

Work Sheet #1

Exploring the Value Non-Neutrality of Technological Systems and Their Development

**Discussion for “Searching for Christian Values That Could Redeem Technological Systems:
Complications, Challenges, Commitments”**

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Redeeming Technology, Session 2.

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According to Jacques Ellul’s studies of the value of efficiency that pervades modern technological systems and forms what seeks to be a comprehensive technological environment, there are three “techno-values” that are constantly being engaged in order to seek technological applicability and prompt innovative developments. Those values are always put into the superlative register, and so identified as

- The fastest,
- Having the most impact (the “most impactful”),
- The cheapest.

These three pre-eminent values associated with “efficiency” are normally not balanced, and so will be adjusted in order to meet various technical requirements, perceived desires of consumers, and adjustment to innovations in relevant technological research and applications. Assessments such as these always involve these three values, values that dominate the way techno-thinking proceeds, and so also replace or de-emphasize other values. Consider the following assessments of some of our modern gadgets that reflect various ways these three key values interact and guide the production of those gadgets.

Discuss the relative “strengths” and “weaknesses” (in reference to the three key techno-values) of

- (1) Your current and past cell phones
- (2) Your preferred brands of laptops / iPads
- (3) Your chosen brand of eyeglasses
- (4) Your / your family’s preferred breakfast and its components
- (5) Your preferred form of travel within Hong Kong (mass transit, taxis, private transportation)

Work Sheet #2

Reflecting on Techno-Values and Their Relationship to Christian Value Systems

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Whenever the three key techno-values associated with the “technological environment” (Ellul, *What I Believe* (1989)) begin to dominate our worldviews and mundane lifestyle practices, they set up challenges to any other values that might be preferred due to emphases that include humane concern, spiritual commitments, and compassionate engagement. Here below are some thought experiments that can help us sense how and where those challenges arise, and what their implications are.

- I. How do the three techno-values “fit”, “work with” or “contrast with”
 - Loving the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strengths? (Matt. 22: 37)
 - Loving our neighbours as ourselves? (Matt. 22: 39)

Identify where you and others can locate points of shared commitments between the three key techno-values and these major imperatives in Christian spirituality, and where there are significant tensions between them.

- II. Consider the forms of life blessed by our Redeemer in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5: 3-12). Which ones are not so easily aligned with the three key techno-values?
 - Poverty in / impoverishment of spirit
 - Mourning
 - Meekness
 - Hungering and thirsting for righteousness
 - Being merciful
 - Attaining purity of heart
 - Becoming peacemakers
 - Being persecuted for righteousness’ sake

III. Consider the value alignments or contrasting tensions created by applying the three key techno-values to the following lists of Christian virtues and cross-cultural values promoted in Christian spiritual engagements with people and cultures in which Christians live.

(A) Compare and contrast the three key techno-values with the list of Christian virtues known as the “fruit” or “harvest” of the Holy Spirit characteristic of vital Christian relationships and communities (Galatians 5: 22-23):

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

(B) Compare and contrast the three key techno-values with the following list of values promoted by the Apostle Paul as worthy of Christian emphasis in cross-cultural contexts (Philippians 4: 8):

- Whatever is true
- Whatever is noble
- Whatever is right
- Whatever is pure
- Whatever is lovely
- Whatever is admirable
- If anything is excellent
- If anything is praiseworthy

Work Sheet #3

Reconsidering the Impacts of Techno-Values in Larger Socio-Political Contexts

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Our “technological environment” (Ellul, *What I Believe* (1989)) manifests a domineering and ubiquitous presence within our normal ways of thinking, acting, and relating within modernizing societies. Most of those studying these phenomena sociologically, philosophically, historically, and scientifically realize that the technological systems that constitute elements within this larger technological environment have numerous “hidden agendas” and are created for specific purposes that have numerous embedded values inherent within the processes of their development, refinement, and promotion.

Consider, for example, various contexts where we, our families, our friends, our church communities, our students, our fellow-workers, engage in these technological systems within the following institutions and/or activities:

- Preferred forms of amusement / recreation,
- Classroom etiquette and the degrees of cooperation / conflict within student-led research groups,
- Various kinds of educational assessment at the university level,
- Protocol and online procedures for seeking research funding,
- Recent controversies (2007-2009) of anthropologists joining in Afghanistan war efforts as “counter-insurgency agents” seeking to overcome enmity and “gain strategic information”,
- Other kinds of military funding promoting practical research related to medicine, engineering, nutrition, and jet travel.

Having explored these various realms and their complexities, then consider how these various institutions and activities promote or contrast with “the acts of the sinful nature (‘flesh’) (Gal. 5:19-21):

sexual immorality

hatred

dissentions

impurity

discord

factions

debauchery

jealousy

envy

idolatry

fits of rage

drunkenness

witchcraft

selfish ambition

orgies

Work Sheet #4

Moving Toward Christian-Inspired Commitments in the Midst of Our Technical Environment

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If we have now discerned the “dangers” and threatening aspects of the three dominant techno-values as they have impacts on our personal, relational, communal, institutional and cross-cultural lives, then we can begin to consider (1) points of resistance to the negative impacts of those values, (2) areas of reconsideration and the interactive creation of alternative Christian ways of living within technological systems, and (3) issues of public concern that may mobilize our efforts to institutionalize new ways of engaging our compatriots regarding various questions related to social justice, proper care for the poor, elderly and desperately needy, legal freedoms, etc.

In terms of “resistance”, how would a commitment of taking “techno-fasts” (choosing to stop using certain time-consuming forms of mobile portals into internet for social communication, and informing others that one intends to do so for a designated period of time or for specific days each week) complicate, enhance, and / or transform one’s own / one’s family’s / one’s workplace relationships?

Wise lifestyles normally involve balancing the various aspects of our lives so that we privilege what is most important to us and subsequently relegate other values / concerns to a less important dimension of our weekly schedules and the various mediated forms of relational commitments. How can considering the Lord’s will as it applies to the following realms of our modern lifestyles guide us toward creating alternative Christian ways of living within our current lifeworlds? Consider these matters in relationship to

- (1) Our preferred entertainments / games / playtime / recreational activities,
- (2) Our relationships with spouses and immediate family members,
- (3) Our concerns for extended family members,
- (4) Our efforts to enhance the Christian qualities within our spiritual communities,
- (5) Our striving for spiritual fruitfulness in all the relationships mentioned above,
- (6) Our relationships with colleagues where we work,
- (7) Our responsibilities with our students and subordinates .