

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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## Technology is Imagination Incarnated

Douglas DeBoer

*Dordt College*, [douglas.deboer@dordt.edu](mailto:douglas.deboer@dordt.edu)

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## Technology is Imagination Incarnated

### Abstract

"Technology enables us to make the stuff of our imagination real—at least partially. Technology itself does not tell us what to do. We use technology to bring our imagination to life."

Posting about how to be good stewards of technology from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/technology-is-imagination-incarnated>

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### Disciplines

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### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

# Technology is Imagination Incarnated

 [all in allthings.org/technology-is-imagination-incarnated](http://allthings.org/technology-is-imagination-incarnated)

Douglas De Boer

As a kid I enjoyed science fiction literature and movies. Little did I know then that some of the futuristic gadgets I was reading about and seeing in movies and comics would become a reality in my life. Dick Tracy's wrist-watch radio has come to life as a smart watch. In the 1960's while I was a kid I relished the original broadcasts of the *Star Trek* TV series. I enjoyed seeing the fantastic gadgets as much as the plots. Now I can enjoy some of the actual gadgets!

Who would not want such a small and portable wireless telephone such as the *Star Trek communicator*?<sup>1</sup> The flip-phone<sup>2</sup> of the 2000's is remarkably like a *Star Trek* communicator. What battleship captain would not want a cloaking device<sup>3</sup> as depicted on the *Star Trek* show? That has been partially achieved and development efforts continue. The B-2 bomber<sup>4</sup> is an example of an aircraft that is mostly invisible to radar. We say it is "stealthy" instead of "cloaked," but it's the same idea. The details of its stealth technology are secret. Those are just a few examples of how technological devices spring from our collective imagination.

Are these technological devices bringing us together or pushing us apart? To answer a question like that we need to know more about what technology is. People may interpret technology in our time to be primarily about smartphones, social media, GPS, and the plethora of electronic gadgets that have become popular in the last decade. But technology is a bigger subject than that. Technology enables us to make the stuff of our imagination real—at least partially. Technology itself does not tell us what to do. We use technology to bring our imagination to life.

The most common definitions of technology typical of some modern dictionaries run along the lines of defining it as *applying scientific knowledge for practical ends*. So a smartphone is a piece of technology because it is an application of electrical circuit theory, electromagnetic field theory, computer science and such for the practical purpose of communication.

A painting to hang over your living room sofa is an application of an artistic work for an aesthetic purpose and apparently that is not a technological thing. But what if the "painting" is actually a poster-print in a frame and the owner bought it to cover a hole in the wall? To some, printing is a technology and covering a hole is a practical purpose. Maybe some paintings are technology after all!



Dick Tracy, 1961.



Pebble Smartwatch.

Language is not perfect. Nobody has a perfect definition of technology. Consider for a moment some of the various definitions of “technology.” Technology can be simple and ordinary, such as a pencil, or complicated such as a laser printer. Technology can be a physical object such as a car, or an intangible object such as a *standard*. By standard I mean a set of guidelines on how something should work. An example of a standard that readers of iAt benefit from would be the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP)!<sup>5</sup>

Technology can also refer to *a body of knowledge and techniques used to build things*. Thus a welder must learn how to weld—must learn the technology of welding. The same goes for plumbers, electricians, machinists, and other, “technologists.” This is usually the meaning of the word “technical” in the phrase, “vocational-technical education.” Therefore, technology can also refer to an *activity*. Welding is *doing* technology.

Some people would limit technology to only human activities and knowledge and objects built by humans. Beaver dams, sticks used by crows to ferret food out of a hiding place and such are then defined to be “natural” and specifically non-technological whereas if a human did something similar or used a similar tool, such as building a dam out of logs and dirt or using a stick to obtain food, this would be considered technology. Others would allow that animals can also build, learn, know, and do technology.

Christians believe we are made in the image of God, thus we bear a higher responsibility for our actions than animals do. (The Cultural Mandate.) This gives merit to limiting our definition of technology to be human activity and the results of that. Then technology carries with it a need to act responsibly in the sight of God.

Admittedly then, a perfect definition of technology is not at hand. But, all of these definitions of technology point to a desire of a human or animal to attain some practical end by means of tools and procedures. Technology lets us do and achieve more than is otherwise possible. As a whole, technology is subservient to our collective desires. That is common to all definitions of technology.

Now let me finally answer the original question: “Is technology bringing us together or pushing us apart?” Technology is doing no such things. We are doing these to ourselves. The technologies we choose are a reflection of our hearts’ deepest desires. They are an embodiment of our imaginations. The imagined wrist watch that was also a walkie-talkie in the Dick Tracy cartoons has become the reality of today’s smart watch. *Star Trek*’s cloaking device has become partially embodied as the stealth technology of the B-2 Bomber today. And these things have happened because we desire them.

But, just as the antitheses cuts through our hearts and imaginations (Genesis 3:15), so it also cuts through our technology. Technologies will carry with them the effects of our sin and our faith. What was in the imaginations of the engineers who designed the AK-47 assault rifle? I’m sure profit, war and death was in their imaginations, and the AK-47 has enabled war and death and profits. If you saw a person carrying an AK-47 would that bring to your mind a soldier, militant, or a hunter? What was in the imaginations of those who invented cardiac pacemakers? When we build or use technology it may entail some unanticipated effects, possibly serious, but mainly, it will do what was in mind from the get-go.

What then do you want to do? Sometimes you would be wise to seek a technology to bring your imagination to fruition. Sometimes you would be wise to reject a technology that is not designed to do what you desire. To be a good steward of technology, imagine what Christians should be doing.<sup>6</sup>

The Bible tells a story of creation, fall, redemption and restoration. What’s your role in that story? Have you taken up the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) and the Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1:28)? When you adopt or use or do a technology, consider what it is best at. Is that in keeping with your role in the Biblical story?

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## Footnotes

1. [Wikipedia: Communicator](#) ↩
2. [Wikipedia: Flip-Phone](#) ↩
3. [Wikipedia: Cloaking Device.](#) ↩
4. [Wikipedia: B-2 Bomber](#) ↩
5. This webpage is relayed over the internet to your computer using HTTP. ↩
6. [\*The Banner\* “Stewardship of Technology”](#) ↩