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“The Digital Explosion: Saving the Human Race From Itself”—Response

In Blown to Bits, by Hal Abelson, Ken Ledeen, and Harry Lewis, the authors proclaim that “the key to managing the ethical and moral consequences of technology while nourishing economic growth is to regulate the use of technology without banning or restricting its creation” (14). At first glance, this statement appears broad and careless for, of course, there are some technologies so dangerous they should never be created. Almost every action movie ever made involves the creation of a super weapon and the danger of it falling into the wrong hands (LaSalle)(Lane)(Scott). However, upon closer inspection there are two main reasons why this concern is not as large as it first appears to be.

Firstly, the authors do not make their claim in a vacuum. Instead, they do it in the broader context of the world we live in, understanding that there already are agencies and organizations whose sole purpose is the regulation of new technology. One such group is, of course, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Before a new drug is approved for production it goes through rigorous testing from the FDA in order to be sure that said drug is safe for public use. When a company wants to sell consumers a generic drug that drug must first be tested by the in order to ensure it is identical to the brand name drug in terms of “active ingredients,” “strength, dosage form and route of administration,” the medical condition it treats, rate of absorption into bloodstream, and “identity, purity and quality” as well as being “manufactured under the same strict standards that FDA demands of brand-name drugs” (“Generic Drugs Undergo Rigorous FDA Scrutiny”). When the authors say that the “key…is to regulate…without banning or restricting…creation,” they do not mean that there should be no regulation before technology is released to the public at all, for it is obvious that there already exist many organizations whose only job is to do just that and without them our world would undoubtedly be a more dangerous place.

The second reason that the fear of too little regulation is problematic is simply that excessive fear and overregulation is also a major concern that can completely stagnate economic growth and infringe upon personal freedom. My partner provided many frightening examples of what can happen as a result of under regulation. However, almost all of his examples were in areas not directly connected to the internet technology Blown to Bits discusses. To provide an example connected directly to the world of computer technology, many people intimately familiar to the field of computer technology such as Bill Gates, Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk have publicly stated that they believe one day, computers will become smarter than humans (Eadicicco) (Luckerson). Despite this, we continue to develop ever more powerful computers in order to better the daily lives of people around the world because the benefits we reap are real and concrete, while the possible negatives are unproven and as of yet nothing but ideas. Regulation of dangerous technology is vital, but take regulation too far and we may end up ceasing to develop any new technologies and stagnating our economic development and limiting personal freedom simply due to an irrational fear of the unknown.
Works Cited