

April 2021

Science and Technology v. Law, or a Plague on Both Your Houses: Comment

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Recommended Citation

Shirley Johnson, Science and Technology v. Law, or a Plague on Both Your Houses: Comment, 47 Denv. L.J. 565 (1970).

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COMMENT

BY SHIRLEY JOHNSON

I MUST confess that elements of Dr. Moore's paper underscore the theme of C.P. Snow's two cultures that physical scientists and social scientists have a hell of a time communicating and that too often when they do, they both end up with bloody noses.

In my first reading of some of my colleague's introductory broad brush strokes depicting scientists in his first theme, as "perpetrators of problems," "tunnel vision technologists," and "pursuers of narrow goals without regard for social need" my blood pressure went up more than just a little. On second reading, assisted by some tranquilizers, I progressed to his second theme that science and technology are not necessarily autonomous forces. Whereupon I said, "Ah, how beautiful!" Because, you see, I accept fully the second premise, and therefore I do not have to go to the mat with my most distinguished colleague. Incidentally, I am afraid I will come out a poor second on the question of whether or not scientists or engineers are black hat or white hat guys; and for the purpose of our discussion, it really does not matter whether they are good or whether they are bad. What does matter is whether society can control them; and I feel very strongly that it can. As Dr. Green said a few minutes ago big science, because it consumes tax dollars, can be shrunken to tinker-toy size in a very big hurry if legislators decide this would be in the best interest of the general public.

Hence, technologists who translate science into goods and services traded in the market place must be wholly responsive to the demands of consumers and the laws of the land. What is tragic, but true, in our social system is that the public gets what it wants; and it wants high compression, 400 horse power automobiles with chrome and without safety devices. It wants 27 electrical push button gadgets in every home, and to hell with the fact that it consumes vast amounts of power, eats up our natural resources, and pollutes the atmosphere. How long is mankind going to labor under the myth that technology has caused these problems and that technology must solve these problems?

On the other hand, any technological solution to the acute societal problems of today is only temporary; for we are increasingly overtaxing nature's ability to accommodate man, and a brilliant technical solution today is antiquated tomorrow. We are, I believe, at a point in time when man should no longer be lulled by the false hope that technology alone can answer these pressing problems, for such idealism only puts

off the day when man must come to grips with major moral and value decisions and the body of laws to enforce them. Garrett Harten, a biologist, said: "The population problem has no technical solution, it requires a fundamental extension of morality." Weisner and York commenting on the ABM arms race said, "This dilemma has no technical solution."

Continuing with Professor Moore's next theme, I certainly concur that there are many points of interaction of science-technology and the law. In fact, as you ponder this theme, you become quite fascinated by the existing interdependence and by the possibility of greatly heightening this interaction. At this point the significance that might evolve from this conference comes into rather interesting focus. It is a fact that law can force technocrats, *i.e.*, executives of technologically based industries where decisions are based on consumer demands and economic constraints, to develop alternative solutions. We all know about the California laws on automobile exhaust emissions which are forcing the trade into many changes. Similarly, other states are forcing on technocrats laws regarding energy absorbing automobile bumpers, air-cushioned collision bags, and collapsible steering wheel columns. Laws in all the states are forcing industries to do, in a few years, what they have not previously been forced to do in a lifetime.

At this point I would like to refer Dr. Moore to a statement made in 1928 by Albert Einstein: "Anyone who thinks that science is going to make their lives a little better is an idiot."