Session 1.1: Introduction
7th October 2017

Title: **Can "*Stuff*" be Morally Good?**

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Mike Brownnutt obtained his first Master's degree (MSci in physics) and his PhD (in experimental quantum mechanics) from Imperial College London. Following this he moved to Innsbruck, Austria, for eight years, firstly as a post-doctoral researcher and later as an Assistant Professor, developing scalable architectures for quantum computers. Throughout this work he has had an abiding interest in the relationship between science and religion. He completed his second Master's degree (MA in theology from the University of Chester) considering how "faith" is understood by various parties in discourse on the relationship between Christianity and science. Now living in Hong Kong, he is Associate Director of the Faith and Science Collaborative Research Forum.

Abstract:
We are used to the idea that *people* can be good or bad, but it is less obvious to see how an inanimate object – without desire or volition – can be morally good or bad. This talk therefore considers what it means to redeem, or even need to redeem, a *thing*.

The things people make, from guns to phones to Coke cans, are designed to be used in particular ways. This inbuilt purpose is not value free, and predisposes objects – deliberately or inadvertently – to be used in ways which are morally value-laden: you *can* use a gun as a paperweight, but you are using it wrong.

The engineers and scientists who develop new technologies are in a unique position, and have a unique responsibility, to be aware of the moral dimension of their work. This awareness can open new vistas for research. It enables us to move beyond the usual puzzles of finding how to make something faster, lighter, or cheaper, and ask how to make something which is, morally speaking, *good*.

Reading:

- "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" Langdon Winner. Article #55 in Scharff and Dusek.