

Online Seminar on the Philosophy of Technology and Religion

This seminar explores the co-evolution of humanity, technology and religion across history, focusing in particular on communication technologies: mimetic, oral, literate and virtual, or computer/internet enabled) and how these different modes of communication form and inform society, relationships, identity and what people hold sacred. In the second half of the seminar we will focus specifically on what religion might offer digital natives and how virtual technologies might shape and inform religious thought and practice.

Each week will involve watching a few 20-30 minute video lectures, writing a 2-3 page reflection paper and participating in a group chat over Zoom with all in the seminar. Students will also write a 12-15 pg research paper. To that end, students will meet regularly one on one with the instructor over Zoom for guidance in their research. In the last couple weeks of the seminar students will present on their research. The research paper will be due at the end of the semester. Students will have the opportunity to present their paper at a national conference on “Seeking the Sacred in the Digital Age” the following Spring.

Tentative Schedule for Philosophy of Religion and Technology Spring 2020

Week 1: Jan 20: introduction group chat; relationship between technology and society: 4 approaches

Week 2: Jan 27: mimetic, oral and archaic culture and religion

Week 3: Feb 3: axial and print culture and religion

Week 4: Feb 10: religious criticism of industrial revolution and electronic culture and religion,

Week 5: Feb 17: introduction to virtual (digital) culture: the networked self and its demons

Week 6: Feb 24: : networked intelligence and agency

Week 7: Mar 2: virtual ontology

Week 8: spring break?

Week 9: Mar 16: religious criticism of virtual culture

Week 10: Mar 23: prospects for online religion: virtual rituals

Week 11: Mar 30: transhumanism

Week 12: April 6: Artificial intelligence and the singularity

Week 13: April 13: virtual theology

Week 14: Apr 20: research presentations

Week 15: Apr 27: research presentations

Week 16: May 4: debrief and assessment of seminar.

Relationship to US Jesuit Formation Learning Outcomes:

This summer seminar addresses several of the learning outcomes identified by the June 2014 document on the initial intellectual formation of Jesuit Brothers and Scholastics.

Regarding the study of the context of mission:

- The seminar will enable an understanding and appreciation of the complexities of the human condition
- It will provide an analysis of structures and developments in society and culture, especially those relevant to faith, justice, religious pluralism and ecological issues.
- Scholastics will encounter important texts illustrating how thinkers and cultures have sought to respond to fundamental questions and dimensions of human and social existence.
- It will offer a methodology for continually reflecting on changing contexts of mission.

Regarding the content of the faith:

- Scholastics will be introduced to a systematic understanding of how the mysteries of faith relate to human existence and history
- It will open a dialogue with the secular world and mindset.

Regarding pedagogy:

- The seminar seeks to cultivate an appreciative and critical appropriation of scholastics' own cultural, intellectual and religious tradition with a respectful openness and humble attentiveness to the Other.
- The seminar will be interdisciplinary, with ongoing interaction and dialogue between experience and reflection, theory and praxis.
- It will employ academic rigor and clarity while stimulating the imagination and creativity
- The seminar would form a community of learners and stimulate among scholastics ongoing searching, inquiry, reflection and study on the many pressing current issues it raises. It will marry philosophical, social scientific and theological analysis to pastoral discernment and spiritual practice.

For more information:

If you are interested in participating in this online seminar on the Philosophy of Technology and Religion, or would like more information about it, you can email me at clancy@gonzaga.edu.