

Live Like a Luddite

Assignment Description

In this class, we are studying the future, and the ways in which technology might change it. And we are reflecting on whether we should embrace future technologies, reject them, or land somewhere in between.

Newsflash: the future is already here. Since the invention of the internet, the smartphone, and social media, our lives have changed forever. There's no question about it—your life will go very differently than your grandparents' lives. But is this a good thing? In this reflection, you will have the opportunity to reflect on this question. More specifically, you will answer the question: have 21st century technologies contributed to or detracted from your ability to lead a well-lived life? Put differently: was it harder or easier for you or your grandparents to live well, given the way the internet, social media, and smartphones have changed things?

To help you think about this question, you will have to live like a Luddite, the famous 19th-century technology-smashers. Well, maybe not quite like a Luddite, but you'll have to give up modern technology for at least 24 hours. Ideally, this means all screens, and any other technology you can. Of course, sometimes modern life makes that impossible. But you should give up as much technology as you can.

Your reflection should be divided into four parts:

First, describe the issue you will be addressing. Here, you should introduce the angle you are taking on the reflection. Tell your reader why the topic is interesting/important, then convince them they should care about it. Note that this part will be short, and may even be just your first paragraph.

Second, summarize your experience 'living like a Luddite' and the experience you had. Describe what you did, and what you noticed during the fast. No need to get into all the details—just the relevant ones that you need to make your point.

Third, formulate your response to the question: have 21st century technologies contributed to or detracted from your ability to lead a well-lived life? Note that your answer to this question may not be simple. For example, you may think that modern technology makes aspects of our lives better, but makes other aspects of our lives worse. Your response, moreover, should not merely be a statement of whatever you happen to think. Rather, you should build your response on your experience with the technology fast and on *at least one philosophy reading from this semester*. Two obvious choices: you could use one of the moral frameworks we discussed early in the semester, or you could use one of the readings from our discussion of human enhancement (the transhumanists or the President's Council on Bioethics). How you incorporate the reading is entirely up to you. You could use it to help you make your point, or to show your reader how *not* to think. What's critical is that you use defend your position. Don't merely answer the paper's question. Provide *reasons* for the answer you give.

Finally, you should provide a brief conclusion. Close the reflection strongly.

Grading Criteria

First, I am looking for a well-articulated thesis. Your thesis should tell me *exactly* what your reflection will be doing. For this particular assignment, your thesis will likely consist in two (or so) sentences: one in which

you tell your reader a little about your experience, and one in which you tell your reader about what how you will answer the reflection's central question.

Second, I will be looking for a defense of your thesis. Anyone can make up a thesis. Your task is to convince your reader that your thesis is true. A well-written reflection should convince your reader that your analysis is the correct analysis!

Third, I am looking for you to build your analysis on your experience and the reading you chose to interact with. The best philosophical thinking is carried out in conversation. The best reflections will therefore demonstrate that you can develop your own answer to a philosophical question in response to your own experiences and other peoples' ideas.

Fourth, I will be looking for general marks of excellent philosophical writing. In particular:

1. *Argumentative Excellence*: I expect your reflection to display all the marks of a good philosophical argumentation. You should state your argument clearly, give reasons in support of your argument, avoid logical fallacies, and so on.
2. *Accuracy*: I expect your paper to accurately represent the ideas of any of the readings with whom you interact in the paper.
3. *Clarity*: I shouldn't have to figure out what you are trying to say. It is your job to make your reflection clear so that I can understand it.
4. *Originality and Style*: The best reflections will put forward an original idea and will demonstrate stylistic elegance.
5. *Attribution*: Give credit to any sources you cite or summarize. You may use MLA, APA, or Chicago style.
6. *Grammar*: You will not receive any points for properly using grammar. However, you will lose points if you improperly use grammar.

Length Requirement

There is no length requirement for this reflection. But by my lights, any paper that fulfills the requirements of this paper would have to be around three pages, double spaced.

Due Dates:

Thursday, October 21: submit by 11:55pm on the PHIL288E Sakai page.