

Rensselaer for Ethics in Science, Engineering, and Technology (RESET)
Meeting #5 - October 2, 2019

Topics

- Recap of last meeting:
 - Defining genetic and biological engineering
 - The boundary between a disease and a character trait (e.g., deafness)
 - How much genetic tampering in humans is permissible
- Technology's effect on our mental health and social norms:
 - Are we more isolated or connected (or both) because of technology?
 - Heavy users of social media report feeling more lonely, anxious, and depressed. Why is this? Who's responsible: the user or the platform?
 - Technology usually minimizes the amount of face-to-face (or even voice-to-voice) interaction (e.g., self-checkouts, service apps). Is this making us afraid of each other? Is this making it harder to learn social norms and etiquette? (e.g., would a child who grew up with Siri and Alexa and never had to be polite to these AIs be polite to people to a food server?)
 - Technology's effect on our attention span. (e.g. The first Lincoln-Douglas debate lasted 7 hours. Can we imagine anyone paying attention to two people talking for 7 hours? Most people don't watch the presidential debates that last 2 hours.)
 - Conversely, technology allows us to communicate worldwide, have better access to mental health resources, and access near-infinite amounts of art and literature. How do we utilize this without succumbing to the problems highlighted above?

Articles for discussion

- <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/10/30/559863326/alexa-are-you-safe-for-my-kids>
- <https://hbr.org/2017/04/a-new-more-rigorous-study-confirms-the-more-you-use-facebook-the-worse-you-feel>
- <https://www.gq.com/story/cal-newport-digital-minimalism>

Further reading

- https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/74034.Amusing_Ourselves_to_Death?ac=1&from_search=true