

Organizations' evaluations for possible technological risks / Ori Freiman

Abstract

In this era, science and technology are deeply interwoven in an inseparable way from society. On the one hand, the various technological advances carry with them various promises for the improvement of human life and society, but on the other hand, warning voices alert from the various uses of technology. In this manner, each technology has those who support and those who oppose. A simple example would be those who see genetically engineered seeds as a possible solution for world hunger, while there are those who see in the very same technology a recipe for the destruction of the ecological biodiversity.

The aim of this qualitative research was to build an overview of these technologies. This was done by examining the evaluations of 12 organizations, chosen in purposive sampling, for the possible technological risks. The research questions examined the organizations, their activities, publication means, funding sources, and their range of topics.

(1) Regarding examining the organizations, it has been found that most of them are relatively new (established after the year 2000). A few are affiliated with academia, some with other organizations, and some are independent. The organizations deal with a variety of topics, ranging over a wide spectrum of disciplines - mainly bio-technology, nano-technology, and medicine and health.

(2) With respect to the kinds of activities the chosen organizations held, this research found that conferences and public lectures are the main activities. While at the same time, activities such as seminars, (online) question and answer sessions with the public, or even summer camps – take place.

(3) The organizations offer a wide variety of publications. Most organizations publish newsletters and keep a blog, but annual publications, weekly to yearly, exist as well. Only a few of the organizations present their list of expert publications.

(4) Regarding funding of the organizations, three of them do not declare their source of funding and do not present any information about their financial activities. Five of the organizations provide full access to their financial activities. Most of the organizations have earned income, usually from their activities, members' fee, and donations. Most of the organizations are supported by donations from trusts and corporations.

(5) The variety of topics the organizations deal with are wide and diverse. The sub-topics of the various subjects were detailed, according to the organizations' focuses. The wide difference in the sub-topics of the organizations was bold. For example, in the realm of ethics, while one organization deals with medical & clinical ethics, another one deals with bio-ethical perspectives of torture. In this section the various subjects and sub-topics were clarified.

After answering the research questions, the compatibility between the literature review on technology, ethics, and risks, and between the organizations' subjects was checked. Afterwards, a few political stances from

the literature review were found to fit the political views of the organizations. In the comparison between the literature review and the research findings, it was found that no organization deals with the philosophical and theoretical literature that focuses on technology and society. Regarding ethics, apart from the religious-oriented organizations which deal with ethics per se, other organizations, if dealing with ethics, deal with specific aspects of ethics (such as the bio-ethical perspectives of torture). Despite most of the organizations' lack of ethical focus, their ethical viewpoints regarding various subjects are expressed (such as the integration of scientific research with weapons manufacturing, the subjects of fertilization or abortion, or agriculture and food technologies).

Regarding the various subjects of risk, it was found that even though the organizations conduct research on known technological risks, only two organizations conduct research to reveal yet-unknown technological risks. Regarding the concerns evolving the end of humanity, which few of the organizations deal with, it is concluded that weapons of mass destruction, bio-technology, nano-technology, and artificial intelligence pose the current scientific and technological challenges, but no less – also political, that threaten the future existence of humanity.

The political viewpoints of the organizations were represented in a techno-political map (table). It was found that among the organizations, four are conservatives – two from the left and two from the right. Four organizations are techno-progressives, and three are libertarians. The various political positions are described, and these differentiate mostly in their stand towards the ability of humanity to control the developed technologies in order

to change the world for the better, their view regarding access to enhancement technology, reproductive rights and liberty, ecological protection, and the place of economy, risk management, or religious considerations, in supporting or opposing development of future technologies.

In summarizing the results of the research, it can be claimed that the following conclusions were reached: a) The diversity of technologies and issues are very wide. While at the same time, b) each organization focuses on a few technologies and issues. c) The motives for focusing on a given issue or technology are ideological - such as religious or political. d) The evaluations made by a given organization regarding possible technological risks depend on its techno-political views.

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