

1.2 SOCIAL/POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

1.2.1 I'D HAMMER OUT FREEDOM: TECHNOLOGY AS POLITICS AND CULTURE

RICHARD SCLOVE

Even though technologies are usually developed to meet a particular need or solve a specific problem, they often have secondary functions or unintended effects on our lives. In this selection, Richard Sclove is interested in how technologies exist within, are influenced by, and in turn exert influence on society. He claims that they often work in subtle ways to both define and set limits on human interaction.

The view of “technology as society” discussed in this selection states that although technology influences the social experience, it is not the sole determinant of how society develops. As a technology goes through various evolutionary stages, it assumes a greater role in our lives, and we become less aware of its influence and less likely to seek alternative ways of doing something. It is important, claims Sclove, for societies to look for alternative technologies more in keeping with humane ideals and aspirations.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Identify one modern technology and discuss its development. In what ways has this technology changed the way you live from both a positive and negative perspective, and what future changes might occur that could have even more impact on your life?
2. Identify one environmental and organizational background imperative of a contemporary technology. How might those conditions have influenced that technology's development and its influence on our lives?
3. Sclove uses the hammer as an example of his concept of *polypotency*. What are some other examples of familiar artifacts that are polypotent? Discuss.

KEYWORDS

citizenship, democracy, primary function, social consequences, social structure

Technological innovations are similar to legislative acts or political foundings that establish a framework for public order that will endure over many generations.

LANGDON WINNER

What is technology? People ordinarily think of technology as machinery or gadgetry, as an economic factor of production, as know-how, as what engineers do, or as progress. Often they characterize technologies in terms of a single

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