2 June 2015

Writing Assignment 1

Wendell Berry presents six main ideals - peace, economic justice, ecological health, political honesty, family and community stability, and good work- that any member of a democratic society would agree ought to be at the forefront of humanitarian concerns. His suggestion, however, that computers will have an adverse effect on these ideals is based simply on the fact that he only seems to view concerns at the extreme end of the spectrum.

Berry states the computers would harm a treasured relationship with his wife, who edits Berry’s work as she types it. He fails to think that his wife might be able to type and edit his works on a computer. It would still get the work done. However, Berry might still believe that he is participating in the “rape” of the environment, by using energy provided by coal-burning power plants. Despite this argument against computers, he still must send his work to a company in order to get it published, companies that likely focus more on efficiency than on making copies by hand to send to every patron, which is far more labor intensive than using a computer and printer. In order to publish his works, he is inevitably participating in said “rape.”

Berry also states that he would refuse to use a new technology unless it fit nine categories; the new technology must be cheaper, smaller, better, more energy efficient, run off solar or kinetic energy, easily repairable, come from a local shop, and not disrupt any good thing already in existence. It is hard to think of anything that would qualify for his high standards. By this definition, had he been born before the typewriter, he would have never used it, for the type writer is not nearly as small as a pencil and pad, is far less efficient, and only has the benefit of making papers more legible. This too, however, could have a negative effect, as the need for legible handwriting has decreased and caused a loss of something good, if one has an appreciation for calligraphy. There have been more recent innovations to fit his means. Specifically, the floppy disc, a means of storage of computer generated files. The floppy discs allow storage for many files, and so save the space and man power needed to maintain a good collection of manuscripts and drafts. Filing is not nearly as efficient as simply saving a paper written in a word processor to a floppy disc. By setting these standards, Berry has isolated himself in a technology-free box that no new innovations in the future will be able to penetrate.

Though Berry has admirable ideals, his methods of upholding these ideas while resisting technology cannot be recommended for a whole population. His chosen escape, by avoiding computers, may be sustainable for an individual, but in a nation reliant on the newest and greatest technology available, he will quite possibly stand on his own.