

Editorial



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Driven by their emergent and convergent nature, dual use or misuse or unintended use dominate much of the sociopolitical discourse around emerging technologies. Technology assessment in its various forms tries to find a balance between the promises and perils of emerging technologies using various hard and soft tools of governance. Very little attention is devoted to ‘creative malevolent use’, the subject of the Special topic in this issue of TATuP. Several factors contribute to this negligence, not the least of which is the absence of a working definition and an accompanying argument why it warrants special considerations.


First, as Cropley, Kaufman, and Cropley have noted, malevolent creativity shares the same five characteristics as benevolent creativity in terms of relevance, effectiveness, novelty, elegance, and generalizability. What separates the former is its antisocial origin and disrespect for social convention. This combination, when successful, produces a catastrophic impact, effectiveness of which decays exponentially once novelty factor is revealed, and counter measures take hold.

An example of creative malevolent use would be the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when technology intended for air travel was turned into weapons of mass devastation. The novelty and effectiveness of the malevolent use was short lived and decayed in matter of hours when alerted passengers intervened to prevent the fourth aircraft turned weapon in reaching its intended target. Nevertheless, the impact of the three successful and one failed malevolent use of technology was history bending.

Second, malevolent creative use is generally accomplished through a unique combination of technology, application, organization, and imagination that exploits technological and social vulnerabilities. It renders powerless much more sophisticated technology-based countermeasures as was the case most recently on October 7 of last year.

Having established their distinction and criticality, the question becomes how should we identify, assess, and mitigate creative malevolent use of emerging technologies? The answer seems to lie with anticipatory governance with its elements of scenario driven foresight, engagement, and integration, however with one caveat. The process needs to start not with an emergent technology looking for malevolent use but with an intractable sociopolitical problem where technological innovation could disturb the status quo in ways plausible but not socially acceptable.

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