Environmentalist or Elitist?

Mr. Wendell Berry has previously stated that modern technology for the most part, is a destructive force in his life. Although I hold the highest amount of respect for Mr. Berry, I am a skeptic by nature. The ideology that technology, computers in specific, are negative seems to be an argument that was formed by Berry for his own personal gain. It is no secret that he is an extremely established and wealthy activist; Berry makes millions of dollars each year just to speak to people about his bizarre claims. He speaks in front of people with large, bright cameras; people making videos of Berry himself that will be shown on the internet and directly benefit Berry’s own financial interest. This begs the question, is Berry really the super-environmentalist he claims to be, or is he just another elite who makes his living complaining about the state of modern society?

I can concede on several of Berry’s claims. Yes, some technology has the potential damage the environment, but in contrary recent technology has been proved to greatly benefit the environment. For example, there are many environmentally friendly fertilizers that have recently surfaced during the Green Revolution. These fertilizers promote the growth of flora and do not have any negative environmental side effects.

It can also be stipulated that technology can cause human relationships to be severed, but I do not believe that this always has to be the case. Perhaps any relationships that cannot withstand the ‘strain’ of a computer are not strong relationships to begin with and the separation may be beneficial. On the other hand, the World Wide Web now allows people from all over the world to connect over the internet, therefor widening the everyday person’s world view and overall intelligence.

Mr. Wendell Berry himself supports technology, the very thing he protests. Although he himself restrains from using a computer, he does support institutions that heavily rely on technology. How many people drive to witness his speeches? How many gallons of gas are released into the atmosphere during these trips? Mr. Berry can be seen wearing fancy suits, suits that were produced in large factories, the same factories that he protests. If Berry was actually so concerned with the environment, why would he not live like the Amish? The Amish have lived peacefully for hundreds of years and have successfully resisted the temptation of modern technology. They are small farmers, as Berry claims he is, but unlike Berry they have kept technology completely out of their life. No lights. No air conditioning. No computers. So if Wendell Berry really hated technology so much, why would he not retreat to life off the grid?

Instead he takes the route of the ‘boutique grocery store shopper’. These are those twenty-something Caucasians who use their money to buy the extremely expensive ‘all organic’ foods. They are the people who will criticize those who cannot afford the organic choice, all the while wearing expensive clothing made in foreign textile mills that use inhumane labor practices. In conclusion, I believe that Wendell Berry is exactly like these people in the sense that he uses his opposition to technology as a platform for his own personal gain, when in reality he is just as bad as anybody else.