Technology as Discipline

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Outline

• What is discipline and technology.
• Why technology disciplines us.
• How technology disciplines us.
• Technology disciplining our understanding of the Christian life.
• Evaluating if technological discipline is good or bad.
What is Technology?
What is Technology?

- C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (p. 88):
  For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique; . . . .

- “Reality”: Both human and non-human, others and self.
What is Discipline?
What is Discipline?

• Not something you study (*a* discipline).
• Something you do or is done to you (*to* discipline).
• Examples: Parental discipline, spiritual discipline.
Why Does Technology Discipline Us?
Why Does Technology Discipline Us?

• The universe (including ourselves) is sacramental:
  - The material and spiritual are linked: “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (Matt 25:40)
  - The universe is not a world solely of forms.

• Human beings are designed to be disciplined:
  - We are supposed to thrive through discipline.
  - “If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.” (Heb 12:8)
  - If we want to be healthy, we have to accept discipline. The choice is rather constructive or destructive discipline.

• Technology is a tool but not a *mere* tool.
How Technology Disciplines Us: Affecting Our Capabilities
How Technology Disciplines Us: Shaping Our Environment

Photo: Pexels.com / Pixabay.com
How Technology Disciplines Us: Affects View of the Nature of the World
An Example of How Technology Changes Our Understanding of the Christian Life

- One area: What does it mean to love others?
- Make a table that looks like the one on the next slide.
- With your neighbor, fill in columns 2 and 3. Leave the last column blank for now.
- Here’s one example using texting (your group has to come up with another texting one for the table):
  - Change in abilities: Communicate remotely in short messages.
  - Love means/is: Concise, terse. Less related to physical proximity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>How it changes our abilities and/or our environment</th>
<th>Effect on what we think love means or is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital photography</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is This Good or Bad?
Ethical Theories: Deontology
Ethical Theories: Consequentialism
Ethical Theories: Virtue Ethics
Is This Good or Bad?

- Title the last column of your table, “Evaluate.”
- With your neighbor, fill-in that column and in each cell, answer for at least two of the three ethical theories what would someone conclude about whether that discipline is good or bad:
  - Deontology
  - Consequentialism
  - Virtue Ethics
Now What?

• Do this analysis with other aspects of the Christian life. For instance, how does technology change our understanding of:
  – What it means to be human?
  – Silence? Contemplation? Prayer?
  – What does a relationship with God look like?
• How do we respond to discipline (not mutually exclusive)?:
  – Acquiesce
  – Resist
  – Resent
  – Learn
• How will you respond? How should you respond?
A shameless commercial . . .
“Technology as Discipline,” God and Nature Magazine, Fall 2015:

http://tinyurl.com/gan-lin

The Nature of Environmental Stewardship (Pickwick Publications, 2016):

http://nature.johnny-lin.com

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