The Berry is Out of Date

Most modern Americans would read Berry’s essay and instantly disagree or defend technology, but to form a true opinion you must look at the perspective of the author. Growing up in a world without technology, Wendell Berry was born into a rich farming family. He holds different values and opinions than many of his readers, as his perspective is of a ninth generation farmer. Berry makes his point that technology can be unnecessarily harmful, but modern society could argue technology can outweigh the costs with all its advancements.

Berry discusses utilizing his wife as an editor and using their Royal Standard typewriter to compose his work.  He states that this process works better for him than using a computer. The relationship and the understanding between him and his wife is a benefit to his work, which is a strong point in his argument. To him, modern conveniences require the mining and burning of coal to power the technology and can isolate us from the world around us.  During the time Berry wrote this, his views were understandable: computers in the 1990s were largely inaccessible and couldn’t be fixed easily. This made the idea of manual work and older versions more practical and more eco friendly. While computers today are more common and arguably less expensive than they were previously, it can still be agreed that today’s computers can still be pricey. Computers have also let us become lazy in our spelling--we often now rely on spellcheck instead of learning the spelling of certain words.

However, Berry is incorrect in the sense that his ideas do not still apply today. Berry’s chain of reasoning is merely overlooking the concept that reward can be greater than cost. He is focusing on the negative effects burning of coal and the strip mining rather than seeing the multitudes of advancements and effectiveness of technology. Berry believes technology incinerates the sacred ties with this old world, while ignoring the new world it has opened up. He is also hindered because he has based all of his opinions off of his circumstances and not opened his mind to how it all affects others with different circumstances. He was raised on a wealthy farm where he could afford stacks of paper and pencils, while others in the middle class might save money in the long run by buying a computer.

Berry sets up a strict set of guidelines for a piece of technology to be acceptable in his eyes. These guidelines, if taken literally, can be almost impossible for any technology to pass. It also takes a subjective toll in respect to where you place ordinary intelligence and what you consider a collision with ideas like family and relationships. By placing rule number 9, Berry writes in his essay that the technology must not ‘’disrupt anything good’’ , Berry sets up a plausible argument against any kind of new innovation since he leaves such open windows with the subjective nature of emotional ideas(32).Technology has inherent downsides, but the costs are miniscule compared to the benefits. While computers still take energy, they provide a variety of advancements. Responding to his essay, one can conclude that Berry’s idea is not one that can be universally applied to all time, but it can be used in reference to a certain period of time.