

The role of ethics in guiding the development of emerging technologies

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...the important question about technology becomes, As we “make things work,” what kind of *world* are we making?

Emerging technologies

a productive conjunction of knowledges, practices, products and applications.

'emerging' is the *assembling* of this conjunction.




Bioethics

critical
practical
interdisciplinary

Bioethics and norms



Bioethics and engagement

A photograph of an audience seated in a lecture hall, viewed from the side. The audience members are mostly men and women of various ages, some looking towards the front of the room. The room is dimly lit, with warm, golden light streaming in from large windows in the background, creating a soft, focused atmosphere. The foreground shows the back of a person's head and shoulders, looking towards the audience.

Bioethics and institutions



COMMENT

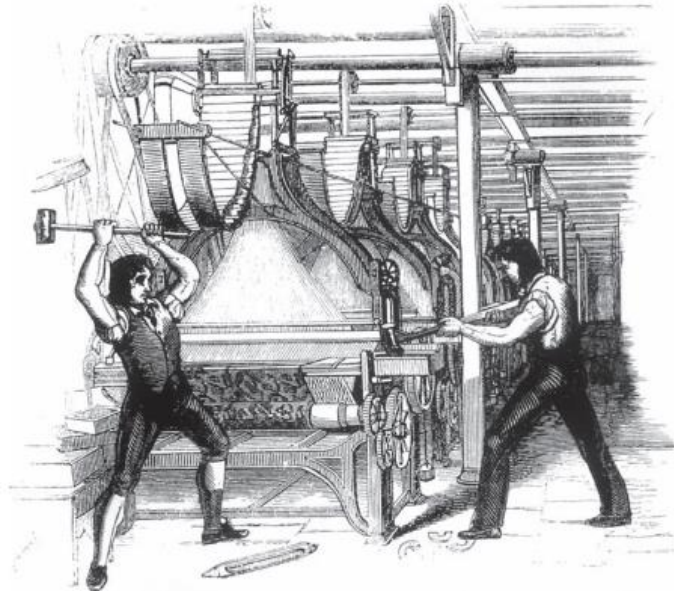


DEVELOPMENT Calestous Juma's optimistic prescription for food in Africa **p.31**

ANTHROPOLOGY Twenty years after discovery, Ötzi goes on show **p.34**

ENVIRONMENT A call to halt deep-sea vent mining before it starts **p.36**

POLICY Unrealistic NIH restructure will inhibit translational research **p.36**



A nineteenth-century engraving of machine-breakers attacking machinery in a textile factory.

In praise of Luddism

Two centuries on from the Luddite insurrection, **David Edgerton** celebrates today's most important opponents to new ideas, inventions and innovations: scientists.

In March 1811, machine-breakers struck in the centre of England. They were not the first or the last, but they started what became known as the Luddite outrages or insurrection. The targets were employers and their machines — stocking-makers and their knitting frames at first, later other textile manufacturers and machines. The breakers were hand-knitters whose livelihood was threatened. The name came from General or King Ludd, the leader the Luddites invented as a signatory to proclamations.

Since then, especially in the late twentieth century, a Luddite has been someone opposed to progress, especially to science and technology. Nowadays, it is a generalized term of unthinking abuse designed to crush any criticism.

In fact, opposition to most new ideas, inventions and innovations is essential for progress. Most grant applications and scientific papers are

rejected; most inventions have to be rejected if there is to be enough time and money to develop any at all. Scientists have had a crucial role in this opposition — they led the charge against new gadget mania during the Second World War, and afterwards.

If by 'Luddism' we mean, as was the case in 1811, opposition to specific novelties for particular reasons, as opposed to novelty in general, then Luddism is indispensable and scientists should cultivate their important, and venerable, role as its most rigorous practitioners.

It is not sufficiently recognized that creation, scientific or otherwise, is a tragic business. Most inventions meet nothing but indifference, even from experts. Patents are little more than a melancholy archive of failure. Most ideas of every sort are rejected, as would be clear if there was a repository for abandoned drafts, rejected manuscripts, unperformed plays and unfiled treatments. The reason is not hostility to novelty. ▶

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Thank you.

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