

## A Strategy to Appropriately Encounter the Modern Technological World: a Comparison of Nasr and Feenberg's Perspectives

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### Abstract

This paper is going to introduce and compare Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Andrew Feenberg's views on technology, and speak of their different solutions to get rid of the problems of modern technology. And finally, it presents a strategy which is approved by both of them and helps us to deal with technology better. The order of the issues discussed in the article is as follows: firstly, their discussions with regard to the technology in three areas of "nature of the modern technology", "its pathology", and "the proposed solution to deal with its problems" will separately be presented; secondly, their views are compared and their common points as well as their differences in the three areas and in general are pointed out; and eventually, a consensual solution to encounter this modern phenomenon better is provided.

Nasr believes that modern technology after industrial revolution is essentially different from traditional technology. Unlike traditional technology, modern technology has a secular humanistic value orientation, has a close relationship with modern dominating science, and has cut off its relationship with art. This technology has done a lot of damages to the human in three areas of individual life, social life, and environment including the decline of creativity and skill, dullness and boredom, the increase of greediness and consumerism, and the emergence of spiritual crisis (individual life), population explosion, and the intensification of global poverty along with the social class gap (social life), air pollution, global warming, extinction of many animal species, and abusing the animals for medical experiments (environment). To encounter this modern phenomenon and its damages, Nasr believes that we should avoid modern technology and return to the traditional technology as much as possible. However, Andrew Feenberg takes a non-essentialist and historical look at modern technology and states that it should be examined in two different levels: 1. Primary level of decontextualizing and 2. The level of recontextualizing. Accordingly, in the early level of instrumentalization, the instruments and humans are separated from their original contexts

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based on their affordance and in the form of some tools and machines are only reduced to their useful features. But, in the second level, regarding some social requirements such as aesthetic and ethical consideration, these simplified objects which are in the form of tools and machines are designed and, in fact, recontextualized. Feenberg takes three major features for technology into account: 1. Social relativity, which means that the success of the technology is defined differently in different communities; 2. Value-orientation: what it wants to say is that in the second level and based on various designs, technology brings along certain values; 3. Undetermination: which is saying that technology does not have unilinear progress, and people can change its evolution process. With regard to the pathology of the modern technology, Feenberg follows the leaders of Frankfurt School, and mostly emphasizes the damages which lead to the increase of global poverty and social class gap. Finally, his solution is to democratize the designing and producing process of technology; that is people should try really hard to gain enough information about various types of technology and by planning the protest campaigns either correct or stop the production of harmful technologies. Comparing these two point of views, one can say that at least apparently when it comes to providing a strategy not only do they reject each other's solution, but also contempt and ridicule one another. However, as far as the pathology is concerned, they have many common points. Unlike Feenberg, Nasr, first of all, does not mention any positive points about modern technology at all, and has a very pessimist look at the consequences of this phenomenon. Secondly, Nasr believes that these damages are caused by modern technology, but Feenberg argues that the damages are caused by the designing phase of some of the technologies. Thirdly, contrary to Nasr's pathology, Feenberg pathology does not talk of spiritual pathology and is only concerned with worldly and material issues. Finally, the comparison shows that these differences are due to the fundamental differences between the two in the important stage of phenomenology of technology, because Nasr has an essentialist and quite negative view toward technology, but Feenberg's view is historical and constructive. Despite the fact that both of them consider technology as an unneutral and value-oriented phenomenon, Nasr believes that technology has a special culture, that is the materialistic culture of the earth which is pursued by great greed while Feenberg does not think so. At last, Nasr speaks of reforming the production of modern technology so desperately that one senses determination, but Feenberg, pointing out undetermination, rejects this desperate view.

Regarding the large number of differences between these two views, at the first glance it seems that finding a consensual solution would not be possible; however, given that both of these thinkers put the main burden of responsibility on the users and peoples' shoulders, one can come to one consensual strategy: people should say no to the technologies which are in conflict with their desired culture as much as possible, and also avoid buying and using damaging technologies. This type of dealing, as Nasr believes, requires standing up to the disruptive technology, and, as Feenberg expects, is quite democratic and popular. In other

words, showing no passivity in the face of the disruptive technologies, and actively boycotting them is a sensible and effective deed which provides a better future for mankind.

**Keywords:** Modern technology, alternative technology, traditionalism, critical theory of technology, Nasr, Feenberg.

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