Tech Ethics: Lessons from Anabaptism and Peacebuilding

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ABSTRACT

The legacy of debates on the ethics of technology is long, but the pace at which technologies are harming humans and the planet is accelerating. This article begins by offering an overview of new technologies not originally built as weapons that can be weaponized to cause great harm, and then surveys Anabaptist and peacebuilding ethics that can inform how individuals and communities use technology. Next, the author describes how these ethics can be operationalized to design technologies that anticipate harms and facilitate empathy, dialogue, and deliberation. The article closes by naming specific "tech ethics" emerging from Anabaptism and peacebuilding

Introduction

In the 1600s, early Anabaptist leader Jacob Ammann instructed his followers to reject the use of buttons to fasten clothing. Armed forces used shiny button on their uniforms. Ammann believed the technology of buttons was a prideful, secular mark. Ammann's followers, now called Amish, were instructed to use hook and fastener to bind clothing, which they continue to do today. The Anabaptist Amish, who became known as *Häftlers* (hook-and-eyers), split with the Anabaptist Mennonites, who were known as the *Knöpflers* (button people).

New technologies pride themselves on connecting humanity. Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook (now Meta), describes the technology company's goal as "a social mission to make the world more open and connected."[1] These technologies are like shiny buttons on a military uniform, a mark of secular life with the illusion of connecting the social fabric. While

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[1] Kathleen Chaykowski, "Mark Zuckerberg Gives Facebook a New Mission," *Forbes*, June 22, 2017. https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathleenchaykowski/2017/06/22/mark-zuckerberg-gives-facebook-a-new-mission/?sh=7c5f5d051343, accessed January 19, 2022.

the decorative brass military button was mostly for show, Facebook is less benign. While it does connect people across the planet, it also increases addiction and depression, spreads disinformation, false conspiracies, and hate, and undermines democratic elections. Repressive governments hire troll armies to use social media to attack human rights activists. Facebook is a weapon of mass destruction causing a "techtonic shift" in human relations.[2]

How do Anabaptists today determine how to relate to new technologies like Facebook? This paper begins with a brief overview of new technologies that were not built as weapons but can be weaponized to cause great harm. Next, the paper provides a broad overview of Anabaptist and peacebuilding ethics that can inform how individuals and communities use technology. The paper then describes how these ethics can be operationalized also by engineers working to design new technologies. The paper closes with a list of the tech ethics emerging from Anabaptism and peacebuilding.

Weaponizable Technologies

The legacy of debates on the ethics of technology is long. But the pace at which technologies are harming humans and the planet is accelerating. Before exploring Anabaptist and peacebuilding ethics related to technology, it is important to first appreciate the scope and scale of harms related to technology.

Technology is a potent force in human history. Nuclear technologies provide energy sources but also weapons to kill. The US military funded and helped to build the internet, with the goal of improving communication and coordination in times of crisis, and using digital surveillance on foreign publics.[3] Technologies such as Google, online markets like Amazon, and social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter were designed for non-military, civilian use. People use social media to communicate with family and friends, to spread messages of peace and coexistence, to offer webinars on women's empowerment or preventing gang violence, and to create a sense of shared experience around the world. However, people can also weaponize

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[2] Lisa Schirch, *Social Media Impacts on Conflict and Democracy: The Techtonic Shift* (Sydney: Routledge Press, 2021).

[3] Yasha Levine, "Surveillance Valley: Why are internet companies like Google in bed with cops and spies?," *The Baffler*, February 6, 2018. https://thebaffler.com/.

these technologies to mobilize hate, spread disinformation, organize gang fights, distribute violent pornography, and recruit new members to violent extremist groups. New technologies are low cost and widely accessible, which democratize access to these weapons of mass destruction. Cyber warfare attacks can destroy national health, energy, or transportation infrastructure with little to no warning.[4]

Weaponizable technology such as artificial intelligence and machine learning are unleashing a "post-truth era" where false and inflammatory posts on social media travel faster and further than truth, distorting political processes and polarizing already divided societies. Social media platforms like Facebook profit from surveilling every individual user and creating databanks of psychometric data useful for commercial and political advertisers wanting to target specific audiences to sell their ideas or products.[5]

Artificial intelligence has already exacerbated surveillance and systemic racism and discrimination against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Some scholars describe this as a "super threat" against marginalized groups.[6] In *Race After Technology*, Ruha Benjamin explain how bias and oppression are built into so many of the algorithms technology companies use to optimize profits.[7] States like Russia, China, and Iran are using social media to surveil and repress democracy activists in their own countries with troll armies. Digital authoritarianism is increasing, particularly during the pandemic as government-backed mass surveillance and repression has increased.[8]

New technologies are vastly changing the ways humans communicate and gather information. Compared to legacy media such as radio, television, or print news, a message on social media can travel faster, reaching millions

[4] Jürgen Altmann, *Technology, Arms Control and World Order: Fundamental Change Needed* (Tokyo: Toda Peace Institute, 2020).

[5] Varoon Bashyakarla, "Persuasion by Personality: The Use of Psychometric Profiling in Elections," Tactical Tech, May 18, 2018. https://ourdataourselves.tacticaltech.org/posts/psychometric-profiling/.

[6] Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

[7] Cathy O'Neill, *Weapons of Math Destruction* (New York: Broadway Books, 2017).

[8] Erol Yayboke and Sam Brannen, *Promote and Build: A Strategic Approach to Digital Authoritarianism* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020).

of people around the planet instantaneously. Whereas legacy media's gatekeepers filter public information, digital technologies enable a single person to instantly post a false message about Covid-19 to millions of people across the world. People can use digital technology to post a message on any topic with near total freedom of content, unhampered by editors and with no or low cost.[9] These technologies also allow technology companies and governments to track users' locations, friends, interests, and digital activities. Some governments have used the pandemic to greatly increase social media surveillance and repression of political opponents.[10]

The most popular social media platforms operate on "surveillance capitalism;" a profit model based on extracting private information and selling it to advertisers.[11] Access to most social media platforms is free because users are the product, not the client. Political and corporate advertisers pay platforms for access to users. Platforms collect information from them about their interests and identities. The more information a platform can gather about users, the more they profit. Advertisers are able to target audiences more receptive to their ideas or products, making advertising on social media more effective than on legacy media. Platform designers use neuroscience and psychological research to keep users on platforms longer with emotionally engaging colors and buttons and algorithms that show users sensational content. Some scholars argue social media addiction is built into the design. Algorithms on social media platforms show targeted users highly emotional material such as hate speech, disinformation and conspiracy theories because this material may capture their attention.[12]

Anabaptist Theology Relevant to Technology
People in many religious traditions have wrestled with how to respond to new technologies. Anabaptist ethics toward technology emerge from a repressive historical context. Anabaptists attempted to read both Hebrew and Christian scriptures to inform a theology that reflected more of Jesus'

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[9] Schirch, *Social Media Impacts on Conflict and Democracy.*
[10] Adrian Shahbaz and Allie Funk, *The Pandemic's Digital Shadow* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2020).
[11] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019).
[12] Schirch, *Social Media Impacts on Conflict and Democracy.*

teachings and less of the Empire Christianity reflected in both Catholic and Protestant theologies. Anabaptists rejected the widespread notion that belief alone was sufficient. For them, scriptures informed both theological beliefs and practical ethics for living in the world. Anabaptist theology and ethics are relevant to technology in at least three ways.

First, Anabaptists demanded the "priesthood of all believers," which was a sort of self-determination to interpret the scriptures. They rejected the authority of both Protestant and Catholic leaders, believing these leaders' interests in holding political power distorted their interpretation of scripture. Anabaptists believed individuals should decide for themselves what they believed and not be forcibly baptized as infants. Anabaptists get their name from their opposition to infant baptism and their insistence on adult baptism, as only adults may decide for themselves what they believe and if they want to follow Jesus' teachings. Anabaptists demanded agency and empowerment to read the scriptures, to do their own theology to interpret them, and to determine the ethical implications of scriptures in their life. This ethic of human agency has relevance for assessing technologies today, because new weaponizable technologies, described in the next section, too often undermine human capacities by attempting to manipulate and surveil.

Second, Anabaptists developed an ethic of nonconformity to the world. They questioned political and religious authorities but trusted the Anabaptist community and its process of deliberation and dialogue to make decisions on both theology and ethics. Anabaptists came to see the outside world as a threat to their church. This countercultural status plays out differently among different types of Anabaptists, as is discussed below. Mennonite pacifism and peacebuilding based on the ethic of enemy love and doing good to others continues quietly around the world despite its resistance to the methods of modern state warfare. This ethic of nonconformity has relevance for how people use technologies today, recognizing that collective action is necessary to address the growing tide of disinformation and hateful rhetoric on social media technologies.

Third, Anabaptist theology emphasized Jesus' teachings in Matthew 5-7 on loving enemies and doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. Anabaptists believed this teaching needed to be translated into their lives by refusing to harm others and refusing to fight on behalf of the

church. Anabaptist theology on these texts has evolved over the centuries from nonresistance, a refusal to fight in state wars, to an embrace of pacifism, which is more than just a refusal to fight. Pacifism is literally an active love of peace. Some Anabaptists have pursued the practical implications of Matthew 5-7 to call for nonviolent action to address injustice and active peacemaking to prevent or reduce violent conflict. Mennonite peacebuilding and conflict transformation emerged from this evolution of Anabaptist theology and ethics of loving enemies and doing good. The peacebuilding field centers this ethic by seeking inclusion and empowerment to ensure that all people have dignity and agency. This ethic of building peace has relevance for designing technologies today that could build social cohesion and reduce polarization between groups.

Anabaptist and Peacebuilding Approaches to Tech Ethics
Anabaptists apply these three ethics in distinct ways. Each of these offers insight and is relevant to applying Anabaptist ethics to technology.

First, some conservative Anabaptists, such as the Amish and Bruderhof, apply a strict review of any new technology to evaluate its impact on the community before the technology is adopted for use. They seek to be faithful through practicing nonconformity by separating themselves from society, and judge technologies in part by the impact they will have on secularizing their community or breaking their internal relationships with each other. These 'plain' Anabaptists are not naïve, or anti-technology Luddites. They are careful and prefer to choose technologies only with the test of time to decide whether they will benefit or harm their communities. While television is forbidden, washing machines may be allowed. While owning cars is forbidden, hiring someone else for transportation to the hospital is not. Some technologies impact the community's need for collective work together, while others do not. The community decides which technologies are accepted and which are not. The Amish and Bruderhof approach to technology can be described as "Go slow, be careful, and check with the community."[13]

Second, some progressive branches of Anabaptist Mennonites have

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[13] Donald B. Kraybill, Karen M. Johnson-Wiener, and Steven M. Nolt, "Technology," in *The Amish* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013), 312-44.

tended to adopt new technologies without intensive community review but rather with a more individualized ethic that evaluates potential harms or unintended consequences of technology. Mennonites concerned about living simply and environmental sustainability, for example, may eschew expensive cars in favor of bicycles. Some Mennonites judge technologies based on their impacts on the wider human community. A Mennonite-based organization known as Project Ploughshares, for example, grew out of concerns for the impact of technological warfare such as nuclear weapons.

Third, conservative and progressive Anabaptists participate in peacebuilding, defined here as efforts to build bridges across social divisions and to foster social cohesion and social justice.[14] Mennonites, Amish, and Bruderhof often emphasize Jesus' teachings on loving enemies and refusing to use violence against others, despite significant departures from this ethic related to German Nationalism, Nazism, antisemitism, and racism found in the Anabaptist community.[15] The Amish have a record of forgiveness of those who have attacked their community. The Bruderhof have supported reconciliation movements in a variety of countries. Mennonites have an active peace and justice ministry, and academic programs in peacebuilding. Anabaptist ethics are also reflected in the field of peacebuilding. These ethics are not unique to Anabaptist peacebuilding. There is nothing exclusively Anabaptist or Christian about building relationships and peace between people. Peacebuilding is the work of all religions.

As noted earlier, the Latin root of the word "religion" communicates the social function of religion to connect people. Technology companies like Facebook say they also have this mission to "connect the world." Peacebuilding brings an ethic that technology should serve humanity and should build social cohesion. Social cohesion builds public trust in the legitimacy of institutions and community norms and laws. For example, Anabaptist-affiliated Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo hosts the "Peacetech Living-Learning Community" where students study ethical frameworks focused on how the design and evaluation of

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[14] Lisa Schirch, "Eight Ways to Strengthen Mennonite Peacebuilding," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 35, no. 3 (2017): 361-84.

[15] Benjamin Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017).

technologies impacts human relationships and communities.

Peacebuilding insists that there are no humans with more value than others. Racism, sexism, antisemitism, classism, ageism, homophobia, and all other forms of discrimination degrade human agency and dignity. For Anabaptists, a theology of peacebuilding denounces these offences but commits to active work toward full human dignity for all. Peacebuilding pays attention to and advocates for the well-being of the oppressed. This ethic is relevant to technology by insisting that it should protect human dignity. For example, researchers have written extensively about how technology algorithms at Google or Amazon seem to reinforce racism and denigrate human dignity.[16]

Peacebuilding walks toward conflict and difference, not away from it. Peacebuilding begins with active listening to an opponent. Anabaptists point to this ethic as stemming from Jesus's modeling and teaching to love those who are different from us or do us harm. Jesus did not live within the purity paradigm that kept others away from people considered "unpure," such as people of different ethnic groups, women, tax collectors, and prostitutes. Listening and acknowledging another person's experiences changes the dynamics of conflict, creating an opening for transformation. These ethics have relevance to the ways people are using new technologies to cause harm. Technology should enable listening and social justice for all. Peacebuilding groups such as Build Up are experimenting with how to use technologies to support efforts to help people listen to and engage with people who are different.[17]

Applying Tech Ethics

Technology companies have at least three ethical responsibilities related to peacebuilding and Anabaptist ethics discussed in this article. First, technology companies are responsible for anticipating possible harms that might occur as a result of the design of their products. Second, they are responsible for designing products that serve the good of humanity.

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[16] Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2018).
[17] Anooj Bhandari, "The Commons: Where are we at in 2021?", Medium, 2021. https://medium.com/.

Third, they are accountable for harms that occur as a result of intentional or unintentional product design.

These three ethics form the core of a new field of "peace engineering," which is an emerging nexus between technology, engineering, and peacebuilding. Whether designing a social media platform, a city, a building, a healthcare system, or a mask to wear during a pandemic, new technologies and inventions impact relationships between people.[18] Peace engineering uses an interdisciplinary approach that employs "the application of science and engineering principles to promote and support peace," as defined by the International Federation of Educational Engineering Societies (IFEES). Engineers themselves developed the concept of peace engineering[19] as they witnessed the unintended impacts of their efforts, and they envisioned what engineering might look like if it set out to have positive impacts on human relations.[20] A new engineered product or technology can alter the dynamics of a community, either creating more conflict or improving intergroup relationships. The primary goals of peace engineering are to create new products or technologies that prevent, mitigate, and help people recover from violence and support sustainable community well-being.

Designing Technologies that Anticipate Harms

The first ethic of any innovation is to anticipate potential harms. All human behavior may cause unintentional harm. The fields of medicine and humanitarian assistance, for example, invest significant resources in assessment and planning to avoid unintended consequences. The concepts of "do no harm" shape medical ethics as well as many other fields. The concept of "conflict sensitivity" refers to the use of assessment tools to anticipate how a new program or technology might negatively impact a particular

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[18] Alpaslan Ozerdem and Lisa Schirch, "Peace engineering in a complex pandemic world," in Richard Rubenstein, ed., *Conflict Resolution after the Pandemic* (Sydney: Routledge, 2021).

[19] Engineering schools around the world are offering new courses and graduate degrees in peace engineering. Examples in the U.S. are Drexel University, University of St. Thomas, University of New Mexico, University of Colorado, and University of Texas at El Paso.

[20] Darshan Mukesh Arvinda Karwat, "Engineering for the People: Putting Peace, Social Justice, and Environmental Protection at the Heart of All Engineering," *Frontiers of Engineering: Reports on Leading-Edge Engineering from the 2018 Symposium* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2018).

context. Conflict sensitivity starts by analyzing the local context (such as the country in which a social media platform operates) to anticipate ways the platform may be abused or contribute to social divisions or violence within that context. Social media companies can use conflict assessment tools to advance their capacity for conflict sensitivity.

Design principles can anticipate and attempt to reduce harms with assessment tools to design new technologies that take into consideration these questions: Who are the stakeholders who will be affected by a new technology? What in the wider context might be affected by it? What are potential unintended impacts of it? What can be done to minimize potential harmful impacts of an engineered solution? These questions reflect the Anabaptist ethics of human agency and dignity by including more voices in assessing technology impacts on human relationships.

A variety of organizations are producing ethical guidelines for technology companies to assess their impacts. For example, the UN has produced a series of reports that relate human rights laws to technology products. The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University directs a program on Ethics in Technology Practice and publishes "ethics toolkits" aimed at technology companies.[21] The Toda Peace Institute in partnership with JustPeace Labs produced a review of ethical guidelines for PeaceTech.[22]

Designing Technologies that Facilitate Empathy, Dialogue, and Deliberation
No engineering project is neutral. Engineers typically design products with principles such as profitability, ease of use, improving quality of life, cost effectiveness, and visual attractiveness. As corporations often focus on profit with little care for other impacts of their products, a socially responsible business community has emerged to promote a "triple bottom line" that includes assessing the impact of a product on "people, planet and profit."[23]

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[21] Shannon Vallor, Brian Green, and Irina Raicu, "Ethics in Technology Practice: A Toolkit," 2018. Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. https://www.scu.edu/.

[22] Jennifer Easterday, Hana Ivanhoe, and Lisa Schirch, "Comparing Guidance for Tech Companies in Fragile and Conflict Affected Situations." Tokyo: Toda Peace Institute, 2021. https://toda.org/.

[23] John Elkington, "25 Years Ago I Coined the Phrase 'Triple Bottom Line.' Here's Why It's

Peace engineering introduces two additional sets of design principles: to reduce violent conflict, and to maximize social cohesion or "peace." These principles reflect the Anabaptist ethics of human agency, dignity, and enemy love.

Peacebuilders also have recognized the limits of their practice. If the design of a social media platform can dramatically increase or decrease levels of violence, peace, and social cohesion, then peacebuilders need to be talking with tech engineers. Paul Heidebrecht at Conrad Grebel University College's Kindred Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement notes that the innovation process itself is a critical location for bringing ethics to technology design. The culture, norms, and process of innovation is a critical location for engaging engineers and entrepreneurs about ethics. Reflecting on the "tech for good" industry, Heidebrecht rightly asks how to define what is good for society and who has the power to evaluate what is good.[24]

The Center for Humane Technology (CHT) aims to inspire "humane design" of social media technology. CHT is encouraging a "design renaissance" that emphasizes "non-extraction-based design decisions and business models" that might empower people to manage their attention toward activities that benefit the social good, both personal and collective. Unlike social media platforms that have a profit motive to keep users on the platform longer, companies like Microsoft, Apple, and Samsung that make the devices that run social media platforms could design safeguards for human security since their profit model does not depend upon users sharing information online. Technology companies can design their products to protect our minds and society, and to enhance human capacity for "time well spent" rather than distraction.[25]

Peace engineering design principles begin with conflict analysis or assessment.[26] Conflict analysis provides a structured research method to determine who holds a stake in a new technology, what interests motivate

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Time to Rethink It," *Harvard Business Review*, 2018. https://hbr.org/2018/06/.

[24] Paul Heidebrecht, "Peacebuilding and the Norms of Technological Change." Tokyo: Toda Peace Institute, 2021. https://toda.org/.

[25] Center for Humane Technology (2020). http://humanetech.com/problem, accessed January 19, 2022.

[26] Lisa Schirch, *Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning: A Participatory Approach to Human Security* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013).

them, what forms of power they leverage with or over other stakeholders, what grievances or interests they aim to address, and when and where they are affected by a new technology. Design principles for maximizing social cohesion and peace include the following questions: What divisions already exist within the community or society that will be impacted by a new technology? How will a new technology impact those most marginalized in a society? How can a new technology help to foster social cohesion, human rights, and dignity of each member of the community? How can a new technology help to promote a shared vision and increase social cohesion?

To answer some of these questions, technology companies could consult with experts who specialize in peacebuilding, facilitation, dialogue, and social cohesion.[27] Social media platforms can be designed or redesigned to better serve humanity. Technology companies can use their vast power, resources, and influence to distribute digital media literacy products to educate, socialize, and remind people of key lessons. Such literacy can also take the form of national programs, radio spots, television spots, and public service campaigns on topics such as responding to fact-checking, regulating emotions, confronting hate speech, and depolarizing by listening and building rapport before seeking to persuade.[28]

Accountability for Harms

Who holds technology companies accountable for harms to society? The companies and their shareholders are ultimately responsible for preventing and addressing harms. Some technology companies are working toward ethical frameworks. Microsoft's "Digital Peace Now" campaign urges governments to protect human rights. Microsoft's Digital Civility campaign asks tech users to sign onto four principles: live the golden rule; respect differences; pause before replying; and stand up for [oneself] and others.[29]

But without civil society and government oversight, technology companies may not be motivated to hold themselves accountable for public

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[27] Lydia Laurenson, "Polarisation and Peacebuilding Strategy on Digital Media Platforms: Current Strategies and Their Discontents." Tokyo: Toda Peace Institute, 2019. https://toda.org/.

[28] Schirch, *Social Media Impacts on Conflict and Democracy*.

[29] Digital Civility Challenge (Microsoft, 2020). https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/digital-skills/digital-civility?activetab=dci_reports:primaryr5.

harms. Some governments are actively seeking to address social media threats with new regulations and initiatives to support digital literacy. The scale of social media threats requires a global regulatory policy and framework to address the relatively unchecked power of technology companies. Some governments are using new cyber laws to further repress civil society. Government regulation should ensure global humanitarian principles for digital space so that any new legislation is respectful of human rights and freedom of expression.

The Center for Humane Technology (CHT) is developing proposals for governments to put "attention extraction on their balance sheets and create better protections for consumers."[30] Yale Law School professor Jack Balkin argues that social media companies should be treated as "information fiduciaries" to protect and care for the public's access to accurate information.[31] The need for regulation is gaining traction. French President Emmanuel Macron, Microsoft, and other technology companies launched the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace.[32] Microsoft is calling for a Digital Geneva Convention that would create new international rules to protect the public from state threats in cyberspace.[33] Others call for a Digital Social Contract.[34]

Social media companies could be required to acquire a government license to operate. Increased regulation might require that technology companies fund a "risk audit" for operating in every country. The companies' ignorance often seems paired with an arrogance about not knowing what they do not know. A risk audit would require extensive consultations to listen to a wide range of stakeholders with diverse experiences and abilities to anticipate negative impacts. Governments could participate in calculating and pricing insurance premiums for social media companies based on

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[30] Center for Humane Technology, 2020. https://www.humanetech.com/, accessed January 19, 2022.

[31] Jack Balkin, *Information Fiduciaries and the First Amendment* (Yale Law School Faculty Scholarship Series, 2016).

[32] Arthur P.B. Laudrain, "Avoiding a World War Web: The Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace," *Lawfare*, December 4, 2018. https://www.lawfareblog.com/.

[33] Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, "Why We Need a Digital Geneva Convention," *Diplomatic Courier*, April 23, 2018. https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/.

[34] Digital Social Contract, 2020: https://digitalsocialcontract.net/.

the financial impact and risk of chaos, violence, and political instability stemming from their business. Regulation might include user protections and requirements for hotlines to respond to crises such as posts threatening violence. Some countries have already brought lawsuits against social media companies as a result of company failures to comply with legal standards.

Governments could also tax social media companies based on their impact on violence or democratic institutions. Legislators could justify taxation because social media platforms spread social and political "information pollution" or disinformation that undermines social relationships and political institutions. Taxes could be channeled to fund not-for-profit offline news sources, including public-access news, information "trusts," and civic media. Just as polluting corporations have to pay taxes toward funds that go to clean up air and water pollution, social media companies could be taxed for their contribution to information pollution, since a functioning democracy requires information.[35]

Civil Society's Digital Peacebuilding

Civil society is already implementing peacebuilding ethics to address threats from new social media technologies. Some civil society groups are promoting digital media literacy to help the public use technology with a greater understanding of how it works and how to detect disinformation. For example, the peacebuilding NGO Search for Common Ground developed a "cyberguardian" program in Sri Lanka to promote empower youth to combat hate speech online.[36] Some civil society groups are developing memes, bots, or digital content that fosters greater social cohesion. For example, the Toda Peace Institute's Digital Peace Factory offered cash prizes for the public to create memes that supported social cohesion during the 2020 US election.[37]

Civil society can also be involved in helping to ensure that technology

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[35] Lisa Schirch, *Mapping Responses to Social Media Threats.* Tokyo: Toda Peace Institute, 2019. https://toda.org/policy-briefs-and-resources/policy-briefs/mapping-responses-to-social-media-threats.html, accessed January 19, 2022.

[36] Ramanaish Katheravelu, "Cyber Guardians: Empowering youth to combat online hate speech in Sri Lanka." https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SFCG-Sri_Lanka_Cyber_Guardians_Final_Evaluation_2020.pdf.

[37] Toda Peace Institute, Digital Peace Factory, 2020: https://www.facebook.com/DigitalPeaceFactoryUS.

contributes to the public good. The peacebuilding organization Build Up is experimenting with depolarization initiatives on Twitter and Facebook in their program called The Commons.[38] In western Europe, tens of thousands of volunteer "upstanders" support victims of digital harassment and misogynist, racist, and anti-immigrant hate speech in the #IchBinHier (#Iamhere) civil society movement.[39] In Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine, civil society movements counter Russian troll farms that plant false and divisive stories on social media. Russia's goal is to undermine democratic institutions and increase polarization. Lithuania's volunteer citizen army of "Elves" works together to protect themselves against Russian "industrial-scale disinformation."[40] These are just a sampling of the many ways civil society peacebuilding groups are innovating responses to digital threats.

Conclusion

This article has identified how Anabaptist theology and peacebuilding ethics are relevant for addressing technological threats to human health and safety, and has reviewed several specific ethics to consider:

1. Ensure a tech ethic of human agency to ensure that technologies do not undermine human capacities by attempting to manipulate and surveil.

2. Practice an individual and community ethic of nonconformity by evaluating potential harms or unintended consequences of technology and to evaluate its impact on the community before the technology is adopted for use.

3. Commit to a tech ethic of building peace today fosters

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[38] Build Up, "The Commons: an intervention to depolarize political conversations on Twitter and Facebook in the USA," 2019. https://howtobuildup.medium.com/.

[39] Jessica Bateman, "'#IAmHere': The people trying to make Facebook a nicer place," BBC, June 10, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-48462190, accessed January 19, 2022.

[40] Kim Sengupta, "Meet the Elves, Lithuania's digital citizen army confronting Russian trolls," *Independent* (UK), July 17, 2019. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/lithuania-elves-russia-election-tampering-online-cyber-crime-hackers-kremlin-a9008931.html, accessed January 19, 2022.

relationships, dignity, and builds social cohesion to reduce polarization between groups.

The final section of the article has argued that these ethics can be operationalized by designing technologies that anticipate harms and facilitate empathy, dialogue, and deliberations, and by holding technology companies accountable for the harms that do happen. Like the shiny buttons on military uniforms, new technologies appeal to the human desire for social affirmation and recognition. Humans seem to love new gadgets, especially ones that make life easier or more enjoyable. But when problems of addiction, hate speech, polarization, and violent extremism first started showing up on social media, some observers rushed to argue that the problems of these technologies could be fixed with more technology. While this may be true in part, humans are not likely to prevent these harms through technology alone. *

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