
A Brief Note to the Student

Throughout your university studies, and throughout your lives in the USA, you've been quietly inculcated with a rather specific worldview concerning technology, ethics, and society. Some of its tenets are that technology is about the gadgets that we build and use; that it's an outgrowth of the sciences; that, overwhelmingly, technology makes lives better; that it liberates us, empowers us, and helps everyone to prosper; and that our technology is fundamentally apolitical, areligious, and amoral. The same worldview holds that the individual is the agent that drives technological change, and so the locus of responsibility for that change. Correspondingly, the individual scientist or engineer behaves ethically if he or she abides by the law and by professional and cultural norms.

But every belief I have just enumerated is fundamentally *wrong*. These lies prop up consumption, inequality, and environmental depredation. It has come to the point that this constellation of untruths has come to imperil our very existence. Still, the beliefs are so deeply embedded in our culture, our institutions, and our identities that we can hardly even see that they are there.

My hope for this class is extremely ambitious: I want to increase your inclination not just to think about, but also to act upon the ethical implications of your personal and professional choices, and our collective work as technologists. Doing this is hard. It may run against your personal interest. Overturning this rock may reveal a world difficult to understand and uncomfortable to see.

I wish you wisdom—certainly more than I have ever found—in your own struggles with the issues of this note and in this course. I don't have the answers—I don't even know if there is hope—but maybe we can help each other to see more.

Kind regards,



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