# CMSC 115 Reading Guide

This reading comes from an FAQ by philosopher of technology Stephen Talbott. It was written over 25 years ago, and I continue to use it because seeing the modern use of computer technology through the eyes of someone many years ago looking forward can help us understand discern which parts of our current technological lifestyle are idiosyncratic, and which parts are built in to the technology itself.

# Stephen Talbott’s “Computerized Technology and Human Responsibility”

1. What is the most basic danger that Talbott sees in Computer Technologies? The most basic danger that Talbott sees in Computer Technologies is the computer seducing us into becoming like it, where we abandon our own thinking and “sleepwalk” with our machines.
2. What “solution” does he recommend? The solution that he recommends is to not sleepwalk, and continue to be a unique and incalculable individual, not falling prone to automated logic.
3. What does Talbott mean in question 3, when he says “One-sidedness can be brought into balance through proper effort”? What would this effort look like? This effort would look like making sure that we do not just blindly accept what a computer returns to us, but rather continue to understand and gather meaning about the analysis and calculation.
4. He talks a lot about computers affecting our humanity. Does he seem to have a Biblical view of what it means to be human? Talbott does appear to have a Biblical view of what it means to be human as he recognizes that we all fall short, but that we are called to create “tools” to overcome, advance, and uncover creation and develop as human beings.
5. What does Talbott meant when he says technology is not neutral? Talbott meant when he said technology is not neutral is that humans have input certain choices into technology that that form to our way of thinking, causing technology to not behave as neutral.
6. What fear about computers is he expressing in Question 10, “Are we free?” Talbott is expressing fear about computer not being able to change after seeing a pattern of causation. He also worries about every action that we take having consequences, meaning the technology we wrote long ago binds us to follow by its rules.
7. After reading through much of this FAQ, you get to question 43. Are you surprised by his answer? Why or why not? After reading through much of the FAQ, this answer does not entirely surprise me. Talbott acknowledged that technology is not inherently evil, but we need to master our technology before it controls us in our “sleepwalking.”
8. Why do you think I assigned this reading at the end of a semester of a programming class? What does this have to do with what you’ve been learning all semester? I think you assigned this reading at the end of a programming class because it relates to what we have been learning and doing all semester. This reading reinforces that we need to critically think about our programming decisions and attempt to develop in such a way that makes the program remain neutral and in a way that allows the user to learn and develop from it.