

## TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN AFFAIRS<sup>(1)</sup>

The overwhelming role played by technology in our lives is reflected in this extensive work of 617 large size pages dealing with the subject and compiled from the works of 86 contemporary writers as well as forewords and introductions written by the editors. The preface presents the book as follows: "The point at which technology and the humanities intersect is the concern of this book of readings. It grew out of courses in the philosophy of technology offered at both the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A & M University over some seven years."

The book is an attempt to assess technology, and to show its assets and liabilities taking into account the differing opinions on the subject.

A pessimistic view is adopted by Paul Goodman, noted author, lecturer and therapist, who says that "since technology is a branch of moral philosophy, not of science, it is time to slow its pace down in order to allow time for assessment. He adds that "science and technology have fallen under the domination of money and power. As in the case of Christianity and Communism, we have gotten the horrors of abusing a good idea" (p. 156).

Many artists share the same attitude expressed by Goodman.

Jacob Landau, Chairman of the Department of Graphic Arts at Brooklyn Pratt Institute, fears that "the need of a patron to support him will make the artist a yes-man. Many artists will succumb to the crude commercialism that attends technology" (p. 111).

However, Landau himself thinks that it is the function of art to humanize technology. Joseph Meeker, professor at Athabasca University, says that technology represents a new alliance between science and art, which will serve to render the world more intelligible and will enable us to confront our problems as well-balanced beings. It will serve as a link between the so-called "spiritual" or "mystic" forces and the realm of scientific research.

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Akin to the artists' point of view is that of religious thinkers, in East and West, concerning the evaluation of technology. Tagore of India (d. 1941) advocates simplicity in the material aspects of life in order "to give the imagination and spiritual faculties of man the ability to blossom".

Gabriel Marcel, a contemporary French philosopher, thinks that technique is something good, or the expression of something good, since it amounts to "a specific instance of our general application of our gift of reason to reality." But Marcel is concerned about the relation between technological progress and sin, when an invention is utilized for wrong ends by people who did not contribute toward its development or perfection. The vice of "envy" which he considers as another outgrowth of technological progress, stands at the root of hostility and conflicts between individuals or between nations. To him "only a recourse to an act of faith can save the world from the mortal malady from which it appears to be suffering."

Speaking on behalf of the Third World, Denis Goulet, a noted author, (born in 1931), thinks that in order to oppose the threat of Western technology, the underdeveloped nations should be allowed to use their own wisdom in developing fresh outlooks on the relation of technology to society and to help bring forth a new non-elitist world order. He hopes for a world technology with a human, non-imperialist, face.

Concerning the relation between technology and sex, Rollo May, a leading psychologist, analyzes the impact of technology on sex in our present age. Love has given way to sex, worry about sexual repression is replaced by anxiety regarding the modern "techniques" of sexuality, and the necessity of "conforming" to them. Instead of passion and sentiment, we are urged to emphasize the "technology of sex". Eros "as a source of the creative power and the bridge between men and gods has deteriorated because it has lost passion and become insipid, childish, banal." While Rollo May advocates the rehabilitation of Eros but in a disciplined form, Robert and Anna Francœur, (the first, a professor, the second, an essayist), condemn the sexual attitude which has characterized American and European cultures during the past century. They call it "hot sex", which means obsession with mechanical relations, possessiveness, conquest and jealousy. They propose the dissemination of a "cool-sex culture", which affirms for woman self-identity and self-actualization, eliminates possessiveness, but considers the value of long-term commitment and stable marriage.

Shulamith Firestone, writer and editor of a feminist magazine, considers the problem from a different angle. She says in her book, "The Dialectic of Sex", that in the history of culture "there is an underlying

dialectic of sex. Culture is seen to have evolved historically along two modes: 1) the Aesthetic Mode which rests on imagination and the active search for an alternate, ideal reality. 2) The Technological Mode which rests on experimentation and the scientific method... The first mode is regarded as subjective and intuitive, it corresponds with "female" behavior. The second is regarded as objective and logical, hence corresponding to male behavior.

"We are now living in the age of the Technological Mode... This situation will culminate soon in a sexual revolution that obliterates the divisions between the two modes and integrates them into one richer mode which will give rise to an "androgynous culture"... Then the repressive aspect of civilization described by both Freud and Marcuse is seen by Firestone as disappearing in this new culture (pp. 338-347).

While political economists and technocrats uphold the dramatic transformation wrought by modern technology and extol the development of the "technotronic" society and the benefits of outer space research, they all insist on the necessity of humanizing technology.

Kenneth Boulding, Professor of Economics, University of Colorado, asserts the dependence of technology on traditional, cultural manifestations and recommends that "both technology and culture" acquiesce to an interdependence that will assure the longevity of both." Brzezinsky, author and former assistant to the President for national security affairs, thinks that "the underlying problem will be to find a way of avoiding the widening of the cultural and psychological gap inherent in the growing differentiation of the world. He calls for **international** cooperation in every facet of life: educational, economic and technological, leading to the stimulation of a dialogue on a global scale, which would effect a search for new directions, transcending the tangibles of economic development.

## Conclusion

This book clearly shows the preoccupation of a large number of thinkers with the problems created by technology and the necessity of handling them. It points out their wish to create an alliance between art and science, to apply human values to technique and to find means of understanding between developed and developing countries. The contributors constitute a select group of authors, including men and women, representing all aspects of modern thought in various parts of the world.

It is up to the future to show whether their admonition will have any echo and lead to the implementation of radical solutions.