

# Book Review: Law and Technology: A Methodical Approach

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**Book:** Ryan Calo, *Law and Technology: A Methodical Approach*, 2025, Oxford University Press, online edn, <https://doi.org/10.1093/9780197526170.001.0001>

## Review

Ryan Calo's *Law and Technology: A Methodical Approach* provides what the law and technology field has long lacked: a systematic, coherent and teachable method for analysing technology from a legal perspective. Methodological reflection is well established in socio-legal studies and has grown within law and technology, yet relatively few works consolidate these insights into an operational, step by step framework designed for legal analysis of technology. Calo's book advances this conversation and appears at a moment when debates about artificial intelligence, algorithmic governance and digital infrastructures demand conceptual clarity and methodological discipline.

Calo's central claim is that law and technology scholarship requires its own methodological foundations. The absence of clearly articulated foundations has enabled recurring misunderstandings of technology as inevitable, ungovernable and inherently beneficial. By presenting a clear and practical analytical framework, he aims both to counter these misconceptions and to consolidate law and technology as a self-aware academic field with its own identity and methodology.

The book begins by dismantling several persistent myths about technology that have obstructed effective legal engagement. Calo challenges the assumption that technologies evolve beyond human control, that they conceal human agency and responsibility, and that regulation necessarily inhibits innovation. Drawing examples

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from cybersecurity and biotechnology, he shows convincingly that technology is a social fact like many others, complex yet governable. The frequently cited pacing problem, according to which law cannot keep up with technological change, is recast as an analytical difficulty rather than a reason for regulatory paralysis.

The next chapter explains how legal analysis differs from the approaches of other disciplines, especially science and technology studies (STS). While STS offers valuable descriptive insight, legal analysis carries a prescriptive dimension. It asks not only what is, but what ought to be done. This pragmatic orientation is a strength when combined with openness to other disciplines. Calo encourages legal scholars to draw selectively from STS, design theory and related traditions without treating any of them as complete or competing paradigms.

The core of the book is a four-step methodology for the legal analysis of technologies. It guides scholars through the selection and definition of the technology under study, the exploration of its social implications, the examination of relevant legal frameworks, and the formulation of potential interventions. At each stage Calo insists on transparency of choices: why this technology, why this area of law, and according to which normative and analytical lens. He shows that doctrinal work, like all scholarship, is not neutral but built upon assumptions that should be made explicit.

The methodology is illustrated through applications to augmented reality, adversarial machine learning and cochlear implants. These examples show how legal reasoning can integrate ethical and social insight while remaining institutionally grounded. They also demonstrate how proposed methodology can be used to channel technological development towards public benefit rather than only restoring a past order.

The book's major contribution lies in its insistence on conceptual clarity, reflexivity and interdisciplinarity. It reminds scholars that sound legal analysis depends on explaining methodological and normative choices, not only on technical mastery of doctrine. Beyond the field of law and technology, the book contributes to the broader development of methodological reflection in socio-legal studies. It complements a substantial body of work that has sought to make socio-legal research more methodologically self-aware and theoretically coherent.<sup>1</sup>

There remain some areas that invite further development. While the book acknowledges a wide range of theoretical perspectives, from feminist theory to political economy, its framework is largely grounded in the concept of affordances. A fuller integration of these alternative perspectives would further strengthen the methodological framework and broaden its applicability across different strands of legal and interdisciplinary research.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Naomi Creutzfeldt, Marc Mason and Kirsten McConnachie (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Socio-Legal Theory and Methods* (Routledge 2019); Dawn Watkins and Mandy Burton (eds), *Research Methods in Law* (3rd edn, Routledge 2025); Peter Cane and Herbert M. Kritzer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Empirical Legal Research* (OUP 2010); Christopher McCrudden, 'Legal Research and the Social Sciences' (2006) 122 *Law Quarterly Review* 632.

Overall, *Law and Technology: A Methodical Approach* is a significant and timely contribution. It provides a disciplined yet flexible framework for scholars and practitioners who seek to understand and guide the legal dimensions of technological change. For readers outside law, it offers a transparent account of how legal reasoning operates and how normative choices shape regulation. For students and researchers, it models good scholarship by demonstrating intellectual honesty, methodological rigour and critical openness.

Calo's book deserves wide readership across law, STS and related fields. It will serve as a foundation for future debates about how law should respond to innovation, and as an example of how methodological reflection strengthens both scholarship and public discourse.