

Fathers & Technology

11 December 2025

Introduction

- Reflections on AI
- Some basic statistics on cell phone use among kids
- Some basic statistics on amount of time adults spend on
 - Screens
 - Social media
 - Games
- Now, what is spirit of talk? Not merely that all tech is bad, but rather an understanding that it is a powerful instrument which is not merely neutral and that consequently requires clear vision of its role and great virtue to use well.

What is technology?

- Any product of human art which is designed to make other, further activities either possible (e.g., flight) or easier to accomplish (car for moving)
- Thus, planes, cars, plumbing, electricity, bikes etc are all examples of tech.
- However, we are certainly going to give greater focus to computer technology
 - Internet/Phones/Tablets
 - Video Games
 - Social Media
 - AI

What is its role?

- Tech is a means to an end.
 - Thus, it must be measured by the importance of the ends it serves.
 - Further, its influence is going to be weighed by the impact it has on other, more important ends.
 - Finally, we must understand it is not neutral; computer tech has been developed to affect our mindset and activities.
- What ends does tech serve, ultimately?
 - Bodily needs. For the most part, technology excels at permitting us to satisfy the needs of the body effectively, efficiently, and comfortably.

- Needs of the soul.
 - Here, technology is much less effective. The soul is immaterial and technology only allows us to manipulate material things.
 - Highest acts of human soul are to know the truth and love what is good. Technology helps in neither activity.
 - At best, it can provide greater access to certain things the soul could use to attain its proper goods (e.g., information that can provide material for knowledge)
 - Moral virtues
 - Technology, of itself, gives no insight on what human virtue is or how to cultivate it.
 - Virtues require understanding, time and practice to cultivate.
 - As a consequence, it takes effort which is not infrequently unpleasant at first.
 - Indeed, given the tendency of technology to reduce our need to make effort, it can just as easily undermine it.
 - Intellectual virtues
 - Here, one could argue that technology serves to perfect the mind. How?
 - Providing access to information to make well-informed decisions
 - By modelling ways of thinking
 - By compelling men to attain new insight and to develop new technologies.
 - However, no technology can actually cause a man to know a single thing or to attain wisdom. AI, for example, cannot replace man's need to think and to see the truth for himself.
 - In fact, technology easily creates the illusion of knowing things. This is a grave danger, as when a man thinks he knows when in fact he does not, he closes his ears to those who do know.
 - We could say that tech tends to make us all like teenagers: we think we know things and have nothing to learn when, in reality, we are blind and ignorant.

What are chief dangers?

- Weakens human virtue

- Deadens memory
- Nurses sloth (fear of effort)
- Kills necessary downtime and boredom
- Destroys attention and ability to be truly present to anything
- Undermines intelligence & wisdom
 - Genuine insight requires time, concentration, and ability to follow sometimes long trains of thought.
- Damages human relationships and interaction. This applies particularly to Social Media
 - Lacks vast majority of elements of human communication
 - Diminishes perception of consequences of bad, anti-social behavior and thus encourages pettiness, etc.
 - Makes it harder to speak to someone in person
- Undermines Modesty
 - Both regarding purity
 - Pornography is most obvious
 - However, widespread exhibitionism, even when it does not rise to level of pornography. Gravely wounds our imagination.
 - And moderate discussion
 - Online presence lends itself to distorted and unhealthy expression of unnuanced opinions. It nourishes a “mob mentality”.
- Destabilizes spiritual life
 - Renders prayer distasteful and difficult.
 - Inability to focus when we are used to respond to notifications, check websites constantly
 - Silence & stillness become oppressive
 - Causes Our Lord and saints to appear dull and unreal

Dad's Role

- Must model virtuous use for his family
 - Option of “dumb” phone
- Must set boundaries for use of technology by other members of his family, including wife
 - Should hold himself to higher standard
- Some boundaries
 - All use of electronics must be public

- No taking electronics into private spaces, especially bedrooms and bathrooms
 - No use of phones as alarm clocks
 - No use of electronics late at night
 - At most, one hour before bedtime
 - All devices must have filters, blockers, and – most importantly – some kind of accountability software.
 - Explain why
 - Whenever it becomes necessary to purchase a new device, make it very evident to family that one of the first steps is to install what is necessary to lessen the danger posed by access to the internet.
 - Limited private devices
 - As long as possible, refrain from allowing children having their own devices.
 - What real need is there?
 - Many authors advise waiting until child is 16-17 before granting their own device.
 - And this need not be a smartphone. A dumb phone is a good transition.
 - Further, it can be a family device that they are merely used when it is useful.
 - Accessible to parents
 - When parents – i.e., father – judges that it is reasonable for a child to begin using a private device, it must be with clear understanding that parents have access to it at all times and circumstances.
 - This must be exercised. On occasion, parents must go through their children’s messages.
 - More frequently at first and more rarely as they grow closer to full adulthood.
 - Family is first
 - Devices should be forbidden at all family events.
 - Dinner
 - Game nights
 - Walks
 - Again, make Sundays tech free

Conclusion

- Modern tech is incredibly powerful and designed to be addictive.
- It can be of some help, but more often than not has a detrimental effect on intellectual and spiritual lives.
- God needs fathers who are saints.

Challenges

- **Remainder of Advent, go as tech-free as possible.**
 - o **Explore dumbing down smart phone or get Wisephone (or equivalent)**
 - **Dumb down smart phone =**
 - **Turn off all notifications**
 - **Eliminate both internet browser & e-mail**
 - **Get rid of all social media**
 - **Establish someone as partner who controls what apps you can download.**
- **Read *Digital Safety***
- **Eliminate all social media accounts (unless required by profession)**

Texts worth reading

Digital Safety

Digital Minimalism by Cal Newport

The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brain by Nicholas Carr