

the production of various unintended social consequences. Prohibition-era laws were enacted to stop alcohol production, not to drive it underground and contribute to the expansion of organized crime. However, people at least expect that legal statutes and institutions will—because that is their intent—in some way shape social interaction and history. In contrast, people ordinarily expect most technologies to prove structurally inconsequential, and—because focally most of them do—this expectation appears confirmed. But here is where appearances deceive, insofar as it is frequently a technology's nonfocal aspects alone that conspire to manifest profound structural consequences.

Hence, although technologies are as consequential as other social structures, people tend to be more blind both to the social origins of technologies and to their social effects. This dual blindness is partly due to certain myths or misconceptions, such as the myth that technologies are autonomous self-contained phenomena and the myth that they are morally neutral. It is

also inculcated through modern technologies themselves, via both their style and their social process of design.

These dual misperceptions concerning technologies actually enhance their relative structural significance, because they enable technologies to exert their influence with only limited social awareness of how, or even that, they are doing so. This helps explain why people are prone to resign themselves to social circumstances established through technological artifice and practices that they might well reject if the same results were proposed through a formal political process.

So long as their social origin, effects, and dynamics remain so badly misperceived, technologies will not suffer the same liability as would, say, functionally comparable laws or economic institutions, of being challenged on the grounds that they are politically or culturally unacceptable. Furthermore, societies will fail to develop the capacity to seek other technologies more consonant—both focally and nonfocally—with their members' ideals and aspirations.

1.2.2 DEMOCRATIC RATIONALIZATION

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In his "Ode, inscribed to William H. Channing" the American transcendentalist poet Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote:

"Things are in the saddle and ride mankind.
There are two laws discrete,
Not reconciled,
Law for man, and law for thing;
The last builds town and fleet,
But it runs wild,
And doth the man unking."

These verses capture the sense that many of us have of being controlled by and at the mercy of technology rather than controlling it. The question is: Does technology determine social conditions and practices? Or does society shape technology?

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