

# Why we Fail in a Technological World

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## **Abstract**

*Our relationship with technology has become co-dependent and somehow a personal and an intimate one. Generally speaking, we tend to think that we experience the world around us as it is, but that is not what we really do. In a lifetime, we learn and store knowledge, but we only use from it what we think and feel it will help us to realize the most important projects in our lives. Therefore, we invent things that have the purpose to make our lives easier, just to have time to manage and work on the other part of life – the non-material part of it - , that concerns the personal development of human. First of all, that is or that should be the idea for developing technology, but on second thoughts, we somehow fail to adapt to it, and from that it deceives us – transforming itself in an insecurity, like high-tech products that are too hard to use, or too unreliable to be counted on, the lack of necessary knowledge in order to use it, the costs.*

*Even if we have these technologies as available, we manage to lose ourselves, by becoming more into it than into us and those around us. We like to think we possess knowledge, that we are experts in some areas, we hold and keep lectures on ethics, moral values, efficient communication, but all become a strategic action – from ones that have the power to others that need guidance and confirmation for looking good for others, to win over, convince or convert new adepts to the proposed ideas of ones that have the power, to court those in power, to please everyone, except yourself. But all of that leads to failure – a self-failure, an inner weakness – and we are becoming our own adversaries, which are silent ones.*

*But if technology is so worthy, why we do not manage so well on moral and ethical aspects?*

**Keywords:** *technology, knowledge, ethics, moral values, communication.*

*Introduction*

From far as we know people communicated (from petroglyphs, pictograms, ideograms, writing to telecommunication and many other communication tools). Since all time and also in the technological era that we live in, it seems we communicate inefficient and that somewhere it intervene a breach. Perhaps, in course of history, the human needs were different, but he was pleased with what he had and if he was not, he accepted his condition because there was no other choice available. Considering there was no technology to rely on and not so much access to knowledge, people depended on traditional communication.

Technology, from its *birth* became both useful and addictive. Its *growth* ease human's life, in order to make it more pleasant, so he could manage and enjoy the gifts of the life. Nowadays technology is *young as specie* – if we are allowed to attribute anthropomorphic features to a domain that is still developing, because we *see* technology *now* in symbiosis with humans – and it has so much to *grow*. Our *symbiosis* with technology can have either a positive or negative purposefulness. We can only draw in broad lines a sort of finality for fulfillment or failure through technology.

Even if there is the ethics of technology and a lot of advices how to use it – from the level of utilization to the level of moral – we seem not to understand its entire process and full purpose and utility, because we tend to live in a sort of mirage, like being charmed by it through its *beauty* and all the facilities that it brings. Therefore we enslaved ourselves to it, raising it to a rank that even if it deserves this position we do not fully understand it.

This era of technology should bring us humans to the point of discovery of ourselves to the point of understanding our short lives and trying to live it thoroughly and for good, and leave for technology *to make* our physical work.

We need to rely on technology, reliability that could only be obtained by knowing, understanding and properly using it. It is probably the most beautiful thing created by and for us for ease our daily tasks, but we make use so defective of it that this can lead only to failure.

The reliability is needed and it is possible through moral values – conceived by humans – and ethics of technology – understood by humans – on every level and domain in which technology *exists* and *manifests*. Because “on so skillful, on so little wise proves to be human being, isolated from the plenitude of existence through the world growth as a protective shell, but which also disconnects. (...)”

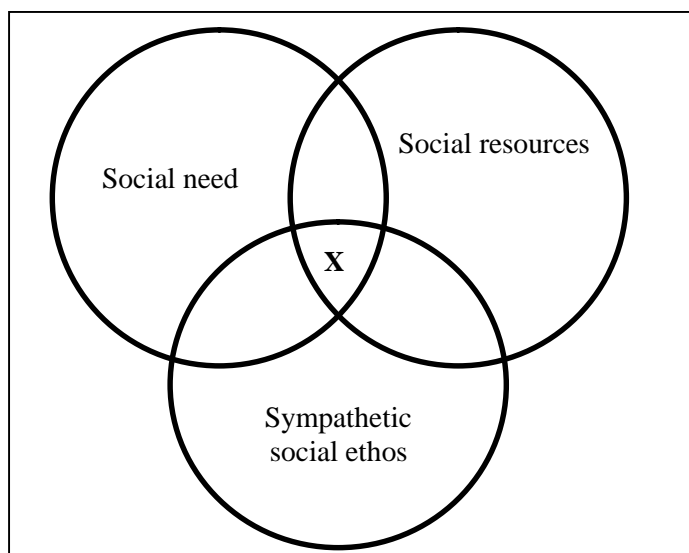
Human ability comes from his world, which protects him, and the incapacity from the same world that disconnects him.”<sup>1</sup>

*The stubbornness of old ideas about technology*

From prehistoric to present, technology is proved to be useful and good, even there were skeptics and critics. We as humans have moral principles which are deeply held in our individual conscience, and we act upon them when we are in a group, as a social group, that becomes a social conscience. This social conscience is in the social environment that we live and we need to be conscious about the social environment and that its “interaction is important in surveying the development of technology through successive civilizations”<sup>2</sup>.

The social environment lead through civilizations to development and for technological improvement it was and it is needed – and will be needed – a favorable environment and *people* to do it, and in order to that, for innovation in a specific field it demanded “social need, social resources and a sympathetic social ethos”<sup>3</sup>.

We can represent the propitious environment for people’s innovation in technology in a schematic form for a better view on technology development:



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<sup>1</sup> tefan M. Gheorghe, *Ethos, pathos, logos. Eseuri despre o dialectic ternar* (Bucharest: All, 2012), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Angus Buchanan, “History of Technology,” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/history-of-technology#toc10382>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

Where  $X$  is the point where *it happens* the favorable environment for people's innovation in technology.

Probably, the skeptics and the critics were the ones that did not understand the purpose of technology and the ones that had no interest in learning it – maybe it was the reason of age, culture, beliefs, moral grounds – because at the time they did not think it could help under no circumstances in everyday activities. Some of these *beliefs* were left as an inheritance for nowadays and we can still find plenty of skepticism and criticism towards technology among people. The transition between generations is a sensitive point in communion with technology. Some of the people want to learn and some of them do not. The category that wants to learn is conscious that the new technologies will improve their lives, while the other category does not recognize that technology has its *good*.

Technologies take many forms – personal computers, web and mobile applications, smart phones, the internet, cloud computing and many others – but even if they are available at a large scale, people are still reluctant about it. Perhaps, the reduced knowledge on the subject itself and about *the product*, as technology, that we consume – because in the end humans are consumers of technology – tends to bring the skeptics and the critics in public eyes degrading its practical use, creating and generating confusion among users. Because we as users are not aware about our mind that knows and we ignore that human himself is an unpredictable being. And what human can't understand criticizes.

Maybe it is in human nature to feel fear regarding *the new*, but we can acknowledge that the social-will of the majority made technology what is today, and it will make it further. This social will spokes through technology and science and it will need through ethics too, leaving censure and criticism behind, because those two took birth from ignorance, fear and the need of stability and what is known so far, as a routine. We can say these were the reasons for which knowledge failed in the past – maybe it is too much to say that it failed, but comparing the new ideas of the time and the mass of people that did not understand it, we could call it failure –, and the reasons that underlie the future of technology and how we will make use it.

In order to counterargument some of the critics and skeptics; let's assume this supposition as a final and true conclusion: *Technology is a propitious element for development*. Technology is developed in a social environment, that it developed through social-will and according to social needs. This leads also to innovation in some points of historical development of technology and science, that made the environment that we live in now, propitious for innovation – if we

reach sensitive points like overpopulation, global warming, globalization, and others – an powerful incentive for scientists and philosophers to develop new technologies and ethics for a new living environment in an accelerated technological world.

If the conclusion confirms that the next step will be to *sketch* new ethics regarding technologies, especially new technologies, for a better understanding and use of it, and for a better human in a technological world.

### *The Ethics of Technology*

Nowadays we can find ethics in every field – *ethics and environment, economy, deontology, feminism, information technology, genetics, biomedical, legal*, and others – as a dimension that supports them. In the twentieth century the ethics of technology was developed “as a systematic and more or less independent subdiscipline of philosophy.”<sup>4</sup>

As far as the ethics of technology is concerned, it has, beyond necessity, a political and cultural approach. “Political approaches to technology mostly go back to Marx, who assumed that the material structure of production in society, in which technology is obviously a major factor, determined the economic and social structure of that society.”<sup>5</sup> His approach determined the society at the time, but nowadays it cannot stand by itself because, as Wittgenstein said, we are misled by our own language, and the political needed upgrade. The “cultural approaches are often phenomenological in nature or at least position themselves in relation to phenomenology as post-phenomenology.”<sup>6</sup> Throughout our entire life we, as a social beings, experiment the world through experience, either political or cultural. Cultural approach is in its essence a phenomenological approach. From this perspective, the experience on the phenomena is based on social consciousness as a culture, as a whole, and the result is based on the subjective experience of the culture. In phenomenological living of existence we can decide on what is *good* or what is *bad* about what it *is needed to be* decided as *good* or *bad*. And if these have a phenomenological nature, we can say that technology (as a result of political and cultural approach) could be a phenomenon – a thing that appeared in our experience and in the way that we experienced it – and as a phenomenological approach on technology we refer to the conscious experience of humans on it. If

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<sup>4</sup> Maarten Franssen, Gert-Jan Lokhorst and Ibo van de Poel, “Philosophy of Technology,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2015 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/technology/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

we consider existence as an order, as a classification according to industrial revolution organization of things, things may be different, because we need the capacity to discern, evaluate the phenomenon and decide on it, if it is *good* or *bad*. The “cultural approach integrates the political argument and the technological assessment to assert that, fundamentally, technology is a social process.”<sup>7</sup> The commitment was made when human started to use technology which involves responsibility. We say that is a *natural* reaction of technology towards human because human started to live in a sort of *symbiosis* with technology and if the phenomenon itself – the technology – *collapses* it will become a natural effect. Regarding the awareness of it is the fact that we as humans do not realize all the time that we depend on technology and we empower with responsibility its *creators*.

Concerning the wide coverage area of ethics, there is a particular interest in information technology – “The term «information» in colloquial speech is currently predominantly used as an abstract mass-noun used to denote any amount of data, code or text that is stored, sent, received or manipulated in any medium. ... The exact meaning of the term «information» varies in different philosophical traditions and its colloquial use varies geographically and over different pragmatic contexts.”<sup>8</sup> Information technology changes “many aspects of human endeavour and existence.”<sup>9</sup> The need of information technology “is now ubiquitous in the lives of people across the globe.”<sup>10</sup> We are strong related to it the context of globalization, because the access to technology, precisely the information technology, had led to the new methods of communication between humans. Globalization “emerged as *the* buzzword of the 1990s, because it captured the increasingly interconnected nature of social life on our planet mediated by the ICT<sup>11</sup> revolution and the global integration of markets.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Anne Balsamo, “Democratic technologies and the technology of democracy: a review of John Street’s *politics and technology*,” in *Cultural Studies: Volume 8*, First Edition, eds. Grossberg Lawrence, Radway Janice (Routledge, 1994), 125-131, 131.

<sup>8</sup> Pieter Adriaans, “Information,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2013 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/information/>.

<sup>9</sup> Lucas Introna, “Phenomenological Approaches to Ethics and Information Technology,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2017 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/ethics-it-phenomenology/>.

<sup>10</sup> John Sullins, “Information Technology and Moral Values,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2016 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/it-moral-values/>.

<sup>11</sup> Information and Communication Technology.

<sup>12</sup> Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization. A very short introduction* (United Kingdom Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

All corporations that have their market in this area have benefits. There is even an economical approach in technology, because the market provides all types of technologies for every kind of budget that is also adjusted to the economic background of a country, to the workforce and payment, in order to make it available at a large scale.

When we are approaching the information technology as a main subject of interest in ethics of technology, we have to stop for a moment on the most relevant historical meanings of the term *information*, which are:

- “*information* as a process of being informed;
- *information* as a state of an agent;
- *information* as the disposition to inform.”<sup>13</sup>

Information technology presumes at its basis the three criteria mentioned above which may provide the beginning point into its ethics.

So, after spreading worldwide technology, what do we do? Do we understand it and its need? Do we use it properly?

Here is where ethics is needed, to point out the way the technology works and to “trace the impact of information technologies on moral values”.<sup>14</sup>

Technology is immersive and compelling, but it can be dangerous if we – as users – do not take into account the risks, if we do not take measures for our own safety and privacy. From social media to online payments we use it, trust it, but in most cases do not understand it. Probably, if we were instructed or better say, educated to using it, we would not face so many inconveniences. Another probability for an irresponsible use may be considered the world population, because there are people that learned the basics of using technology, and there are the children and the young who were born with it. But it is still a probability; because the *old ones* did not understand its full purpose and they could not pass to the younger generation methods of securely use it and an ethical guidance.

This brings along making an ethics of technology issues – old and new ones. Probably the corporations that have their market in the area are not taken by surprise, contrary they provide new methods of technologies that are meant to defend devices and their personal users.

We cannot talk about technology without science and about science without technology nowadays. These two merge into human development. An idea, a

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<sup>13</sup> Pieter Adriaans, “Information,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2013 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/information/> 8.

<sup>14</sup> John Sullins, “Information Technology and Moral Values”.

theory is being implemented with the help of technology, and technology could not develop without scientific theories.

Ziman says as conclusion that: "...science is all these things and more. It is indeed the product of research; it does employ characteristic methods; it is an organized body of knowledge; it is a means of solving problems."<sup>15</sup> And in pair with technology, science becomes reality.

Science, environment for new idea brings into study the most relevant subjects that concerns human living, activities and purposes. The "science studies is a diverse field with many subject matters and a variety of goals. One goal is to develop a coherent, unified theory of science as a human activity."<sup>16</sup> The new era of technology will endanger many human activities, as we know so far. Ethics is required to put in order the *symbiosis* between human and technology. Science, through technology, and with the help of ethics will make the theoretical perspective a real, a practical perspective.

### *Communication in a Technological World*

Human, as a social animal, must communicate. To communicate in a technological world he needs the technology. "The technologies that revolutionized communication through electricity are telegraph, telephone, radio, television, the internet and electronics with semiconductors, the latter being the physical foundation of the virtual world"<sup>17</sup>

As easy as it seems and as difficult as it comes in practice communication in technological world seems to take a break out of the real world and transposing itself in virtual reality.

Virtual reality creates an imaginary world for those who spend most of the time on social media networks. "The interactive web, (...), where users generate much of the content themselves, poses additional challenges."<sup>18</sup> Challenges are seen from the beginning of using a social media network. After the user completes

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<sup>15</sup> John Ziman, *An Introduction to Science Studies: The Philosophical and Social Aspects of Science and Technology* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Roland N. Giere, "The Units Analysis of Science Studies," in *The cognitive turn: Sociological and Psychological Perspectives on Science*, eds. Fuller Steve, De Mey Marc, Shinn Terry, Woolgar Steve (Springer Science+Business Media, B.V., 1989), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Roxana-Ionela Achiricesei and Mihaela Boboc, "Communication in the digital era – connections and virtual space," in *Globalization and National Identity. Studies on the Strategies of Intercultural Dialogue, Communication, Public Relations and Journalism Section, Volume III*, coord. Iulian Boldea (Universitatea "Petru Maior", Tîrgu Mure , 2016), 295-301.

<sup>18</sup> Jeroen van den Hoven, Martijn Blaauw, Wolter Pieters and Martijn Warnier, "Privacy and Information Technology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2016 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/it-privacy/>.



with personal data his attention is distracted and without knowledge he generates attention about his profile – even if he/she fills up the section of privacy – through his/her search mode which is stored in a virtual memory that generates to user information regarding a subject that he/she maybe has great interest. By options that come within search he/she has an offer to *like* – even if behind it stands a threat – and to share.

Most of the communication on social media networks resumes in liking, sharing and posting. So how can we communicate and *read* through this mechanism? We need to deduce by shares and posts if that person tries to say something, has a problem or its just having fun. Many users do not even understand the meaning of something that they share to their virtual friends. So why do they do it? Does that mean that social media networks become an addiction to users? Many articles or information are taken by many other users that made their pages official as a credible source, but the content can be found in other sources. This taking over and over of a content can be confusing – but not all users complain about this, because it does not considered as such a big problem the fact that the content is not advised and sure – in a mass of information. If we analyze a social media page of a user we can observe that a part of his communication consists in sharing.

It is hard to put boundary between what is real and what is imaginary in online communication because “social networking technologies open up a new type of ethical space in which personal identities and communities, both «real» and virtual, are constructed, presented, negotiated, managed and performed.”<sup>19</sup> So how can we have an efficient communication if we live most of our lives in social media networks? Maybe we will need to exercise more the meetings and moral values that seem to get lost in such a world or maybe in this consists the *new natural*. “It has also been argued that the ever morphing nature of information technology is changing our ability to even fully understand moral values as they change.”<sup>20</sup> This results as a consequence from the impact of information technology upon moral values, but maybe this is the consequence of progress of human through technology.

We need to understand the new type of communication in a technological world in order to bring to surface the moral values that we inherited and turn those

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<sup>19</sup> Shannon Vallor, “Social Networking and Ethics”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2016 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/ethics-social-networking/>.

<sup>20</sup> Pieter Adriaans, “Information.”

into a practice of ethics in efficient communication (even) through social media networks.

### *Conclusions*

We have tried to reach some sensitive points in which why humans fail in a technological world. If all fields will identify its sensitive points maybe ethics will come in easy into ethical guidance. Technology's role is to make our lives easier and we cannot imagine living a life without it. Its ethics is important as it is the ethics in every domain, but it is a key role here, in information technology, where (natural) reality becomes virtual reality.

If we take a look around us we could observe that we somehow forget to be humans, although *being human* is not that easy to define. But the addiction to technology leads human to submit himself to technology. Technology makes our work easier on one hand, but brings difficulties on social aspects. We leave morality behind embedded on the wall of a social network, shared by many and understood by few.

To *merge* with technology – through science – we need to rediscover moral values, ethics and communication. But we need to work in-depth of the problem, not on its surface and relying on subjective perception regarding this new wave in our existence. It may seem an unachievable goal, but human is a *skillful animal* that will adapt to the new world, but not alone: human will need to relearn to belong to the group.

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