How then shall we live?

Activity / discussion for Redeeming Technology Session 3.
3rd February 2018

In writing on *The Autonomy of the Technological Function*,[1] Ellul states that the desire and ability to control – simultaneously provided and encouraged by science and technology – do violence to nature:

> "Technology abstractly reproduces nature to permit scientific experimenting. Hence, the temptation to make nature conform to theoretical models, to reduce nature to techno-scientific artificiality. 'Nature is what I produce in my laboratory' says the modern physicist. In these conditions, science becomes violence (in regard to everything it bears upon) and the technology expressing the scientific violence becomes power exclusively."

This applies to Ellul's concept of *technique*, as much as to technology. Standardised testing, for example, is a *technique*: it reduces nature (all that is known by the individual) to techno-scientific artificiality. 'What the student knows is what their test says they know' says the modern teacher.

Q1) In your own personal / family / social life, what aspects of technology do violence to the things on which they bear?

Q2) In your respective areas of work (science/engineering, education, theology/religion) what aspects of technology do violence to the things on which they bear?

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[1] Article #36 in Scharff and Dusek, and one of the set readings for Dr Maggay's talk.

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Recall Ellul's "techno values" from Session 2: the fastest, the most impactful, the cheapest; all of which have the intent of increasing "efficiency." In *The Autonomy of the Technological Function*, Ellul says that technological values are self-perpetuating: "It presents itself as an intrinsic necessity."

> "The autonomy of the technological system must be matched by the autonomy of the institutions that are part of it, that embody it. And this, incidentally, will be the only acceptable autonomy in our society, because it will be the only one providing an ultimate justification."

This is where Christian ears should prick up, because if Christianity cannot provide "ultimate justifications", we are in trouble indeed. (Technology may revel in efficiency, simply because it is efficient. Christianity can revel in kindness, simply because it is kind.)

Q3) What narrative can Christianity offer that can subvert the supremacy of technological values?

Q4) Very concretely, suggest ways in which you, personally, can take steps to subvert the supremacy of technological values, and the violence done in its cause, and replace it with a perspective better aligned with Christian priorities.

There is a place for government policy, or for industry upping its game, but these are grand ideas which are pleasant for us to discuss, and impractical for us to implement. I therefore specify the proposals should be concrete and personal, because I want them to be things that – at least in principle – you have the power to implement. If you happen to run a company then, sure, your personal proposal can include the steps you can take through that company to chance industry. If you happen to be the head of department at a university then, likewise, concrete steps that you could take to change university policy and culture come in the remit of this exercise.