

Whom (or What) Does Your Technology Serve?

Discussion for “Can Stuff Be Morally Good?”

Redeeming Technology, Session 1.

7th October 2017

Within your groups, consider the technology that you use or design.

Q1) What purpose does your technology serve?

There may be more than one answer. List several if necessary.

If possible, identify the “fundamental” one; the one to which all others point.

Q2a) What do you optimise your technology for?

Q2b) What metrics are used to measure the “success” of your work / research?

This is a sanity check against Q2a. If your success is measured in the number of patents filed, or the funding / revenue you generate, or the number of people attending your events, or the ranking of your institution, it is a bold person indeed who optimises their work for anything other than the thing by which their success is measured. Maybe you are bold.

Q2c) Given the answers to Q2a,b, do you need to reassess your answer to Q1?

Q3a) In optimising the things in Q2, what things does your technology suppress?

Q3b) Considering the things you are suppressing, what does that really mean?

This is to move you past the euphemisms. To clarify this question, here is an example:

Online-shopping websites optimise “ease” of sending gifts.

By optimising “ease” they suppress “difficulties”.

By “suppressing difficulties” what they really mean is,

“You don’t have to actually visit Grandma on her birthday. Grandma is difficult.”

Q4) Are there better things you could be optimising for?

Is it worth using (or designing) technology differently?

Is it worth using (or designing) different technology?

Is there a better non-technological solution?