

# Technology, Society, and Christian Ethics

Theology 2481-151  
Spring 2008  
MWF 12:00-12:50  
Bellarmine 217  
St. Joseph's University

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1:00-2:00 & by appointment

Christianity has had an on-again, off-again relationship with technology throughout history. Technologies have often been deemed “on” or “off” based primarily on a simple estimate of the effectiveness of that particular technology as a tool for winning souls and ensuring faithfulness. Yet, there is more at stake in technology than the state of our immortal souls. Anyone who has been annoyed by someone else’s loud cell phone conversation, frightened by the recall of one’s car, or shocked at the amount of personal and private information that can be found on the web knows that this is true. Technology brings about a great deal of joy and suffering in this life, not just the next.

This course is designed to engage students in critical reflection on technology, its role in human lives, and its impact on society. The course will focus its reflections on technology and ethics using three overarching sets of questions. First, how should we think about the morality of technology? Are technologies purely instrumental, receiving moral aspect through how they are used, or do they have moral species in and of themselves? Second, what aspects of technology are relevant to assessing its moral use and character? What must be considered when judging the morality of technologies and their use in society? Third, how do particular technologies and technology-using practices influence Christianity? How does life in technological society transform what it might mean to live as a Christian in the 21st century?

This course will engage the intersection of technology, society, and Christian ethics from three angles. First, the course will examine a variety of ideas of the nature of technology. Second, the course will use the resources available within the discipline of Christian social ethics to assist understanding and evaluation of the moral implications of technology. Third, the course will examine a variety of particular technologies within the broad categories of engineering, communications and information technologies, and biomedical technology. Through these investigations, students will develop informed stances on the ethics of technologies.

## Course Materials

Required course readers available at SJU Press.

Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs*.

Richard Galliardetz, *Transforming Our Days*.

Ann Raimes, *Pocket Keys for Writers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Several DVDs on reserve at the Instructional Media Center

## Course Goals

- 1) Students will know and be able to use ethical terms, concepts, and methods that are prominent in Christian Social Ethics.
- 2) Students will be able to identify the way in which these concepts, values, and decision-making strategies come into play in contemporary social moral issues, particularly those that deal with technology.
- 3) Students will identify and understand key issues at stake in the development and use of contemporary technologies.
- 4) Students will develop their skills at critical reading of primary texts.
- 5) Students will present their ideas and respectfully engage in dialogue with others when discussing the course materials and various cases we will encounter in class.
- 6) Students will continue to clarify or identify the values significant to their own ethical reflection and moral decision making processes.

Additionally, this course has been approved as fulfilling partial requirements for the Faith-Justice Studies Minor. Faith-Justice Studies courses (1) engage students directly with the “sufferings of the poor” and explore the call, not only to serve them, but also to stand in solidarity with them, (2) invite students to analyze institutions and social structures and to question prevailing systems of thought or action that systematically contribute to modern-day social problems (poverty, racism, human rights violations, violence), (3) challenge students to consider existing social values and priorities in light of Gospel values and faith-based traditions of social justice, (4) present students with alternative models (social movements or schools of thought) that challenge current modes of thinking and provide creative steps toward social transformation, and (5) provide students with tools and approaches for acting as faithful citizens in a more just society.

Given the subject matter of the course, we will address these objectives regularly.

## Course Requirements

Preparation & Participation	30 %
Technology Assessment	35 %
Midterm Examination	15 %
Final Examination	20 %
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Total	100 %

**Midterm and Final Examinations** – 35% of final grade total (course goals 1, 2, 3, 5)  
There will be two examinations in this class. The exams are designed to let you show your comprehension, analysis, and synthesis of assigned readings, lecture material and conclusions of class discussions and activities. The midterm exam will be a take-home exam, and the maximum page count will be stipulated. The final exam will be written during the exam period. The final will be cumulative, meaning that all of the assigned readings and all topics covered in class are fair game. Both exams will be composed of essay questions.

### **Preparation and Class Participation** – 30% of final grade

The success of our work together in this class will depend upon the engagement of all students in the educational endeavor. This engagement is reflected most clearly in daily preparation and participation.

Each person in the class will be expected to *prepare* daily readings and assignments so that she or he will be able to contribute to the discussions and class activities, as well as to prepare to interact and participate in class. Each person in class will also be expected to *participate* in class discussions and activities. Typical opportunities for demonstrating preparation and participation: presentation of various assignments to a small group, explanation of readings to classmates, answering questions posed by the instructor, participation in discussions of issues posed in class, in-class writing assignments, etc.

*Preparation* (course goals 1, 5, 6, & 7) will be evaluated on the basis of short quizzes that will be given throughout the semester. It is likely that there will be six quizzes, but the exact number and schedule of the quizzes will be at the professor's discretion, based on the particular needs of the class. Presentation of Technology Assessment Papers (if done) will also be included in the Preparation grade. *Participation* (course goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 7) will be evaluated by the professor through observation of daily classes. Participation progress reports will be given out shortly after midterm so that you can chart your progress in this area.

### **Written Assignments** – 35% of final grade (course goals 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5)

There will be two kinds of writing assignments this semester.

*Short Essays* – These 1-2 page, short written assignments are aimed at getting out your ideas on specifically defined, rather narrow questions. They will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis, in accordance with whether or not you completed the assignment and approached the essay in a serious manner. Students will need to redo any failed short essay. These essays will include (but are not limited to):

- 1) **Technology Policy Briefs (3):** As a way of preparing for class discussion, students will be required to write three policy briefs over the course of the semester. These briefs will require students to recommend a particular policy regarding a technological issue, providing argumentation that engages the relevant facts of the technology and the concepts covered in the course. Each student must sign up for three of the eight available days for writing Policy Briefs (see course schedule). Sign up will be done in the first few weeks of class (course goals 1, 2, 3 & 6)
- 2) **Technology Identification:** Identification of a current technology that you will examine in your Technology Assessment Paper, and description of several articles that describe the key aspects of that tech. (course goals 2 & 3)
- 3) **Paper Proposal:** Proposal for the content and argument of your Technology Assessment Paper. (course goals 1, 2, & 4)

*Technology Assessment Paper* – There will be one fully graded formal essay to do during the semester. It will be an examination and evaluation of a contemporary technology (of your choosing) in light of Christian social ethics. In the Technology Assessment, you will have to describe a contemporary technology issue using print sources, explain several key ideas of Christian social thought that speak to the issue at hand using the course texts as your key resources, analyze the situation using the ideas you have identified, and propose a policy recommendation for the situation. Topics must be approved by the instructor. 8-10 pages, double-spaced.

## Measures of Success

Overall, performance is considered in light of three key activities:

- 1) *comprehension* of the material: apprehension and understanding of the facts, terms and concepts in the readings and lectures
- 2) *analysis* of the material: ability to understand the structure of and relationship between the parts of a given text
- 3) *synthesis* of the material: ability to relate items of a given text or idea to other texts and ideas, creating new ideas in the process

Yet, having good ideas is not sufficient for success either in class or life. You must be able to communicate your ideas to others and work with others toward goals. As a result, you will also be evaluated in terms of your:

- 4) *contribution* to the classroom: ability to contribute one's comprehension, analysis, and synthesis to the overall community of learning in a charitable and respectful manner
- 5) *clarity* of communication: ability to communicate one's comprehension, analysis, and synthesis to the overall community of learning
- 6) *mechanics*: ability to communicate one's comprehension, analysis, and synthesis in standard academic English. It is expected that all written assignments will be free from errors of spelling, punctuation, and syntax when they are handed-in or posted to the web.

## Grading

If you do all of the work required in a class in an adequate and average manner, you deserve a grade of "C." Grades of "B" are given for "very good" work. Grades of "A" are given for "excellent" work. Grades of "D" are given for "poor" work. Using the categories above, the grades sound something like:

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| <b>A</b> | excellent <i>comprehension</i> , insightful <i>analysis</i> , and creative <i>synthesis</i> of material<br>frequently makes invaluable contributions with:<br><i>clarity</i> in spoken communication and no issues with <i>mechanics</i> in written work                              |
| <b>B</b> | very good <i>comprehension</i> , solid <i>analysis</i> , and good <i>synthesis</i> of material,<br>frequently makes valuable contributions to class with:<br><i>clarity</i> in spoken communication and no issues with <i>mechanics</i> in written work                               |
| <b>C</b> | adequate <i>comprehension</i> , can do some <i>analysis</i> , beginning to <i>synthesize</i> material,<br>frequently makes contributions to class with:<br>some <i>clarity</i> in spoken communication and some issues in written work  |
| <b>D</b> | difficulty <i>comprehending</i> material, little <i>analysis</i> , little ability to <i>synthesize</i> material,<br>makes infrequent contribution to class or attempts to make contributions with:<br>little <i>clarity</i> in spoken communication and some problems in written work |
| <b>F</b> | difficulty <i>comprehending</i> material, no <i>analysis</i> , no ability to <i>synthesize</i> material,<br>makes no worthwhile contribution to class, either in written or spoken form   |

## Details on Writing Assignments

- *Submitting Written Work* – All written assignments must be submitted to the instructor in two forms: 1) a paper copy of the essay must be delivered at the *start of class* on the day it is due, and 2) an electronic copy uploaded to the course site at Turnitin.com. If either copy is late, the paper is considered late and will be penalized accordingly. Your paper is not considered “handed in” until I receive both copies. The paper copy is for me to read, mark, and return to you. **Technology Assessments will not be returned to the student unless requested before it is turned in.**

- *Late Assignments* – Written assignments turned in late will be penalized a fraction of a grade per day late for the first three days (1 day = 24 hours). Late written assignments will not be accepted after the third day late.

- *Citations* – The papers that we are doing are focused on building your document-reading skills and letting you demonstrate your insights into Christian ethics. I am mostly interested in your ideas. But, when you inevitably draw upon ideas from other authors, whether they are from our course readings your own research, all material taken from you use must be properly cited. Footnotes are the standard method for citing in Theology, but parenthetical styles are also acceptable. See a *Pocket Keys for Writing* for details on citations.

- *Errors* – I expect your written work to be *free from errors in spelling, grammar, and mechanics*. It is very hard for me to understand your great ideas if I cannot read your text. Thus, if you have a lot of errors, your paper will be penalized. Having more than five errors in any written assignment will result in the reduction of the grade by one fraction of a grade (e.g. A+ reduced to A, B- reduced to C+, etc.). More than ten errors in any written assignment will result in the reduction of the grade by two fractions of a grade. More than fifteen errors will result in an “F” on the assignment. If you have particular difficulties with writing in English, please 1) discuss the situation with the instructor and 2) avail yourself of the resources of the Writing Center.

- *Formatting* – Written assignments should be formatted according to some recognized standard format (e.g. Turabian, MLA, APA, etc.) If your particular college has a particular style manual that you use for writing assignments, please indicate this to me *before* you turn in any written work so that I know what you are trying to do. If it does not have a prescribed style manual, formatting for written assignments should follow the guidelines for format, grammar, and punctuation in the *Pocket Keys for Writing* manual, available at the SJU bookstore.

At a minimum, papers must be word processed, and turned in with 1 inch margins, double spaced, with page numbers, and using a standard serif font (like Times or Palatino) in 11 OR 12 point size. Papers in cursive bold, or display fonts will be returned to the student with an F. Please put a cover page on your paper that has your name, the date, title, relevant class info, etc. *Do not* put your name on the other pages of your paper. Papers that are shorter than the required length will be penalized.

“Plagiarism is an academic crime punishable by academic death.”  
Lt. Roland Sharp, *Man of the House*

## Etcetera

- *Regarding Academic Honesty* – Work can be difficult and time consuming, but cheating and plagiarizing others' work is unacceptable. At a minimum, violations of the Academic Honesty Policy will result in the recording of a grade of "F" for the course. Violations of the Academic Honesty Policy will be reported to the Office of the Dean and could result in your expulsion from the University. You should familiarize yourself with the Academic Honesty Policy on pages 57-59 of the University Catalog.

- *Regarding Attendance* – Learning is a community endeavor. Each class period is important to your success in the course and the success of our community of learning. Simply put, you are expected to attend every class. If you miss three classes (1 week of class), your grade for the course will be lowered by a fraction of a grade. If you miss six classes (2 weeks), you will receive an "F" for the course. Not an "FA" — an "F".

The cause of the absence, if *very* serious, will be considered. But "having an excuse" does not guarantee that it will be considered serious enough to warrant being excused from the penalty for missing the class. The best way to ensure that you receive a participation grade is to be present and participate. Otherwise, be sure to see me *before* the absence.

- *Syllabus* – **The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus and course schedule as the course progresses.** You will be informed of any changes that are made to the schedule or syllabus, and updated versions of either will be handed out as need be. In general, it is unlikely that changes will be made to the syllabus itself (e.g., class requirements, rules, and regulations). Each class, however, has its own pace and personality. Since it is better to change the schedule to meet the needs of the class rather than force the class to keep up with the syllabus, **it is highly likely that changes will be made to the course schedule, including the reading list. Students who have difficulty dealing with changes in course schedules should take this into consideration.**

- *Students with Disabilities* – For those who have a documented learning, physical or psychological disability who are requesting reasonable academic adjustments, you are encouraged to contact Services for Students with Disabilities, Room 113, Science Center, 610-660-1774 or 610-660-1620 early in the semester. If you suspect that you have an *undiagnosed* disability (learning, physical, psychological), please contact Services for Students with Disabilities to discuss this concern.

It is important to discuss instructional needs and accommodations with me in the semester. All requests for extended-timed testing must be discussed with me at a *minimum of one week prior to the date of each exam.*

## Technology, Society, and Christian Ethics 1301-151: Course Schedule v. 1

		topic	read for class	due today
	m	1/14	<b>Introduction to the Course</b>	
<b>1</b>	w	1/16	<b>The Nature/s of Technology</b>	
	f	1/18	Jared Diamond, "Necessity's Mother," <i>Guns, Germs and Steel</i> , 239-264. (R) Video: <i>Guns, Germs, and Steel</i> , PBS, episode 1.	
	m	1/21	<b>Martin Luther King Day</b>	No Class
<b>2</b>	w	1/23	Bill Henderson and Tim Barkow, "Luddite vs. Fetishist," <i>The Wired Society</i> , 36-43 (R)	
	f	1/25	William Morris, "Useful Work Vs. Useless Toil" (R)	
	m	1/28	From <i>Making of the English Working Class</i> Writings from the Midlands Luddites (R)	
<b>3</b>	w	1/30	Richard Galliardetz, <i>Transforming Our Days</i> , ch. 1	
	f	2/1	<b>Central Concepts in Christian Social Ethics:</b> <i>Person, Action, and Community</i> Lisa Cahill, <i>Between the Sexes</i> , "The Sources of Christian Ethics," 4-7 (R) Connors and McCormick, <i>Character, Choices, and Community</i> , chapters 2 & 4 (R)	
	m	2/4	<i>Character, Choices, and Community</i> , chapter 3 (R)	
<b>4</b>	w	2/6	<i>Ethical Methodology</i> Beauchamp and Childress, <i>Principles of Biomedical Ethics</i> , "Types of Ethical Theory," 44-100 (R)	
	f	2/8	Beauchamp and Childress	
	m	2/11	<i>Natural Law, Norms &amp; The Principle of Double Effect</i> Richard Gula, <i>Reason Informed by Faith</i> , Chapters 15, 16, 18 & 19 (R)	
<b>5</b>	w	2/13	<i>Human in Creation</i> Biblical accounts of creation	
	f	2/15	Pope John Paul II, <i>Redemptor Hominis</i> (R)	<i>Tech. Id.</i>
	m	2/18	Jameson Wetmore, "Building Amish Community with Technology," 1-16 (R) James Gustafson, <i>Christian Attitudes Toward A Technological Society</i> , 173-187. (R)	
<b>6</b>	w	2/20	<b>Engineering and the Technology of Objects</b> Schininger and Martin, <i>Intro. to Engineering Ethics: Ch. 1-The Profession of Engineering</i> , 1-12, 17-24	
	f	2/22	<i>IEE: Chapter 3-Engineering as Social Experimentation</i> , 71-95; ABET Code of Ethics, 226-227; IEEE Code of Ethics, 246 (R)	
	m	2/25	<i>IEE: Chapter 4-Commitment to Safety</i> , 107-141	
	w	2/27	<i>IEE: ASME Code of Ethics</i> 241-246. (R) Neil Schlager, <i>When Technology Fails: "Ford Pinto rear-impact defect,"</i> 156-163; "Hyatt Regency Skywalk Collapse." (R)	
	f	2/29	<b>Midterm Exam</b> Watch <i>Nova: "The Storm that Drowned a City," "Building on Ground Zero"</i> (IMC)	<i>Midterm Exam</i>

	m	3/3	Spring Break	No Class	
8	w	3/5			
	f	3/7			
	m	3/10	<b>Communication and Information Techs (CIT):</b> <i>Cell Phones</i>	Howard Rheingold, <i>Smart Mobs</i> , chapter 1 (R) Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," 139-149 (R)	
9	w	3/12		Howard Rheingold, <i>Smart Mobs</i> , chapter 7 (R)	
	f	3/14		Thomas Cooper, "Plain speaking in a world of suspect communication technologies," <i>Media Development</i> 48 no 1 (2001): 26-29. Donald Kraybill, <i>The Riddle of Amish Culture</i> , 190-197 Pontifical Council on Social Communications, <i>Communio et Progressio</i> (R)	Policy Brief — Paper Proposal
10	m	3/17	<i>Internet and Social Relations</i>	Katz, J.E. "The internet, 1995-2000: Access, Civil Involvement, and Social Interaction." <i>American Behavioral Scientist</i> , 45 no 3(2001) 405-419. (R) R. Kraut, "Internet Paradox: A Social Technology That Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well Being. <i>American Psychologist</i> 53, no. 3 (1998): 1017-1031. (R) N. H. Nie, "Sociability, Interpersonal Relations, and the Internet: Reconciling Conflicting Findings," <i>American Behavioral Scientist</i> 45, no. 3 (2001): 420-435. (R)	Policy Brief
	w	3/19		TBA on OLPC, "socially responsible technology" and social engineering.	Policy Brief
	f	3/21	Easter Break		
	m	3/24			
11	w	3/26	<i>Privacy</i>	Jacques Maritain, <i>The Person and the Common Good</i> , "The Person and Society," 47-89.	Policy Brief
	f	3/28		Howard Rheingold, <i>Smart Mobs</i> , chapter 8 (R) Recent news articles on privacy and surveillance	
	m	3/31	<i>Internet, Creativity, &amp; Ownership</i>	Lawrence Lessig, "Innovating Copyright," 611-23 (R) Michael Novak, "The Creative Person," <i>The Catholic Ethic &amp; the Spirit of Capitalism</i> , 211-37.	
12	w	4/2		Recent news articles on RIAA law suits; net neutrality; and the taxation and criminalization of recordable digital media (R)	Policy Brief
	f	4/4	<i>Digital Divide</i>	Gustavo Gutiérrez, <i>A Theology of Liberation</i> , x-xl.	

	m	4/7		US Census Bureau, Computer and Internet Use in the United States: 2003. (R) Alfonso Gumucio Dagon, "Is The Internet A Form Of Electronic Apartheid?" <i>Media Development</i> , 1-5 (R) Katy Campbell, "Gender Bias in Instructional Technology," <i>Computers, Ethics, and Society</i> , 171-183. (R) Reginald Stuart, "High-tech Redlining," 114-115. <i>Watch Video: The Net @ Risk (IMC)</i>	<i>Policy Brief</i>
1 3	w	4/9	<b>Technological Manipulation of the Body:</b> <i>Everyday Technologies</i>	Sidney Perkowitz, "We Have Always Been Bionic," <i>Digital People</i> , 85-110. (R)	
	f	4/11		Tom Beaudoin, from <i>Consuming Faith</i> (R) Martin Connell, "Word without Flesh" 22-27. Gilbert Meilaender, "Genes as Resources," <i>The Hedgehog Review</i> , 66-79. (R)	<i>Technology Assessment</i>
	m	4/14		Neil Schlager, ed., <i>When Technology Fails: Thalidomide</i> , 468-474, and silicon-gel implants, 475-80. (R) Nicholas Thompson, "Self-Adjusted Glasses Could Be A Boon to Africa," <i>New York Times</i> (R) Recent news on new uses for Thalidomide, surgery, including Operation Smile (surgery for poor children), and cosmetic procedures.	<i>Policy Brief</i>
1 4	w	4/16	<i>Not So Everyday Technologies: The Posthuman</i>	Bill Joy, "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us." (R)	<i>Policy Brief</i>
	f	4/18		Ray Kurzweil, "Embracing Change," and from <i>The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology</i> (R)	<i>Policy Brief</i>
	m	4/21	<b>Technology in the Christian Life: Some Proposals and Closing Thoughts</b>	Susan White, <i>Christian Worship and Technological Change</i> , "Liturgy and Mechanization" Quentin Schultze, "Sojourning with Heart," 189-209	
1 5	w	4/23		Galliardetz, <i>Transforming Our Days</i> , chapters 2-4	
	f	4/25		Wrap-up	

	w	4/30	<b>Final (Preliminary Schedule)</b>	Wednesday, April 30, 11:30-1:30	
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