

## Computers & the Humanities 281

# Ethics and Computers

Computers are ubiquitous in modern society and have become the technology of choice for many practical applications. It will be quite difficult to find employment that does not utilize computer technology in some form or another. Therefore, it is important to examine some of the principles of conduct that should be taken under consideration regarding the implementation of computer technology and the consequences of such decisions. For the collective benefit of our society, it is extremely important to examine where we are headed, as well as what will happen along the way, and when we arrive at the destination.

In order to prepare for our discussion of ethics, you are required to read the following:

- Konigsburg, E. L. (1994, May). The big bang, the big picture, and the book you hold in your hand. *Brigham Young Magazine*, 23-27, 48-51.
- Stoll, C. (1999). *High-tech heretic: Why computers don't belong in the classroom and other reflections by a computer contrarian*. New York: Doubleday.

Konigsburg's article can be found in the Special Collections library. Stoll's book can be found at any reputable library (though you can finish the entire book in one sitting, you are required to read only the first three chapters). Photocopies of both (five of each) are on reserve in the HLRC (3031 JKHB). You are welcome to check them out and read them.

You must also read at least one of the following:

- Ellul, J. (1980). The power of technique and the ethics of non-power. In K. Woodward (Ed.), M. Lydon (Trans.), *The myths of information: Technology and postindustrial culture* (pp. 242-247). Madison, WI: Coda Press.
- Healy, J. M. (1998). *Failure to connect: How computers affect our children's minds--for better and worse*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Joy, B. (2000, April). Why the future doesn't need us. *Wired*, 238-262.
- Postman, N. (1999). *Building a bridge to the 18th century: How the past can improve our future*. New York: Knopf.

You can find the Joy article in the periodicals section of the library, or you may access it [online](#). A large library should have the others. As before, both articles and excerpts of the books have been photocopied and are on reserve in the HLRC.

You are also required to view this [special news report](#) on computers in Utah's public schools (it's almost four minutes). The following is also recommend:

- Oaks, D. H. (2001, April). Focus and priorities. *Ensign*, 31, 82-84.

This will give you an Apostle's viewpoint on some of these issues. His talk is available [online](#), and photocopies will be available in the HLRC as well.

You need to come to class prepared to discuss the various viewpoints you have reviewed and your responses to them. It would be to your benefit to think on the following questions as you examine the readings:

- Who is E. L. Konigsburg? Who is Clifford Stoll? Who is Jacques Ellul? Who is Jane M. Healy? Who is Bill Joy? Who is Dallin H. Oaks? Who is Neil Postman? What are their particular qualifications to write on this topic? What are their unique and/or shared concerns?
- What is a Luddite?
- Neil Postman proposes some questions to be asked regarding any new technology:
  1. What is the problem to which this technology is the solution?
  2. Whose problem is it?
  3. Which people and what institutions might be most seriously harmed by a technological solution?
  4. What new problems might be created because we have solved this problem?
  5. What sort of people and institutions might acquire special economic and political power because of technological change?
  6. What changes in language are being enforced by new technologies, and what is being gained and lost by such changes?

Are these valid/relevant questions? What answers do you get as you apply these questions to computer technology? What questions do *you* think need to be asked, if any?

- What are our responsibilities with regards to computer technology?
- As you examine your future, what is going to be your relationship with computer technology?
- Why is it important to engage in such a discussion? What are the stakes?

This list of questions is neither exclusive nor comprehensive. If you have others you think appropriate, please write them down and bring them to class. As stated before, come prepared to engage in a discussion (including coming prepared to support your assertions). The success of the time and effort we invest in this addressing this topic will depend primarily on your preparation and participation.

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