



Mains Practice Question

Q. A technology should be evaluated both on the basis of its utility and the intention of its creator. Critically examine. (250 words)

13 Feb, 2020 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce briefly about the growing utility of technologies.
- Discuss some ethical contradictions and concerns arising out of increasing role of technologies.
- Discuss how these technologies should be evaluated on the basis of the intention of its creator.
- Give conclusion.

Introduction

- Technology has surrounded every aspect of human life and its utilities are increasing exponentially. Every day we have innovative products and services that announce their arrival in the market place and others that go obsolete.
- It is this technology and innovation that leads to **ethical issues**. Issues like data mining, invasion to privacy, data theft and workplace monitoring are common and critical.

Body

Technology is mainly evaluated by its utility and usefulness. But, sometimes the intention of its creator also becomes a parameter to evaluate a technology. For example,

- **Algorithmic Bias in Artificial Intelligence (AI):** An AI system introduced in 2015 in the U.S. failed to recognise faces of African Americans with the same accuracy as those of Caucasian Americans. Google, the creator of this AI system, quickly took remedial action.
 - From a **teleological perspective**, this flawed AI system gets a go ahead. According to the 2010 census, Caucasian Americans constitute 72.4% of the country's population. So an AI system that identifies Caucasian American faces better is useful for a majority of Internet users in the U.S., and to Google.
 - However, from a **deontological perspective**, the system should have been rejected as its intention probably was not to identify people from all races, which would have been the most ethical aim to have.
 - **Discriminatory Nature:** Such technologically biased systems may also be used to deny benefits to people on the basis of caste, religion, gender, region, etc.
- **Data theft and Behaviour tracking:** Human behaviours are being monitored through social media and electronic gadgets. Their personalised data is being traded without their consent. Businesses, political parties, extremist organisations, etc. manipulate these data according to their own suitability. **Cambridge Analytica-Facebook Scandal** is a prime example in this regard.
- **Privacy Invasion:** personal information of citizens being collected by the government and private agencies, though with good intentions, may have consequences in terms of privacy breaching and misuse of data by third parties.
- **Medicines and Life Care:**

- **Clinical Trials:** Intention plays a very critical role in clinical trials. There are cases where clinical trials were conducted with bad intention of money making by pharma companies, risking the lives of poor people.
- New **cloning techniques, genetic modifications or other life saving drugs** need continuous monitoring and surveillance to check the original intent of the developer of these technologies.

Conclusion

- The transformative capability of technologies such as AI is huge. However, these technologies must be rooted in an **egalitarian ethical basis**.
- Adoption of any technology should have a multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach, and have an explicit focus on the ethical basis.
- Technology Giants should have a credible **Ethics committee** to look after the ethical challenges associated with a specific technology.

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