

# Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

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## For Openers: Minds and Machines

Editorial Board

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# Minds and Machines

The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.

Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis* (1627)

Between Bacon's vision of the illimitable scope of "human empire" and Charlie Chaplin's man enmeshed in the gears of Modern Times lies the terrain surveyed in this issue of *Conversations*. In our hospitals, universities, research laboratories and manufacturing plants, we routinely wield more power over nature than was dreamt of in Bacon's philosophy. So why do we so often feel like the hapless fellow pictured on the cover? Have we come to work for the tools that were supposed to set us free? Has the notion of infinite progress left out something essentially human?

John Staudenmaier, Timothy Casey, and Paul Soukup argue in the pages that follow that there is an urgent need for educators to undertake serious investigation of such questions. Unwilling to forfeit the ground to the endless and unilluminating battles of technophiles versus technophobes, each author calls for a critical stance toward technology that acknowledges the fact that our techniques and our machines are, after all, our own, and that the responsibility for their use and abuse rests with us.

For John Staudenmaier, the task is to foster in ourselves and our students an awareness of the complex relationships between technology—which we so often misperceive as an autonomous entity—and the human choices, hopes, and fears of which technology is ultimately an extension. He calls for the Jesuit university to be a community in which teachers and students are encouraged to read the technological order as a sign of the times, to study its dynamics in the spirit of a "love for the world that is tempered by discernment" (what St. Ignatius called "*discreta caritas*"), and to learn thereby to take part as adult citizens in the negotiations through which public resources are allocated to some technologies and not to others. Timothy Casey provides an overview of the resources that the Western philosophical tradition brings to bear on the question of technology. Philosophical reflection on technology keeps us mindful of the important, and potentially disconcerting, fact that "all technologies—from the humblest craft to the most sophisticated hi-tech—bring with them certain ways of viewing and valuing the world." Finally, Paul Soukup focuses on our culture's deep ambivalence about technology and finds in that ambiva-

lence the potential for a deeper understanding of ourselves—in all of our paradoxicality.

For all three authors, the "technological style" or technology-influenced mindset of the age lends itself all too easily to one or another form of passivity. If, in response to its manifold successes, we see technology as evidence of Baconian notions of inexorable progress, we are prone to regard all technological innovation with the absurd complacency of a Pangloss. Conversely, if we demonize all modern technology as inherently anti-human, we fail to participate in the intellectual, social, economic and political processes through which we decide what kinds of machines we will have.

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## Suggestions for "In Deed"?

When *Conversations* was launched four years ago, the "In Deed" section of the publication was established as a way to encourage exchange of information among the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States. Beginning with our second issue, we committed ourselves to publishing reports on "programs related to mission and identity" on each of the campuses, setting aside space for three or four institutions per issue. With the reports on Fordham and Le Moyne in this issue, we come to the end of this nationwide survey. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the dozens of people who have contributed to these features over the years.

We would also like to solicit news, notes, and suggestions for future "In Deed" sections. If you have information on an event, activity, or program that you think would be of interest to readers of *Conversations*, please let us know. We are especially interested in publishing items relating to topics treated in past issues of the magazine. A list of those topics follows:

Helping Students Make Moral Decisions  
Theology and the Mission of the Jesuit University  
Professional Education in the Jesuit University  
Women in Jesuit Higher Education  
Catholic Identity  
Service Learning  
Catholic Intellectual Life