

Book Reviews

4. Don't be fooled by performances.
5. Inspect the undergirdings of your philosophies. Are they legitimate?

OLPC failed on all of these points. Millions of dollars were spent, and there is little evidence of any lasting impact.

Although it is not an easy read, this book is recommended for those who are interested in thinking about how computing can be effectively used to make a difference in this world. If you are a Christian, and desire to be an active agent of change for good, you also should spend time considering your privilege, the culture of where your project will be deployed, and why you are optimistic about the success and impact of your project. Will you be making the same mistakes that OLPC made?

Reviewed by Victor Norman, Associate Professor of Computer Science, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.

MY TECH-WISE LIFE: Growing Up and Making Choices in a World of Devices by Amy Crouch and Andy Crouch. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020. 208 pages. Hardcover; \$15.99. ISBN: 9780801018671.

My Tech-Wise Life is a book about life before it is a book about technology. Through a discussion of her own experience growing up in a "tech-wise family," Amy Crouch shares her struggles and successes as a young adult navigating a world that is obsessed with technology. She honestly shares how she doesn't have it all figured out, while describing the ways that she keeps technology in its place as a tool in her life, rather than as a controlling force.

Technology causes us problems that aren't rooted in technology. It changes the problems that we face, but it doesn't create fundamentally new problems. Sometimes it exacerbates problems that we have always faced, such as distraction. Other times, it covers up problems—this sounds good, until you realize that it also covers up the solutions. We experienced distraction and loneliness long before the distractions from phone notifications, and the loneliness from seeing Instagram posts of parties we weren't invited to. This book is about how to live—with and without technology.

In each chapter, Amy tackles a different facet of technology, exploring how we can be free of the demands of technology in a way that helps us to be more engaged in our own lives. Some chapters address specific technologies: for example, social media, and how "we don't have to compare ourselves" (chapter 1). Other chapters cover how we can use all of our technology better so that "we don't have to be exhausted" (chapter 7).

Each chapter is paired with a letter from her dad, Andy Crouch, the popular Christian author of *The Tech-Wise*

Family. Each chapter also ends with "What to Do Next," beginning with questions of reflection, then moving toward the challenges of how to start conversations with your family and friends about how you want to be using technology, and ending with suggestions for how to change your habits surrounding technology.

My Tech-Wise Life reads more as an invitation than as a lecture. It is encouraging to hear this from Amy's perspective, as someone who grew up with smartphones and Instagram as a central part of high school. Amy is honest about how she struggles with what she's writing about—including issues of secrecy, loneliness, and exhaustion. These negative effects aren't invented by tech companies, but they are reframed and coded into the devices we carry around. She doesn't pretend that our problems can be fixed by purging our life of technology. Yet our situation isn't hopeless; Amy offers stories of her successes too. We are not inevitably going to lose to technology. There are ways to live a more meaningful life and to not succumb to the exhaustion of the endless scroll.

The book would be a valuable read for any young adult, but it is written to be most relevant for teens. This is apparent in some of her prompts to discuss technology use with parents, as well as in the emphasis placed on the teen demographic in the Barna research statistics scattered throughout the book. These statistics are based on surveys of young adults, so they primarily add confirmation that everyone else is struggling with the same technology problems. Aside from the statistics and a few of the prompts, the book is applicable to anyone who grew up with digital technology and is needing to reassess their relationship with it.

With its easy-to-read style, *My Tech-Wise Life* is a quick read, and would fit well for a small group wanting to read a book together. It is a hopeful, yet realistic book. It is honest about the problems that we face in using technology wisely, but it also offers concrete suggestions to be more mindful of technology use. Amy invites us into a life that is shaped around relationships and wonder rather than around technology.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Koning, graduate student in the Department of Computer Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL 61801.

RIGHT/WRONG: How Technology Transforms Our Ethics by Juan Enríquez. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020. 304 pages. Hardcover; \$24.95. ISBN: 9780262044424.

Right/Wrong: How Technology Transforms Our Ethics made me angry, made me think, made me research, made me discuss, made me agree, made me disagree ... and it turns out that is what the author was hoping for. His goal was to get people interested in ethics again.

His point was that “technology provides alternatives that can fundamentally alter our notion of what is right and what is wrong.” Ethics, he believes, often do (and should) evolve, and technology is increasingly becoming the catalyst for this evolution. He states that this book is not the classic “scholarly” book that provides answers, but one that he hopes will incite debate and provoke questions regarding the status quo.

As a computer scientist, I expected “technology” to be digital technology, but Enríquez uses a broader, and probably more proper, definition. Though he doesn’t provide a formal definition, it appears to be something like “applied scientific knowledge.” His definition of technology encompasses birth control, medications, gene editing, machines from the industrial revolution, and lab-grown beef, among other examples.

Enríquez begins the book with examples of what he means by technology influencing what we see as ethical. One example is the advent of birth control. The use of birth control afforded women more opportunities in education and career development. This, in turn, allowed them more financial independence which lessened their need to stay in abusive marriages. Even without the aspect of divorce, today many would look back and see the lack of education and career opportunities for women as unethical treatment. Birth control allowed for and encouraged more-ethical treatment of women.

Enríquez also looks to the future with the more contemporary example of gene editing. Many people today are appalled at the idea of editing a baby’s DNA, even with the intent of preventing future diseases. They see it as unethical. Could it be that in the future our kids and grandkids will be appalled at how unethical we were for not editing their genes to avoid the cancer that they now face?

A third example of technology influencing our ethics is related to meat production. Currently, almost all of the meat we consume is a result of raising and slaughtering animals. Present-day technologies, however, allow for lab-grown beef. When this product becomes more affordable and perhaps the norm, will future generations regard us as unethical for the “cruelty-ridden” steaks and burgers that we consumed?

Throughout the book, Enríquez addresses controversial issues, including the educational system, mass incarceration, drug legalization, mental health, climate change, and warfare. There are plenty of topics to use as conversation starters. Unlike other books that help us to see the potential ethical dangers of technology, Enríquez focuses on the ways that technology enables us to become more ethical—if we are willing to adapt.

I love the passion that Enríquez brings to the discussion. He believes that technology without ethics is a

recipe for disaster, and he wants people to pay more attention to what is right and wrong. He wants us to be open to re-evaluating what we believe to be right actions if we are given new information or possibilities through technology. At the same time, he wants us to be humble, recognizing that it can be hard to decipher right from wrong in new situations and that it can take time for a society to make the changes necessary to produce more-ethical actions. Hindsight is often 20/20, and people that went before us—even if decent people—made mistakes. We will also make mistakes. Furthermore, there are deterrents to making changes: inconvenience, shame, loss of status, and other costs. He wants to encourage us to be aware, kind, civil, and open when we are considering what is right and wrong given new technology. To all of this, I heartily agree.

In keeping with the author’s hopes (that the book would also cause us to disagree, but discuss), I also wanted to mention a few things from the book which troubled me. As previously noted, he tells us that this is not a scholarly book, one meant to prescribe or give answers. Yet, he states that the current healthcare system is unethical, the cost of college is unethical, it is unethical to restrict gay marriage, and the ethical thing to do with autonomous cars is to make them available as soon as they can save more lives than with our current system. Agree or disagree with his conclusions, he is prescribing. He does provide plenty of “answers” throughout the book.

In chapter 3, Enríquez addresses those who would absolutely claim to know right from wrong. One of his main areas of focus is religion. He speaks specifically to people of faith who claim to know right from wrong because they know God’s word. He then attempts to show how religious principles too have evolved. He declares, “The religions that survive long-term tend to evolve.” Of interest to Christians, he states that “the Bible, the word of God, and hence Christian ethics, has evolved, or been reinterpreted, since the good old days of the Old Testament.” He cites examples in which Christian ethics have changed over time. Interpretations of passages in the Bible have altered as our society has changed, and as technology has allowed us to communicate more broadly. He cites how Pope Francis has revised how he speaks about various issues. Agree or disagree, these are interesting topics for research and reflection.

But in his zeal to make his point, Enríquez makes certain statements (e.g., “None of the Gospels were written while Jesus was alive, and none by someone who actually met him”) that I don’t believe would be accepted by mainstream Christians. Yes, the Gospels were not written when Jesus was on Earth, but it appears that most Christian scholars believe, for example, that the Apostle John wrote the book of John. (Although Enríquez does admit in the references that his citation supporting this statement is from a rather controversial book.)

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Finally, the author is trying hard to make this ethics book interesting, far from one of those stodgy, dry ethics theory books “that alienate the general reader” (his words). He accomplishes that, but some help from ethicists could be very beneficial. Very early in the book Enríquez states, “Because we never thought we could come close to doing what we take for granted today, we have no framework to deal with changing ethical norms.” The truth is, ethicists have several frameworks available, and Enríquez even uses or suggests a couple of them—perhaps without knowing it.

Near the end of the book, he admonishes the reader to “bring front and center several core principles: modesty, generosity, empathy, civility, humility, compassion, decency, truthfulness ... That is what underlies what we eventually discover to be ethical” (p. 221). This essentially describes what is known as a virtue-ethics framework. Those “core principles” he mentioned are virtues. The virtue-ethics framework simply asks: what would a virtuous person (someone who is compassionate, generous ...) do in this new situation? The second framework is utilitarianism, which asks the question: What would produce the best outcome for the most people? He applies this approach to the authorization of autonomous vehicles and to the discussion of which types of healthcare developments should be prioritized. Both frameworks can be helpful tools for informing tough ethical decisions.

Enríquez brings a wealth of interesting scenarios to this discussion of the future of ethics because of his life experience and work in cutting-edge science. I truly appreciate his desire to write a book that will hold our attention and that is far from a dry textbook on ethics. But the work of those who think about these ideas every day ought to inform the discussion. In glancing through the references, I found only two of hundreds of references that looked to me to be directly related to ethics research. In writing about computer ethics as someone trained in computer science, I have certainly found the literature from those trained in ethics to be enlightening.

This book is an interesting read for those thinking about right and wrong, and this includes people who might not normally be inclined to do so. It can help us realize that we need to re-evaluate frequently and be willing to listen to other points of view with humility. But there is very little information on how to make those tough ethical decisions that we will be continually asked to make. For that, the reader will need to look to other resources.

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THEOLOGY

DIVINE ACTION, DETERMINISM, AND THE LAWS OF NATURE by Jeffrey Koperski. New York: Routledge, 2020. 168 pages. Hardcover; \$160.00. ISBN: 9780367139001. Ebook; open access.

When it comes to talking about God’s action in the world and laws of nature in the science classes I teach, my students sometimes wonder if God, violating the very laws he created, is a problem. Jeffrey Koperski has written a book for those students and for you, too! You can see that Koperski is a teacher well experienced with explaining philosophical ideas to students majoring in anything but philosophy (who form the bulk of our philosophy teaching). This makes his new book a very accessible and enjoyable read. Moreover, no matter your background, you are likely to learn something new reading this book, perhaps even about your favored approach to divine action in the world.

Koperski is right to point out that philosophy of science—particularly philosophy of physics—is missing from most divine action discussions. If it enters at all, philosophy of science makes only cursory contributions. He is also right to observe that the causal closure of the physical, or of nature as a whole, gets too little attention in the divine action literature despite the outsized role it plays. Koperski ably shows why neither causal closure nor determinism are genuine obstacles to divine action in the world. Philosophy of science allows Koperski to clear a lot of this dead brush from the ground of divine action literature. This is an important contribution to the discussions.

Koperski helps us think more accurately about laws of nature (full disclosure: he and I have talked about these issues and tread a lot of the same ground). The assumption or metaphor of laws as “governing” events in nature has been accepted as largely unanalyzed in the divine action literature. Though he rarely uses this language, Koperski shows why the metaphor of laws “governing” things does not stand up to close analysis. He endorses a view of laws functioning as constraints that enables us to think more clearly about how God can act in the world without violating laws.

Koperski describes his model for divine action as decretalist and nonviolationist. The laws that scientists deal with represent divine decrees—gifts of order and constraint to creation. The regularities of creation genuinely exist and genuinely act. Koperski captures a biblical view of God’s relationship to creation; he also considers natural philosophers’ critical thinking about laws in the seventeenth century.