

Are Technological Advancements Taking us Forward or Backward?

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Abstract: *Technology may be very useful for good, but no matter how advanced technology becomes overtime, its negative effects of power and dehumanization remain consistent, and our modern world has been shaped by the advent of technology.*

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What does it mean to be human? This existential question has defined our actions, our history, and our world since the beginning of time. Of course, the way our modern world answers this question did not suddenly change from previous periods in history, instead, our past has shaped the mold for the world we live in now.

When looking into the eyes of an innocent who is about to be killed, a human perpetrator will feel something, whereas a technological perpetrator will not. Technology is devoid of any capability to feel empathy, remorse, or lust by itself. However, technology, such as weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), does enable the human that controls it to feel a strong sense of power over other individuals because the mere presence of scientific advancements symbolizes progress and prosperity for a civilization. This feeling of power that comes with technological progress can also interfere with judgement and make the perpetrator dehumanize his victims, who are perceived as uncivilized and weak because of their relative scientific limitations. This raises very important questions: Does technology control the human rather than the other way around? Does the expectation of the gun in your hand make you pull the trigger? Does technological or economic progress equate to a progressed society as a whole and how has the advent of technology affected what it means to be human *now*? Throughout history, technology has been the real perpetrator. The great ships made the Europeans perceive themselves as colonizers; Rubber-lust filled bottomless sacks with hands of slaves in the Belgian Congo; poison gas suffocated the Jews during the Holocaust and the machete hacked off Humanity's hands in the Rwandan Genocide. The persistent problem of dehumanization has not changed with technological developments and suggests that humanity hasn't progressed at all since 1492. However, this essay explores how science and technology act as universal and perennial symbols of power and progress and examines how this evil symbolism has morphed humans into cold-blooded murderers in this new age.

Christopher Columbus's discovery of North America and the Genocide of the Native Americans demonstrates how the European's established their ideology of being the superior race based on the western definitions of progress. In one of his diary entries, Columbus shares his first impressions about the Native American people, '[they were] weak'; 'weapons, they had none...nothing more than sticks'; 'they seemed... to be a very poor people'. [1] These observations were just momentary, but the effects of these judgements were seen later on in the European ideology when a rule was

formed that for every single White killed, 100 Native Americans had to be slaughtered. [2] They thought of themselves as 'civilizers' and their attempts to colonize and strip the Native Americans of their 'barbaric and savage' traditions and culture show how the power divide stems from the perceived progress of each group. [3]

Furthermore, the Europeans defined progress in terms of a western norm and purely in terms of economical, scientific, or religious progress. In order to impose this definition onto the Native American population, the Europeans took control over their land; punished, tortured and killed innocents. They forced them to work in silver mines and the building of European ships. [4] Many Natives died as a result of mercury poisoning or being crushed by anchors. However, the Europeans did not do anything to change these deplorable conditions and in fact enforced stricter rules in order to maximize their gain. [5] Their perceived cost of the loss of lives was much less than the economic power and progress they would make once they built better technology. They used the natives to climb up the progress ladder but left them behind in the process which further reinforces and widens the power divide. This case study is a perfect example of how technology was used to mark progress for Western empires and how these empires used relative levels of technological advancements to form their ideology of European supremacy.

This idea of European supremacy and the concept of Social Darwinism led the perpetrators of the Belgium-Congo massacre to dehumanize their African slaves. Racial science was very popular during the Belgian rule. [6] Although this interest and belief in genetic explanations of traits began with soldiers bringing back skulls of Africans for experiments, these ideas were influencing the overall European ideology as well. [7] For example, in a Belgian journalist, Frederick Starr's, account titled *The Truth about the Congo*, he refers to the native Africans as 'scheming, servile and lazy' and attributes these traits to biological factors. [8] In E.D Morrel's account titled *Red Rubber*, he quotes a Belgian official when he is asked to stop the atrocities, 'I am the only God and Law of Katanga'. [9] Instead of just being superior, the pseudo-science explanation of "The Superior Race". This belief gave rise to serious dehumanization of the natives, who were forced to leave their previous, 'unfulfilling, uneventful lives' as farmers to collect rubber for the benefit of the European race without being paid. [10] The Europeans thought that it was the natives' duty to fulfil the demands of the higher race, much like the line in the Bible about how animals exist for

man to benefit from them. Additionally, the Europeans cut the hands off the natives if they could not meet their quotas. [11] Both these examples show how the natives were viewed as animals and machines to further European progress.

Once the power divide was set and the ideology was formed, no action committed by the Europeans could change the power hierarchy. The words 'savage and barbaric' were used to describe the unacceptable practices of the Native Americans and to justify why their civilization was backward and inferior to the Europeans. These words were also ironically used by E.D Morrel to describe the atrocities committed by the Europeans themselves in the Congo. [12] In fact, the cutting up of the hands of African slaves to evoke fear, respect and obedience for the white man or the holding of family members as hostages to 'encourage' the natives to meet their quotas were justified by the Europeans as acts of civilizing the 'lazy Negro' and helping him progress in his life. [13] They created rationalizations for their actions and believed them because they were now only looking through the lens of their ideology. In this way, scientific developments such as the creation of categories for human beings and pseudo-scientific explanation for these categories can deepen the power divide and lead to dehumanization of an entire race. This allows perpetrators to commit atrocious crimes under the façade of civilizing and progressing because they believe that they are fundamentally better.

The two case studies of Colonization and Imperialism above contrast with what I consider a turning point in the History of the World: the Rwandan Genocide. This case study is chilling, because I see no trace of humanity in the perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide. Does technology really symbolize progress when it is technology that is beginning to control humans, rather than the other way around?

During the Rwandan Genocide, pseudo-race science can be attributed once again to create a power divide between two groups while technology progressed and mutated into a more lethal, modern weapon. Before the Belgians colonized Rwanda-Burundi, the only segregation that existed between the Rwandan people was occupation: being a farmer or cattle herder. [14] Moreover, these identities were completely permeable which enabled cultural, social and economic progress. [15] However, when the Belgians arrived, they imposed their ideas of anthropology and ethnography onto the Rwandan people and divided them into different races: Hutus and Tutsis. [16] By definition, the word 'race' means divisions of human kind with distinct characteristics that can only be attributed to genetics. But all of the distinctions between the Hutus and the Tutsis were based on arbitrary reasons: anyone with more than 10 cows was a Tutsi; Hutus were the farmers whereas Tutsis were the cattle herders; all Tutsis were taller than Hutus. [17] Instead of characteristic differences giving birth to a race, the mere labelling of a race gave birth to characteristic differences. This is why the Rwandan Genocide is 'beyond human imagination': because it was not between two different groups of people, but between people who were essentially the same! [18] Science and scientific developments in terms of anthropology-

controlled humans once again. This time, they manipulated their identity. Over time, Tutsi traits were considered more advantageous and desirable and thus Tutsi's administered the Hutus. [19] This naturally, created resentment. Eventually, it led to the massacre of over 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutus (poor Hutus) in 100 days just because of a title printed on their identity cards. [20]

The Rwandan Genocide is the most chilling case study yet because it was the first time that the killers actually seemed to be enjoying the killing, and did not repent their actions. In Jean Hatzfeld's book entitled *Machete Season*, she mentions how not one killer committed suicide or showed signs of psychological damage in the Prison because of the torment of his memories. [21] In fact, whenever she interviewed them, they would always make up 'zig-zags' of narrations where the killers would exaggerate, invent or conceal certain memories without hesitation. [22] The killers seems to have no attachment to the memories of the victims at all. As a result, for the first time, when a Hutu looked into the eyes of a victim in the marshes looking for mercy, he laughed and cut them slowly to inflict more pain. [23]

What does being a human mean? It means being able to feel empathy. But this was absent in the human perpetrators of Rwanda. The Genocide took place in a very unusual technological battlefield: there was barely any technology. We could argue here that the machete symbolized power, that the radio caused dehumanization of the 'cockroaches', or the process that made banana beer so cheap and potent was responsible for the Hutus not being in control of themselves. [24] However, by the time of the Rwandan genocide, humans had mutated to become the metaphorical 'technology'. They were no longer able to feel. Even without powerful weapons such as the atomic bomb or poison gas, the humans in Rwanda were able to find a way to create a power hierarchy and were able to dehumanize their victims and themselves to such an extent that they enjoyed being controlled by their own evil. The study of the Rwandan Genocide gives us an understanding of the arbitrary consequences as a result of science and technology.

Are we really devoid of empathy? When we often think about genocide and weapons of mass destruction, we use the past tense. We think that all of the massacres happened long into the past when people were barbaric, weren't educated or hadn't evolved. But we are wrong. Today is the age of Genocide. This is because even in the 21st century, with all the knowledge that we have, with all the atrocities that humanity has had to endure, people still manage to kill each other, rationalize their killings and still are controlled by technology. Technology may be very useful for good, but no matter how advanced technology becomes over time, its negative effects of power and dehumanization remain consistent. Our modern world has been shaped from the advent of technology. Our modern world is different because the past had nothing to look back on and learn from, we did, and we still have learnt nothing. Society seems to be stuck in a loop since 1492 while humans are losing their humanity.

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