Session 4.2: Redeeming Communication Technology
7th April 2018

Title: **Christianity and Technology: The Uneasy Connection**
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Robert Fortner received his B.A. degree from Otterbein College in Westerville, OH, his M.A. from Indiana University in Bloomington, IN, and his Ph.D. from the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, IL. His dissertation focused on the cultural history of the development of communications technologies in Canada until 1920 and he has published additional essays since then on the development of both radio and television systems there. His scholarly interests include international communication, media ethics, political economy of communications, and technological development. Most recently he published a co-authored book on *World Media Ethics*, published in 2017 by Wiley, and he has been working on the issues raised for our understanding of humanity by digital technologies that exhibit characteristics long thought to be the province of humankind. He has conducted field work in twenty-two countries and taught classes, seminars, and workshops in a like number.

Abstract:
Christians, especially evangelically-minded Christians, have long approached communications technologies from a perspective of mythological expectation. Even the telegraph, as it arrived in one American city after another, was accompanied by Sunday sermons on how it would finally allow the entire world to hear the gospel. We have never let go of that expectation. But technology is a double-edged sword, bringing both benefit and harm in its wake. How is it to be redeemed, then? There are several demands that we must place on ourselves. First is not to get caught up in the technophile-technophobe debate that is promoted by inventors and the media. Second is to dive below the patina that this debate deposits on technological reality and inquire into the underlying logic of each technology. And third is to ask ourselves what the consequences are for faith, identity, and humanity itself when new technologies are widely adopted. Concentrating on these three aspects of technological development will lead, I think, to a more accurate appraisal of technological change and help us anticipate its fundamental demands on human beings.

Reading:

- "Conflicting Visions of Technology" Mary Tiles and Hans Oberdiek. Article #22 in Scharff and Dusek.
- "Philosophy of Technology at the Crossroads: Critique of Heidegger and Borgmann" Andrew Feenberg. Article #31 in Scharff and Dusek.
- "Media, Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, and Human-Computer Interfaces: Implications for Human Flourishing" Robert S. Fortner (2017) 12th International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, Hiroshima. [Available here](#).