Navigating the Technological Age

Announcer:

Greetings and welcome to Mind Matters News. It's no secret that we live in a technology dependent world. In many ways, the advancements in technology and the availability of information have been revolutionary and invaluable improvements to our lives. Yet at the same time, those advancements have come with downsides that are increasingly addictive and instantly gratifying, the negative effects of which have only become more apparent over time. Today we have Andrew McDiarmid, senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute, to discuss how we can exert control over the impacts technology and social media have on us. Enjoy.

Robert J. Marks:

Welcome to Mind Matters News. I'm your loyal host, Robert J. Marks. What the heck is happening in our world? In 1939, my father was forbidden to go see the classic movie Gone with the Wind. Why? Because one of the main characters said, "I don't give a damn." And the word damn was considered a terrible curse word in 1939. Then when I was a boy, my mother said I could not use the term son of a gun. I don't even think she knows why it was a bad phrase. So I had to later look it up and find out why it was a bad phrase. And I read that on British warships of old, resident prostitutes were allowed and could become pregnant on board, and their baby's fathers were unknown. So the child thus conceived, was called a son of a gun. Today, it's even getting worse. We see book titles and movie titles making a token effort to disguise filth words by inserting asterisks' like, for example, don't give a F asterisks, asterisks K. Or something like that.

I also see some of these filth words written boldly on shirts of people that wear them that are for some reason not ashamed. So what happened since 1939 when damn was a filth word? The challenge, of course, is that curse words are only an indicator. They are only part of a bigger slippery slope. Philosopher Marshall McLuhan described our situation. He said, "We live invested in an electric information environment that is quite imperceptible to us as water is to fish." Imagine a drop of dark-colored sewage being dropped into a fresh, clean water pool. There's a swirl as the visibility of the dark sewage mixes with the clean water. But soon the sewage has dissipated and the water looks clear again. The fish adapt, and another drop of sewage is added. And again and again, and soon the fish are swimming in sewage and they don't even know it.

They are numbed by familiarity. We are similarly affected today by the sewage from social media, the news and political pundits. We are swimming in the sewage. If you're like me, you often get mad at what's happening, but there's little you can do unless you invest yourself fully in the process. But there is something that you can do locally for yourself, for your family, for those around you. And we can make the water clean for ourselves and our family. How do we do this? How do we make the water clean for us and our family? Well, we're going to talk today with somebody who has some good ideas about this. Our guest today to talk about this is Andrew McDiarmid. Andrew is a senior fellow and media specialist at the Discovery Institute. He writes a lot. He's written for the Daily Wire, the New York Post, the Houston Chronicle, the American Spectator. He's a regular columnist for Newsmax. He has guest hosted here on Mind Matters News also. So Andrew, welcome.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Bob. Thanks for having me.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay. Look, I went against a tirade against technology and all of the stuff that we're being bombarded with over the median stuff. But I know that your solution is not the banning of technology, but you want to introduce something called authentic technology. You're not against technology, it's just the way it's used. Tell me about authentic technology.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Absolutely. Yeah. I guess the term digital wellness is, it's an umbrella term for, "Hey, how do we go about doing this in a healthy way?" My approach would lean more toward digital authenticity. In other words, it's getting to the heart of why we should have wellness with our digital life. So I call it authentic technology. There's a number of names for it, number of approaches. But this is something I've developed as I've studied this the last five years. As I said, the digital authenticity, it's three steps to get there. The first is to renew our understanding of technology. Before we can change our relationship to technology for the better, we need to become fully aware of how we're interacting with it. And how it's affecting us. We've got to renew our understanding of what the word technology means. And we have to look at the ways that technology impacts us, and make some decisions about that.

So the first step that I've come up with is renewing our understanding. Just becoming aware and really changing how we understand technology. The second step is to reset, to hit that reset button. Resetting our relationship with technology. That's stepping back, turning things off, asking some big picture questions that will help us then ask questions about our technology. And of course, this doesn't happen as quick as that easy button at Staples. This is something that has taken years to develop, so it's going to take time to address and change in us. And finally, once we've reset our relationship, it's time to, the third step is, releasing our potential as human beings. Everything is geared toward that step, Bob, because it's the most important thing we can do. Release what we have inside us for the betterment of not just us and our families, but for those around us and the world in general.

Robert J. Marks:

So let me ask you, what do you mean by discovering the meaning of technology? I think I understand pretty well what technology is, but you have something deeper in mind. So what did you discover about the meaning of technology?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah, yeah. I have a nasty habit of opening etymology dictionaries and just looking

Robert J. Marks:

What's that? Etymology. Oh, that's the source of words. Okay.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah, yeah. Etymology. Just the history of the words and what they mean, where they come from.

Robert J. Marks:

I have to pause every once in a while, Andrew, when people use big words. Okay, good.

Andrew McDiarmid:

No problem. Me too. So I just look at what technology actually means. That's where I started. I thought, "Okay, if I'm going to study this, if I'm going to see how this is affecting me and my family, my kids, how do I parent them? What do I do? I need to go back to just what the word means." And it was actually a very exciting discovery that I made as I studied this. It is all about us. Just not in the selfish, passive, unthinking way that we often see tech take hold of us today. The word technology is the sum of the ways in which social groups provide themselves with the material objects of their civilization. And so I thought as I read those words, material objects, "Well, where do they come from?" The prefix techno or techna in technology means art, skill, a system of making or doing.

And when I dug deeper, I found the root teks, T-E-K-S. And that root teks literally means to weave. Or fabricate. And this root is where we get words like ax, hatchet, carve, join, build. As well as words like textile, tectonic, text, tiller, and even toil. So the heart of the word technology, I discovered is the art and skill we use to weave together things that we find useful for human living. And the good news as I studied this was that I realized this art and scale doesn't just refer to the original maker of the tool. It also applies to everyone who will use it, who will harness it, and that's us. I thought all this was pretty exciting when I first came across it.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. Let's unpack this a little bit, the ways that material comes together. So can you relate that, for example, to some common things that are happening in the real world to us today?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. If we understand the word technology as weaving and fabricating, building...

Robert J. Marks:

Weaving and fabrica... Okay.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. It's the literal weaving of a basket. It's the tiller that allows you to steer the boat or create the furrows in the land before you plant. It's all the things that we can do with our minds and our hands to produce objects that we will find useful, that help us through life. And of course, we could be here all day giving examples. But when you go right back to it's what we weave together. What we create, what we make.

Robert J. Marks:

And all of these things are available, it's just how we weave them together, I think. See if I have this right. For example, we have available to us today things like computers, automatic dishwashers, car, cell phones, and the weaving together is the manner that we choose to aggregate these together, is that...?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. When you talk about our gadgets today, it's our decision on how we use them, how we harness them. Or, whether we decide to put a gadget down or a platform down, and just move on without it. We really have to assume the boss of our technology. Just really keep it in check by deciding which gadgets and tools are going to be useful to us per our purpose and vision, and which won't be.

Robert J. Marks:

This is a common theme in technology and stuff that exists, that it in itself is neither good nor bad. Computers aren't good or bad. Automatic dishwashers aren't good or bad. Cars aren't good or bad. It's the manner that they're used. And this has to be incorporated, I guess, into a healthy way of doing things and recognizing this idea of authentic technology. Right?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. Yeah. I'm not sure if I would go across the board with the neutrality of technology. Just because there are arguments to be made for certain things coming into being that may be better off not being in being. But that may be just looking too deeply. If we do start with technology as neutral, and then what are we going to do with it? Yeah, that's a good place to start, when it comes to our own digital wellness and digital authenticity.

Robert J. Marks:

So what's an example of something coming into the being that is universally bad or abhorrent?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Well, I think of Apple and the smartphone. Their iPhone that came into being in 2007. I'm not going to sit here and say, "Well, gosh, it shouldn't have been invented." But I wonder, and this is something you could say about a lot of gadgets and inventions, is how much thought was put into whether we should make it before we were just dominated by, "Well, we can, we could do this." There's a lot of tech teams in companies that are just dying to come up with something new to solve another pain point that they perceive in the population. And it's like that classic Ian Malcolm phrase in Jurassic Park. As he's talking to Hammond about the park, he says, "We were too busy thinking whether we could, that we didn't stop to think if we should." And so I think that's another way to address whether these gadgets and inventions are truly neutral, and whether enough thought went into them by the humans that brought them about.

Robert J. Marks:

I see. This is a debate which comes up in the area of artificial intelligence, and whether you should have autonomous artificial intelligence killing machines that are totally without human supervision.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah.

Robert J. Marks:

Is that something we should even pursue development of? I think in certain cases there are, but I can see that in many cases it's a better idea just not to go there.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. It's certainly a debate with certain things. Because there's usually pros and cons to a piece of technology or a device that's been made, arguments on both sides. And you don't want to rule out either side, but you do want to find... You do want to get to the heart of the purpose for something and whether it can be used for good or bad. And that's why I encourage people to think bigger when it comes to the questions about technology. It's not just, "Is this something that I should use?" It's, "Does

my life and my purpose and those around me, does it call for it to be used? Is it going to contribute to that larger purpose and vision?"

Robert J. Marks:

I see. Okay. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I know that you've been influenced a lot by somebody named Jacques Ellul. If I'm saying the last name right.

Andrew McDiarmid:

You are.

Robert J. Marks:

Who is he and why did he influence you?

Andrew McDiarmid:

So Jacques Ellul is a French sociologist, theologian and philosopher of technology. His lifetime spanned almost the entire 20th century, 1911 to 1994. He wrote over 50 books and over a thousand articles in his writing and teaching career. And as you can imagine living through the 20th century, he had a front row seat to observe how modern society was being impacted by technology. He wrote whole books on the topic, as well as whole books on what he recognized as the solution. And as I said, I'm so glad I discovered him. Because he kind of gave me a real boost of inspiration to the point where I thought, "Well, golly, I need to take some of his ideas and give them to a new generation." Because I was fully on board with what he presented. And the solution, not just the problem. So two of my favorite quotes from Ellul, these kind of capture his thinking. He says, "The denizen of the technological state of the future will have everything his heart ever desired. Except of course his freedom."

Robert J. Marks:

Let's unpack that a little bit. The future, as we have more and more things available to us will get to the point where we have everything available to us. But what's the consequence of that? What are we still not going to have?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah, we'll have less freedom than we ever did.

Robert J. Marks:

So technology, if we just embrace everything that comes out, is going to diminish our freedom. Is that what you're saying?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. And Ellul uses a concept called technique to explain how this happens, and we can talk about that next. He also said, "When we become conscious of that which determines our life, we attain the highest degree of freedom." So there's that freedom word again. How do we get the highest degree of freedom? By knowing what is determining or dictating or governing our life. And by first knowing and then having control over that, we can attain that freedom that we so desperately desire as humans.

Robert J. Marks:

I see. So the concept of technique is, tell me if I'm getting this right, is the choice of the proper technology, the proper components that you're going to put together and weave your life?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yes. Yes. Ellul's concept of technique is an amazing way to understand how technology can shape us and how big tech is influencing our life. In one of his most popular books, 1954 is The Technological Society. Ellul explains in great detail the phenomenon of technique. At the most basic level technique is simply the practical methods we apply to tasks. Ellul defines it as, "The ensemble of practices by which one uses available resources to achieve values." Technique in itself is not a bad thing, but in the hands of an entity or company or leader with different values than us and different goals and different visions, it can become harmful or detrimental. And usually I start with a little bit of history in case you want to weigh in there.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. Let's go into this. I would like to understand a little bit of the history and some more of the specifics of what's going on here.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. So prior to the Industrial Revolution, technique was just a straightforward part of life. It was localized. It was to do with how craftsmen and people working in different fields did their jobs. It was various. Somebody who did a task a certain way in one country, did it differently than somebody in another country, the same type of task. It developed slowly at the pace of humans. It never got ahead of them, because we governed the techniques that we were using in our work. And it was concerned with beauty and function, not just efficiency and convenience. But then the Industrial Revolution came along and started to replace human muscle and mind as a source of energy and information. And since then, technique has entered every sphere of our life and come to shape human life in many ways. And one thing that it's done is, it's gotten ahead of us.

Now, humans are no longer in control of the technique that's governing their life, because it's moving faster than us. And that's kind of where we're at today. Modern technique is concerned with the perfection of the instrument or the process, not the perfection of us, the human being. Modern technique is governed by rationality, artificiality, and automation. It decides what is moral and it's totalitarian. Meaning it's going to decide the one best way, and we have to conform to it, if we want to achieve this task. Depending on what we're talking about in this life. And you have to remember that this is not just technology we're talking about. The word technique is not synonymous with technology or gadgets. Technique is the methods by which something is realized or done. And more often than not, today we're talking about who's in control of this technique. Who's looking for the most efficient, most convenient way? Who's guiding us toward that? And we see that the answer plainly today is big tech.

It's the big technology companies and the medium-sized ones too, that have this influence in our life. And I can talk about how they influence us as well.

Robert J. Marks:

We have been talking about Jacques Ellul's concept of technique. And, if you would, just kind of summarize what technique is in order to bring those listening up-to-date. And then talk about how the phenomena technique can help us understand our issues with technology today.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah, sure. Well, Jacques Ellul, as we said before, is a French sociologist, theologian and philosopher of technology.

Robert J. Marks:

I want to get this in, because this is kind of cool to me. I'm an engineer, and engineers have a big challenge with scientists. Because it wasn't scientists that put a man on the moon. It was engineers. It wasn't scientists that gave you your cell phone, it was engineers. And there's an area called the philosophy of science, which deals with the philosophy of science. But here you're saying that this Jacques Ellul is a philosopher of technology, a philosopher, if you will, of engineering. Which is a very, very different thing. So it's nice to see that there is a philosopher of engineering. So I needed to stick that in there for a self-serving promotion for all of us engineers. And go ahead. I interrupted.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, that's a good point to be made and to be brought out here. Well, Ellul's lifetime spanned almost the entire 20th century, 1911 to 1994. He wrote books and articles throughout his career on how he saw technology impacting "the human adventure", as he calls it. And he comes up with this concept written about in the 1954 book, the Technological Society. And he called it Technique. And at the heart of it, technique is just the practical methods we apply to do tasks. And there's nothing controversial about it. But prior to the Industrial Revolution, humans were shaping these techniques, and the techniques were part of their work. And it moved slowly at the pace of humankind as they did their craftsmanship and their workmanship. And it was localized, it was various. It developed slowly, and it was to do with beauty as well as function, not so much with efficiency.

And the industrial Revolution sort of changed that. As we started replacing human muscle and mind as a source of energy and information, became less to do with the pace of humanity and how we wanted our tools to look and be. And more pursuing efficiency in the best way to do something. And then machines started coming into the picture. So Ellul opened my eyes to this concept of technique, which I think is a great way to look at the problems we're having with technology today. Just some of the issues we're having. As well as how we can work on those problems. So who controls technique in the modern age? Who controls these methods by which we access things and get things done in the modern age? Well, the short answer is big tech. With capital letters. The biggest technology companies, and even the medium ones joining in with them, that govern the way that we access information, connect with other people, entertain ourselves, get news and current events, and live much of our lives.

Shopping, medical, fitness, mental health, recreation. There's so much involved with an online digital life now. And we have to realize that these big tech companies are governing the methods, the techniques by which we access all of that. And that's big. That's the first thing we got to realize is just how much they're governing that. And then we can go from there to what to do about it.

Robert J. Marks:

So I monitor a number of different sites, including some of them that you write for. The Daily Wire and Newsmax, etc. But I also got to make sure that I visit the other side of things, the more liberal side. So I also, every once in a while, poke around at the Daily Beast or the Huffington Post and see how they're handling things. And the disparity is incredible. And I really pity people that have all of their input from a single source controlling what they think and what they believe. It's really frustrating. And many times we don't know what is true. And that is enormously frustrating, not knowing what is new. I'll give you an example. I did an article about McDonald's kiosks, and there was a story that they were full of all sorts of

bad things. A biologist went up and did some swabs of these kiosks where you went up and you ordered your Big Mac and McNuggets.

He did it in England. And he discovered that there were all sorts of bad things on it, like a coli and traces of fecal matter and other stuff. So this was terrible. And so I wrote a column about it, and then there was another column that came out and said that this guy that made this report was totally wrong. He didn't know what he was talking about, and there was all sorts of bad practices in the way he gathered the data, etc, etc. So I thought, "Well, maybe McDonald's kiosks aren't so bad after all." But then it occurred to me that this counter story could itself be fake. That these big companies that control the media, like you were mentioning, could come in and they could actually plant another story, which debunked a true story. And you just don't know what to believe. And today, I don't know the deal. I don't know the truth about McDonald's kiosks, but I can tell you I never used them.

I go up and I order nose to nose the way the God meant it to be. And so it's frustrating when you can't filter out the truth and you're being bombarded from all these sides by all of these different perspectives.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah, that's where you need to rely on the critical thinking skills you were supposed to be educated in in school. Folks our age would certainly have some of that today. I'm a little worried about the amount of critical thinking being taught in schools. But the best way to get through fake news and wondering what is true and what isn't, is evaluating, looking at multiple sources and seeing what comes out of that. Just evaluating left, right, middle, and see who's corroborating what. And just really apply your own critical thinking to get to what you would consider is the truth. But yeah, those kiosks, I've thought about them, but from a different perspective. The taking away of the human interaction. Of course, there's germs and there's all sorts of yuckies on the screen that multiple people would use. But to me, that's the secondary reason not to use it. The first reason is, I'm not looking at a human. I'm not making a connection with another human being. So that's where I'd go with those kiosks.

Robert J. Marks:

I have a cousin who's incredibly conservative, and he just gets so upset at some of the things happening. And he will talk for hours about why this is bad and why that's bad. And I get to the point where I get tired of listening to it, and I tell him, "Look, there's probably not a lot that you can do about this stuff you're complaining about. So maybe you shouldn't spend your time bathing in that information, which gets you upset if there's nothing you can do about it." Now, there's always something you can do about something. But a lot of these things, like at the national level, in order to do something about it, you have to invest yourself totally into the process in order to be effective at all. So is there times when you should just stay away and fast from some of these different disturbing things?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Indeed. And really the first person that you're trying to help is yourself.

Robert J. Marks:

Yes.

Andrew McDiarmid:

And a lot of people forget that these days. They run out into the streets and they join these parades, and they join these online social media driven mob processes. And they forget that they're trying to help themselves, or they should. If we don't address the problems with ourself and get to a better place ourself, how are we going to help anybody? So yeah, turning it off, that power button really becomes our friend, Bob. The ability to just turn something off and turn inside and say, "Okay, all right, Andrew, what are you thinking here? What are you doing? Are you spending your time well? Are you getting caught up in the minutiae of daily life? What's the big picture here?" You know, you got to give yourself time to look inside before you can help others. It's like what they tell you, or they used to, I'm not sure they do it still on airplanes. In case of an emergency, put your own mask on first and then help your children.

Robert J. Marks:

Yes.

Andrew McDiarmid:

That's an analogy I like to use sometimes.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay. So how does big tech influence us through the power of technique? We touched on it a little bit. It's just this dominance in the media. Not only in the media, of social media. Not only the news, but in the entertainment that we get from Netflix and Hulu and all of these streaming services that have a certain agenda and try to cram it down our throats with their entertainment.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. Yeah. I have a friend, Doug Smith, he's written a book called [Un]Intentional.

Robert J. Marks:

Oh, in fact, you did an interview with Doug Smith for Mind Matters News, and we should reference that in the podcast links.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yes. Yes. I was able to unpack a few things with him. His book's called [Un]Intentional, How our screens shape our desires and what we can do to break free. And so he takes it all the way to why these people would do it. This is not just for a paycheck, it's not about money, it's about power. But it goes even beyond that to what influence us to do things to other people. And the people that have made these screens and these modern gadgets, they've studied human psychology. They've gotten tips from casinos, they know how humans tick. They know what causes people to come back for more on a regular basis. They know what hooks us. And they have used these ideas to create this addictive, immersive technology. And what I'm encouraging people to do is, "Look, you got to become a tech boss here."

"You know, you got to wake up sleeper. You got to get back to what your vision is, what your purpose is, what you want to do with your life. And just really keep this stuff in check, or it is going to rule you. And you're not going to know which way is up."

Robert J. Marks:

So, suppose I want to do that, and I do want to reset my life. I want to quit worrying about things that there's nothing I can do about them. I want to quit worrying about things that are in the long run non-consequential. How do we go about resetting our relationship with technology? What are the techniques? What are the steps?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. So once we've kind of renewed an understanding of technology, we understand that it's about us, it's about our art and skill. And it's what we can do to weave something useful, good and beautiful in the world. Once we get to that point, then it's time to reset. As I said, that Staples button. The easy button, you start hitting the button. Unfortunately, it doesn't take just a second. This is the lengthier part of the process.

Robert J. Marks:

And that, by the way, is your second step. The first one is renew, then there is reset. So you have to hit that reset button, right?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. And you do that by first addressing the big questions. Why am I here? Who or what is responsible for life in the universe? What do I want to do with my time on Earth? What is my vision? And what is my purpose in that vision? So you got to start there, because if you just start by saying, "Well, do I need this gadget or that one?" That's really not addressing the main thing here, which is, what do I actually want to do? Not what am I caught up in doing, because I'm not thinking and just acting reflexively. No. It's what do I want to do with my life? So address the big questions first. Then you start to survey your gadgets and ask questions about them. And here's an example. Does this technology positively or negatively affect my...? And then you can fill that in. My time, my energy, my relationships, my potential, my memory, my attitude, my outlook, my finances, my marriage, my kids. There's a lot you can unpack with that as you start to ask about each gadget.

And I'm not just talking about gadgets, I'm talking about platforms, whole tech platforms. I'm talking about subscriptions, and I'm talking about the tech companies themselves. It's all up for grabs as far as what we decide to get rid of and keep.

Robert J. Marks:

In terms of this resetting. Both you and I are Christians, we're followers of Christ. And one of the things that one needs to do is go to your fundamental ideology in order to choose these steps that you're talking about. What do you believe the Christian should do in such a case?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Well, thanks for asking about that, Bob. I was recently rereading Psalm 139 over the Mother's Day period this year. And I got to verse 13 and 14, you know, "You knitted me together in my mother's womb." And I started unpacking that, and I got to the Hebrew word [foreign language 00:32:39], which means to [inaudible 00:32:41] in, but it also has this understanding of to weave. And I thought, "Well, gosh..."

Robert J. Marks:

Oh, there it is. Okay.

Andrew McDiarmid:

There it is. That is the same word as technology. So I think it's fair to say that when you're a believer, you are believing in a God of technology, a God that put you together with amazing technology and the ability to then go and create technology of your own. So if you start there, Bob, then you're thinking, "Well, okay, I can do technology because my maker produced me, created me, wove me together in my mother's womb. So what do I do with that?" And then the Bible promises us that, "He knows the plans He has for us." Ephesians 2:10. He planned good works for us to do in advance. So then you're looking at what you can do, building a vision fueled by God that can inform your purpose. And that's really where you start with the resetting step.

Robert J. Marks:

And so this is the third step, if you will, which is to, if you will, release our potential. Releasing our potential is the final step in your approach to technology. And that's becoming who we are meant to be. And so could you unpack that a little bit and maybe elaborate on how we do it. In order to follow these steps, you're going to become a much more effective person. You're going to have more impact on the world by doing things that are impactful, that are meaningful, than you would if you don't follow them.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Absolutely. Yeah. This is not a process for getting rid of your gadgets necessarily. That's not really the focus. In the end, these tools, these tech tools that we have, they're just a means to an end. But if you don't know what the end is, then it doesn't really matter how you use technology.

Robert J. Marks:

But the end is going to be shaped to bury your ideology.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Correct.

Robert J. Marks:

That's where you're going to start.

Andrew McDiarmid:

It's how you see the world. It's how you see your place in the world. And it's what you want to do with the time you have. So after you've surveyed your gadgets and your platforms and all your tech and then made the purge. Which is getting rid of, severing ties with, selling anything that isn't going to be useful to you and help you serve your vision and your purpose, then we're into releasing our potential. And to me, it's the most exciting part of it. This is where we practice keeping our tech in check, as I like to say. This is where we apply what we've just applied to our current tech, to any future tech. Apple and all these other big tech companies, they're never satisfied. They don't close up shop, because there's always something to innovate. There's always a new version of whatever they have out.

There's always the next new thing around the corner. And we have to decide how much of that next new we need. How much is enough. I've heard in a popular song recently, "Lately, I've been asking, well, what is enough?" Do I have a powerful enough computer? Is my phone got enough gigabytes of memory and storage? Or am I always going to have to look at the next thing? So that's part of practicing, keeping your tech in check. And then I think really just filling in your life with the human adventure, really

addressing what it means to be human. Because that, after all, is the natural antidote to dependence on machinery, dependence on technology, dependence on gadgets and subscriptions and big tech. It is, living human. And the places that I would encourage you to think about that would be relationships, learning and discovery, producing more than you consume, raising healthy, happy families, being inspired and inspiring others, and then honoring the designer of the universe. If you see that there is one that is the designer. These are all parts of the human adventure.

So filling your time with those things is going to automatically give you less time to dwell on the tech gadgets that are taking up our time and attention.

Robert J. Marks:

I have a son that teaches high school from a low income demographic. And a lot of these kids come in and they're spending all of their times on Twitter. They don't have relationships, they have very difficult parenthood, and they're developing into social misfits. They're not sure how to relate to people. And as a result of this, things materially become very, very important to them. Like, what kind of tennis shoes they wear, if anybody is liking them on Facebook, and things of that sort. And it's very frustrating because they're very empty. They're not the sort of people that... Well, if you look... Yeah, they're not the sort of people that God intended them to be, and because they're spending too much time being distracted by this other thing. Not realizing that if they did spend this time, they would be fulfilled, they would be more happy, and they would lead a much better life.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Yeah. And this was Ellul's fear as he was writing in the mid-20th century. He saw what was to come. He saw how these techniques would be shaped by technology companies and the state and other factors. He just saw this coming. And I enjoy so much reading his work because I can relate it today in a way that he can't. But he saw it. He saw it coming.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. I think Mashall McLuhan did also with his idea that we're kind of fish and we don't know the water. He made a famous statement. He says, "I don't know who discovered water, but I'm sure it wasn't a fish." So you're swimming around in all of this stuff and all of this technology, and it isn't healthy. Especially because you're being steered by these big tech companies. You're no longer in control yourself. And I think the point that you're making, Andrew, is that we need to get back in the driver's seat and take control of our lives. And not hand them over to these big tech companies and to high technology.

Andrew McDiarmid:

Right. Yeah. I think we are now at the point where we can all realize that we can't trust companies with different values and different visions than us to dictate the best methods for us in life. I just think that's a foolish thing to do, and to continue to allow yourself to do. So, that's sort of where I'm coming from with this authentic technology approach. It's helping people to wake up to this, helping them to understand what technology really means and who it's really about. And then, like you said, having them take the steering wheel.

Robert J. Marks:

So when's your book coming out?

Andrew McDiarmid:

Well, I wish I could tell you, Bob. But all these ideas are swirling, and everyone around me is writing books in Discovery Institute. And I really want to put some of these ideas together and put it out as a book just to help people in that way. So I'm looking forward to it.

Robert J. Marks:

Well, I hope you do. We're going to put a link to your talk. You sent me a link to one of your talks that I listened to. It's about an hour long. And I think it summarizes some of the points that you've made in here. However, this interview and this podcast is much better than your talk. Sorry.

Andrew McDiarmid:

There you go.

Robert J. Marks:

I put a little plug in there. So this has been a blast. Our guest today has been Andrew McDiarmid. He is a senior fellow and media specialist at The Discovery Institute. And so, until next time, be of good cheer.

Announcer:

This has been Mind Matters News with your host Robert J. Marks. Explore more at mindmatters.ai. That's mindmatters.ai. Mind Matters News is directed and edited by Austin Eggbert. The opinions expressed on this program are solely those of the speakers. Mind Matters News is produced and copyrighted by the Walter Bradley Center for Natural and Artificial Intelligence at Discovery Institute.