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A Future for the Family: A New Technology Agenda for the Right

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Introduction

A new era of technological change is upon us. It threatens to supplant the human person and make the family functionally and biologically unnecessary. But this anti-human outcome is not inevitable.

Conservatives must welcome dynamic innovation, but they should oppose the deployment of technologies that undermine human goods. We must enact policies that elevate the family to a primary constituency of technological advancement. Our aim should be a newly re-functionalized household for the twenty-first century.

Technology is meant to empower the human person. We have seen, however, that if left ungoverned, technological advancement too easily comes to hinder human flourishing and threatens the human person and the family. Many of the most important political questions of our day have been prompted by the moral implications of new technologies: Should human life be artificially created or destroyed? Can people change genders? Should digital obscenity be accessible to all ages in the name of free speech? Should jobs that sustain families be automated? We must discern prudent ways to govern technology in order to keep the human person, human dignity, and the common good as the central goals of our politics. We must ensure that new technologies serve human life and the human family, not the other way around.

Our present technologies are not, however, designed to serve the family. They were developed to accomplish military, bureaucratic, and corporate purposes, without regard to effects on families. American technology has undermined the moral authority of parents, the procreative potential of spouses, and the ability of families to shape their communities; it has commodified the data, relationships, and bodies of children; and it has enabled the out-sourcing of jobs that once supported a healthy marriage culture among the poor and working class. This crisis affects almost every aspect of our national life. The family generates society, and a culture of thriving families is an indispensable condition of social health. A nation that is hostile to the family is hostile to itself.

Conservatives should push for policies that support economic dynamism and innovation, but we must recognize that the market has failed to produce a technological order that uplifts the family. Rather, that order too often attacks it at the root.

As scholars, writers, and policy experts, we believe that public policy should direct technology toward the flourishing of the family and the human person. Our laws and regulations must seek to form a technological order that provides a functional economic role for the household, protects human sexuality, rewards marriage, enriches childhood, preserves parental and communal authority, enables the practice of liberty, and ennobles our common life. These human goods are fundamental for thriving families and they must be guarded and advanced amid revolutionary technological change.

To these ends, we offer the following ten guiding principles for empowering families through technology:

Ten Principles

1. Respect the natural cycle of mortality by healing or mitigating chronic disease rather than pursuing radical life extension, and palliate the suffering of terminal illness rather than artificially accelerating death.
2. Support women in their natural ability to conceive, gestate, birth, and nurture children, rather than seek to bypass or short-circuit the female body or reduce it to organs for rent.
3. Protect human sexuality from ongoing commodification and dehumanization by violent pornography, digital prostitution, child sexual abuse material, deepfakes, AI sexual companions, and sex robots.
4. Work to wrest childhood from the grip of social media and smartphones and encourage free play and personal interaction in their place; hold companies accountable for designing platforms to undermine human well-being and exploit the most vulnerable phases of childhood development; and remove screens from the center of the classroom while restoring physical books and the mechanical arts.
5. Oppose the political economy of addiction embedded in the software and user interfaces of smart devices, which capitalizes upon compulsive use, surveillance, and disembodied relationships. Encourage the growing market of smart devices that offer tools for productivity and connectivity only, while ensuring that smartphones are not required to fully participate in our economy or society, but remain a true consumer choice.

6. Legislate toward a restored republican culture in a digital age by giving citizens ownership over their own data; protect privacy by blocking the transformation of everyday appliances into surveillance systems; and require platforms to build robust tools that give users transparency and choices about the algorithms that construct their feeds.
7. Favor technologies that enhance local and familial autonomy through right-to-repair laws, open-source software, and open-platform designs, all of which make technology less reliant on distant power centers. Oppose the imposition of universal technological changes, such as the EV mandate, that undercut the capacity and responsibility of local actors.
8. Favor technologies that enhance human skill and improve worker satisfaction over those that degrade or replace human labor, thereby increasing productivity and growing working-class wages. Balance the pace of automation by investing in job recovery and skill development to buttress a family wage in the most affected industries, especially those that foster higher marriage rates.
9. Accelerate the transition to a new household economy, clear away policy restrictions on home production, and shape labor laws and tax policy to adopt flexible work models that strengthen families and reinvigorate communities, while also taking measures to protect the home from managerial overreach and the disruption of family life.
10. Launch projects that encourage man's cultivation of the natural world and elevate the human spirit, such as a renewed manned spaceflight program and the tech-enabled rewilding of parts of the American West. Dismantle government incentives that push the American people toward artificial or virtual substitutes to embodied life, such as subsidies for lab-grown meat and a liability regime that punishes embodied industries and activities.

These guiding principles will lead to deep and needed reform of our existing technological order. Whenever technology ceases to supplement other human goods and threatens to become a substitute for them, we are in danger, all the more so when technology attacks human life at its root by subverting and replacing the family. The family plants the seed and forms the foundation of the future, through the begetting and raising of children who will carry the human project forward. As such, the family, technology, and a dynamic and fruitful future are intrinsically connected, and the present conflict between them must be overcome. To undermine the family is to undo the future; to strengthen the family is to fill the future with possibility, invention, and hope.

The full text of the statement can be found at

<https://firstthings.com/a-future-for-the-family-a-new-technology-agenda-for-the-right/>

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