# The Incompatibility of Values

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> Realizing that technology is one of the major characteristics of our time, and keenly aware of the moral problems that attend the applications of technology, the Technion—the Israel Institute of Technology—invited some intellectual leaders of the Western world to consider ways of thought and behavior, individual and societal, that might alleviate the present crisis. The idea was to survey the social, political, economic, and perhaps most important, the moral abyss into which Western civilization seemed to be slipping, without any footholds to stay its descent.
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> A representative group of major thinkers thus was gathered for an international symposium titled "Ethics in an Age of Pervasive Technology," held in Haifa and Jerusalem in December 1974. This symposium, also known as the Wunsch conference, was the eleventh event in a series of annual lectures established at the Technion by Dr. Joseph W. Wunsch of New York. The specific aim of the symposium was to examine the role of ethics in the modern world—a world characterized by pervasive technology—through an interdisciplinary approach. Humanists, social scientists, engineers, and natural scientists, were included.

*Excerpt from p. 2 of Melvin Kranzberg's Introduction*

Sir Isaiah Berlin of Wolfson College at Oxford pointed out the complexity of the problems involved by asking if certain cherished values might not actually be incompatible with one another.

THE FACT IS that certain values may be incompatible. For example, efficiency and spontaneity may be difficult to reconcile, as perhaps equality and liberty are difficult to reconcile. Perhaps even knowledge and happiness are difficult to reconcile in certain respects. This question of the incompatibility of values impinged upon the consciousness of humankind extremely late, and it perhaps makes certain problems appear unsolvable. Very few persons ever raised this question before the nineteenth century. Yet our symposium is concerned about such questions as whether the progress of technology is compatible with certain basic moral principles.

In the nineteenth century, Saint-Simon firmly asserted that technologists should be allowed to pursue the truth at the expense, say, of human rights. If humankind were to be properly organised, the idea of human rights must, of course, be removed; for Saint-Simon there are no human rights, there is only the right to be properly organised into a coherent rational whole. If people prove obstructive, if they resist on the grounds of no matter what principles, their objections must be ignored, or, at any rate, set aside. Saint-Simon had no doubts about that.

However, later thinkers did have doubts, and we have doubts today. The notion that there might be conflicts of interests and **[33]** values that would lead, at best, to some kind of imperfect and untidy compromise is something that does not seem to have been explicit before the beginning of the nineteenth century. History is full of examples of highly rational schemes that were believed, adopted, to some extent implemented, and against which people rebelled, feeling that their moral principles or human rights were being trampled on or impinged upon, or that in some way they were being over-compartmentalised by being fitted into some awful block universe without sufficient reason.

This, I think, is perhaps what happened toward the end of the fourth century BC in Greece, when, against the intellectual philosophy of the Socratic schools, there was an increase in belief in occultism, in all kinds of irrational doctrines, rites and mystery cults. These religious movements are perhaps responsible to some extent for the rise of Christian beliefs. Some such reaction may be equally responsible for the antinomian movements in the Middle Ages, and for the rise of Romanticism at a later date. This may explain the rise of all kinds of revolt, and movements in our own day against what is regarded as the suffocating effect of efforts to plan centrally and to organise humankind in accordance with a rational schema.