

THE STRAIGHT SHOT

Technology & Choice by Jess Hardin



Like it or not, we live in a largely technologically defined age, an era in which almost everything we do makes use of or is influenced by the wonders of industry and science. Having no agenda of its own, this powerful force can be harnessed to create everything from valuable new diagnostic tools for doctors to insidious mind control, from the miraculous solar electric panels that I use to power this laptop to clothes made of so called "miracle fibers" that I wouldn't be caught dead wearing. Brain implants can be put to use by doctors to help patients manage their seizures, or just as easily by an intrusive future government seeking to further increase its control over all aspects of our behavior.

Some people think of technology as our earthly savior from discomfort and suffering and a certain remedy for every problem our individual or collective stupidity might ever cause. Others consider it an evil genie unleashed from its bottle, from which no good is believed to come without unjustifiably harmful and dehumanizing results. Fact is, it will never be a cure all, nor would the world suddenly become an easy going paradise if every high-tech creation were to suddenly disappear. We need to get over the need to see it as simply good or bad, black or white, recognize technology for the hugely complex, dual-edged sword that it is and then act accordingly. We need to define our relationship to inevitable innovation not in terms of acquiescence or adoration, cynicism or rejection, but rather, personal responsibility and astute, mindful

selection.

To begin with, we must understand that technology is not now, nor will it ever be, solely benign. The petroleum based herbicides and pesticides that have helped farmers feed the growing population of the world, have also damaged human and wildlife health. Life saving antibiotics have spurred new forms of viral disease, and those given to livestock have reduced the immune response of people eating them. Other effects are not so easily discerned. Case in point: A person grows stronger by pulling a load, pushing hard against an obstacle, or rising to a mental challenge. Thus to the degree it ensures ease and comfort, technology threatens to take away the very sources of our strength. It promises the possibility of us living hundreds of years through the use of synthetic bionic parts, and yet it is our awareness of the finite nature of life – of how relatively short our life spans are – that we come to fully appreciate, value, and concentrate on each precious present moment. It can accelerate our day to day activities and increase our production, but unless we take careful countermeasures we may find ourselves experiencing things on a more superficial level, having no time for the depth of relationship and understanding that lead to wisdom and enlightenment. Because technology gives us the means to manipulate appearance, we find ourselves increasingly surrounded by the artificial, with a reduced capacity to know what is real and what isn't.

Whether or not an innovation makes our lives easier is not the only criteria we should be using but also: How do we feel, deep down in our guts? What other impacts is it having on us, our lives and families, neighborhoods, ranches and farms? How ponderous is it, how beautiful or ugly, weakening or strengthening, contributing to clarity of thinking or robbing us of chances to learn and grow? While I am too predisposed to self defense to be able to relate to the Amish practice of nonviolence, I can get into their philosophy when it comes to determining what they want to incorporate into their community and what to repudiate or reject. Whatever they're considering for adoption – from Roundup-Ready crop seed to new forms of entertainment – the question they ask themselves is "Does this thing contribute to or take away from who we really are, the long term health of ourselves and our land, the tenuous fabric of our community, the ways of living we believe are best?"

As free and awake citizens, it is our job to carefully examine both the many benefits and possible problems, with not only the things we buy and subject ourselves to but also their components and the processes by which they were produced... in order to ascertain their likely impact on us, on the human psyche itself, our relationships and homes. The most defensible technologies are those which deplete the fewest resources with the fewest negative consequences, contributing to our empowerment and not our cycles of dependency. What's important is not finding which "sustainable" technologies can be made to last the longest, but rather, which of these endless new high tech forms help sustain the very spirit and integrity of free and empowered life.

It doesn't help to blindly worship or totally count on technology, anymore than it helps to ignore or downplay the personal and social consequences of its various means and uses. What we need instead is to see, distinguish, understand, appraise and discern between the ever larger field of options. By being totally aware and paying attention, we're equipped to decide what kinds of tech to support or personally utilize, when and how, how much or how little... instead of being either simple recipients or disgruntled victims of its relentless new forces. We are born to be responsible decision makers and not strictly prissy antagonists or doe-eyed converts, meeting our needs while heeding our conscience, committed to helping create our reality and affect our world.

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