. Berry is wrong on several accounts: he does not accept the limitations of shops that are close to home and privately owned, he does not respond to the fluid and ever-changing association of the relationships of people and the variable of technology in the same context, and finally, Mr. Berry, very often, refers to a subjective term in the form of the word good.

Mr. Berry states, specifically, in his list of what constitutes an ethical technological advancement that the advancement must come from “a small privately owned shop or store that will take it back for maintenance.” Mr. Berry fails to realize that the vast majority of the time to advance, technology must become more complex. Complexity, by its nature, requires specialty – something that most “local shops” lack. Due to the consumer marketplace in which technology exists, new products come out with lightning speed, making the old obsolete; this is not a sustainable business model because of the continuous need for retraining. Berry does not grasp the complexity of technology and the inability of small stores to keep the pace. This is not to say that these “local shops” no longer serve a purpose in the community; they absolutely do. However, it is unfair to burden both these local shops and technological advancement with an unobtainable requirement.

As currently exhibited in social media, relationships are always changing. Berry disregards this fluidity of relationships ignoring the fact that previous technology did the same to the technology before it - from oral history, to written word, to the telephone. He believes that anything damaging the old is not good. What he fails to realize is that this new technology doesn’t destroy current relationships; it just modifies and expands its bound.

The highly subjective term “good” appears throughout the majority of the essay. Two students receive a B- on a recent geography test. To one, the grade may be good; to him the grade is acceptable. Conversely, the grade may be unacceptable to another student. In order to require something to be “good,” a standard must be set or a definition must be given to determine what constitutes “good.” Berry’s failure to define “good” renders this criterion useless to the reader.

Mr. Berry exhibited several key flaws. They fell within his criteria and his word usage and mechanics. Overall, these were large contributing factors to the error in Mr. Berry’s essay. Wendell Berry makes these mistakes several times, negating the credibility of the essay as a whole and undermining his own trustworthiness as a competent writer on the subject on which he is speaking.