

BRIERCREST

THEO 759 Theology Specialty: Left to our own De[vices]? Theology, Technology, and the Future Winter 2020

Professor: Dr. Joel Houston
Email: jhouston@briercrest.ca
Phone: 306.756.3245
Course Dates: February 24–28, 2020

3 Credit Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This iteration of the Theology Specialty is a theo-critical appraisal of our technological age, habits, and trajectory. This course seeks to understand the broad currents of technological development and their influence upon contemporary ways of being-in-the-world. Resourcing the classical doctrines of Creation and the Incarnation, the class will endeavor to formulate a distinctly *Christian* response to our modern condition; one that seeks to strike a balance between an outright rejection and uncritical embrace of technological expansion.

INSTRUCTOR'S INTRODUCTION

G.K. Chesterton once observed that the “huge modern heresy” of living within a technocratic society is that it “alter[s] the human soul to fit its conditions, instead of altering human conditions to fit the human soul.” It is difficult to escape the notion that our technological tools are quickly becoming our technological masters. But is this the final word? *Left to Our Own De[vices]* is a class that seeks to respond to, and resist, the current “technological takeover.”

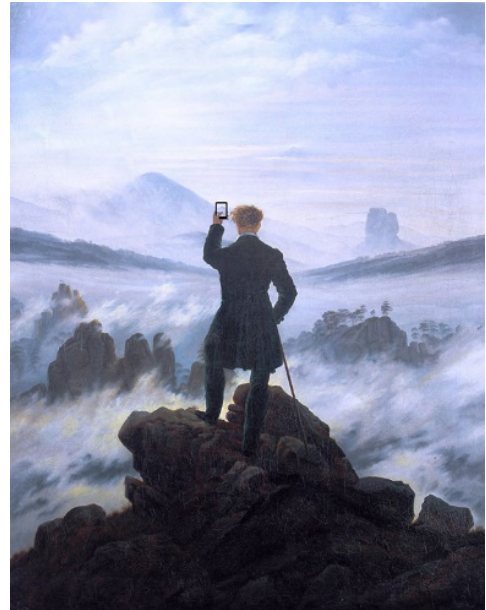
Students will be encouraged to evaluate their contemporary technological climate (with special emphasis on screen-based technologies, such as mobile phones and personal computers) and respond critically, thoughtfully, and most important, *theologically*. Instead of a privatized examination, THEO 759 is structured in such a way as to maximize opportunities for both personal *and* corporate discernment. Ultimately, this course is designed to create an opportunity to critically assess our technological habits and step into the future a more theologically informed and technologically responsible follower of Jesus Christ.

COURSE INTEGRATION

THEO 759 is deliberately aimed at the intersection of life, ministry, family, the academe, and indeed, the soul. Course readings, activities, and research assignments are intended to explore the rich cross-sections of life that are affected by, and intimately tied to, the usage of technology and our understanding of the person and work of God. As such, students can expect a broad and diverse approach to the questions that surround technology and theology and will also benefit from a decidedly praxis-oriented exploration of these themes.

COURSE TEXTS

Borgmann, Albert, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), **138 pages**.



Capon, Robert Farrer, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection* (New York: Modern Library, 2002).

Crouch, Andy, *The Tech-wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), **224 pages**.

Gay, Craig, *Modern Technology and the Human Future: A Christian Appraisal* (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), **224 pages**.

THEO 759 Course Reader (available on Canvas), **300 pages**.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Hill, Doug, *Not So Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016).

Postman, Neil, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

Schmemmann, Alexander, *For the Life of the World* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2nd Ed., 2002), **186 pages**.

OTHER TEXTS REQUIRED FOR CLASS

The Holy Bible (a translation of your choosing; ESV is recommended, but not required).

These texts are available in store and online at the Briercrest Bookstore: <http://briercrest.ca/bookstore>.

Students are expected to refer to Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and Guide for Writing Research Papers, available as PDF documents here: <https://www.mybriercrest.ca/seminary/documents/>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>; cf. <http://briercrest.ca/online/canvas>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

COURSE OUTCOMES

- 1) Students will have the opportunity to critically evaluate the integration of technology into their personal life and assess the personal and spiritual impact of this integration.
- 2) Students will develop a theologically robust framework for appraising the usage of modern technologies.
- 3) Students will gain an understanding of the development of modern technologies and examine the implicit values inherent within these developments.
- 4) Students will be able to articulate a biblically and theologically informed vision of human flourishing.
- 5) Finally, students will have the opportunity to develop the skills (both inside class and as a result of class assignments) to apply this vision to a variety of contexts (personal, ministerial, academic, or otherwise).

COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT¹

¹ The instructor of record reserves the right to alter the course outline and content at any time before, or during, the delivery of the course.

Date	Topic	Readings ²	Assignments
Feb 24 th	<u>Where Are We?</u> Morning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course Introduction - Syllabus and Assignment Review Afternoon: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The State of Affairs: Technology, our Brain, and our Soul. - On the Possibility that the Internet is a Manifestation of the Antichrist. 	Gay , <i>Modern Technology</i> : ix-58; Snow , "Look at Me" (Course Reader), 1-9; Lanier , "Social Media Hates Your Soul", 125-144.	<i>Modern Technology</i> Presentation #1
Feb 25 th	<u>How Did We Get Here?</u> Morning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "But What Did We Lose?": A Brief History of Technological Development Afternoon: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No God but the Internet: Society, Secularism and Belief. - Technological values and theological poverties. 	Gay , <i>Modern Technology</i> : 59-92 Ellul , "The Sacred Today" in <i>The New Demons</i> , 48-87; Berry , "Why I am Not Going to Buy a Computer", 1-7	<i>Modern Technology</i> Presentation #2
Feb 26 th	<u>How is This Designed to Work?</u> Afternoon (1:00pm): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Here I Am": Theological Anthropology in a Covenantal Context. - The Only Human Who Ever Lived: Following Christ in an age of Ghosts. Evening (5:00pm): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Supper³ - Werner Herzog, "Lo and Behold: Reveries of the Connected World." 	Gay , <i>Modern Technology</i> : 93-131; Tolstoy , "The Death of Ivan Ilyich", 39-91; Heidegger , "The Question Concerning Technology, 3-35;	<i>Modern Technology</i> Presentation #3
Feb 27 th	<u>Where Do We Go From Here?</u> Morning:	Gay , <i>Modern Technology</i> : 132-166	<i>Modern Technology</i> Presentation #4

² Readings for the dates stipulated must be completed *before the course*. The assigned readings correspond to the days where the texts will be under discussion.

³ Students are required to inform the instructor of any dietary preferences or requirements in advance of the community supper.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Futures of Theology and Technology: Destructive? <p>Afternoon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Futures of Theology and Technology: Redemptive? 	<p>Crouch: <i>The Tech-Wise Family</i>; Capon: <i>The Supper of the Lamb</i>;</p>	
Feb 28 th	<p><u>How Do We Get There?</u></p> <p>Morning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategies and Practices: Techno-and Theo-logical. 	<p>Gay, <i>Modern Technology</i>: 167-228; Postman, <i>Technology</i> (Course Reader), 36-57; Seerveld, "Obedient Aesthetic Life",</p>	<p><i>Modern Technology</i> Presentation #5</p>

ASSIGNMENTS

Pre-Course Assignments:

Please submit these assignments to Canvas.

Course Reading and Critical Reviews – 15%

As preparation for class discussion and interaction, students are required to read and complete critical reviews for the following three texts: Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure*, Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, and Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb*. Each critical review is to be **2 pages** in length (for a total of **6 pages**). The first page is to be a precis of the central thesis of the work. Concision and precision are the watch words for this portion of the review. The second page of the critical review should argue for the relevance of the work as it bears upon the intersection between technology and theology. In some cases (Crouch, for example) this may seem self-evident. For others (Capon), analysis the relationship will require greater critical reasoning.

Students will be evaluated on their ability to a) accurately and succinctly summarize the thesis of the work and b) creatively apply the work to the concerns of the subject matter of THEO759. Please note: this assignment is not a personal reflection. Students are more than welcome to share their informed opinions of the works in class; this assignment, however, should maintain the interests described above.

Course Reading and Critical Reviews Due: 24 February 2020

Technology Audit and Taxonomy – 15%

One of the most perplexing questions associated with a theological assessment of technology is beguilingly simple: what is technology? Before embarking on our in-depth analysis, it is essential to grasp what technology is, and how we are presently involved with it.

The student will select **two days** within a given week to conduct a personal technology audit on both days. One of these days must be the day where the student participates in a formal day of worship (a Sunday, most commonly). On both days, the student will record as many instances of technological usage as possible. In the case of the day of religious observance, the student is required to observe and record all technologies and way technology is employed to facilitate the service of corporate worship.

Following from this audit, the student must develop a taxonomy of technological usage, and record which classifications technology falls within. Students are free to create a creative taxonomy, classifying technologies in whichever way they see fit. An *example* could be as follows:

<u>Technologies of Communication:</u>	<u>Technologies of Ambulation:</u>	<u>Technologies of Health and Nourishment:</u>
- Phone	- Personal Automobile (Car)	- Microwave
- Text Messaging	- City Bus	- Kitchen Knife
- Email		

The purpose of this assignment is to consciously note the all-pervasive aspects of technology and begin the process of understanding the relationship between tool and telos. Students will be evaluated on the rigor of their audit (how comprehensively they assessed their technological milieu) and the creativity of their taxonomies, as well as their presentation. Note: many technologies (especially screen-based technologies) will appear in multiple categories. Students must be prepared to share their audits in small groups during the week of class.

Technology Audit and Taxonomy Due: 24 February 2020

Mid-Course Assignments:

Modern Technology In-Class Presentations – 15%

Students will, in groups corresponding to the total class number, present the contents of the reading from Craig Gay's *Modern Technology* for the day (1 chapter per day of class), and lead the class in a discussion. Students are expected to develop a seminar-level presentation which includes, but is not limited to, appropriate visuals (e.g. power-point), suitable handouts and appropriate facilitation of class interaction (suggestions for discussion, in-class activities, etc.). Students will be evaluated for their ability to comprehensively account for the contents of their respective chapters. Additionally, creativity and quality of presentation will account for the grade constitution. Groups will be selected by the instructor and announced via Canvas. In preparation for this presentation, students are advised to be well-read in *Modern Technology* and prepared to communicate with each other in advance of their presentation. A suitable presentation will run between 45-60 minutes of class time. Finally, students will submit their presentation materials to the instructor of record for final evaluation.

Modern Technology Chapter Presentations: 24-28 February 2020

Post-Course Assignments:

The "Digital Declutter" – 25%

Students will read Cal Newport's chapter "The Digital Declutter" from *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (available in the THEO 759 Course Reader) and carry out Newport's prescription for minimizing unnecessary technologies. Students are required to journal throughout the entirety of this process. Because the "digital declutter" takes place over several weeks, the journal need not feature daily entries, but rather, serve as an accurate reflection of the student's experience of the experiment. Students are free to reflect candidly and honestly and should view this assignment as an opportunity to put into action the insights gathered from class. Of interest in the journal should be a record of the progress of the soul. Did the student notice any quantifiable changes to their devotional life? To their experience of God in the everyday? In their interactions with peers, colleagues, family or strangers?

Students will submit their journal for evaluation. A final comment in the journal about whether the student will continue with a "minimalist" digital life is expected. Students are required to hand-write their journals. Students unable to submit this assignment on campus should submit it by mail, postmarked by the due date.

Mail to: Briercrest Seminary (Attn: Dr. Houston), 510 College Dr., Caronport, SK S0H 0S0

"Digital Declutter" Journal Due: 24 April 2020**Theology and Technology Synthesis Paper – 30%**

Students will write a **10-page** paper relating to the intersection of theology and technology. The description of this paper is deliberately vague, allowing students to explore a creative approach to asking and answering questions related to theology and technology. Furthermore, the broad nature of the topic should encourage students to research and write with a specific focus on their current vocational trajectory. Papers that explore theology and technology as it relates to ministry, counselling, leadership, philosophical or academic theology, and pastoral care are strongly encouraged. A *minimum* of 10 scholarly sources must be resourced for this paper including monographs, journal articles, systematic theologies, primary and secondary sources. **Students must approve their topic with the instructor of record by 28 February 2020.** Please submit the final paper to Canvas.

Theology and Technology Synthesis Paper Due: 31 March 2020**SEMINARY CALENDAR**

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current Seminary Calendar: <https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/academics/calendar/>.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend 100% of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible due to extenuating circumstances, arrangements must be made with the course professor before the first day of class. If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending class, a maximum of one full day of class can be foregone. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Course Schedules

Classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

Assignment Submission

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

Return of Graded Assignments

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

Academic Honesty

Students are accountable to perform each task according to principles of academic honesty. Please refer to pages 24-25 in the [academic calendar](#) for more information.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or illness who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should discuss them with the course instructor after contacting the Director of Student Success in person (L234 in the Library), by telephone (1-306-756-3230) or by email (studentsuccesscentre@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Borgmann, Albert, *Holding on to Reality: The Nature of Information at the Turn of the Millennium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

_____, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003).

Carr, Nicholas, *The Glass Cage: Where Automation is Taking Us* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).

_____, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains* (New York: Norton and Company, 2011).

Capon, Robert Farrer, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection* (New York: Modern Library, 2002).

Crouch, Andy, *The Tech-wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017).

Dyer, John, *From the Garden to the City* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011).

Ellul, Jacques, *The New Demons* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973).

_____, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976).

Gaillardetz, Richard R., *Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000).

Gay, Craig, *Modern Technology and the Human Future: A Christian Appraisal* (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2018).

Gorrell, Angela W., *Always On: Practicing Faith in a New Media Landscape* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019).

Hildebrand, Dietrich V., *Liturgy and Personality* (Steubenville: The Hildebrand Project, 2016).

Hill, Doug, *Not So Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016).

Illich, Ivan, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

Lanier, Jaron, *Ten Arguments For Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2018).

McLuhan, Marshall, *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999).

_____, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Oxford: Routledge, 1964).

Monsma, Stephen, V, Editor, *Responsible Technology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

Newport, Cal, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (New York: Portfolio, 2019).

Noble, David F., *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York: Penguin, 1999).

Postman, Neil, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 2nd Ed., 2005).

_____, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

_____, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

_____, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

Price, Catherine, *How to Break Up With Your Phone* (California: Ten Speed Press, 2018).

Reinke, Tony, *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017).

Schmemmann, Alexander, *For the Life of the World* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2nd Ed., 2002).

Turkle, Sherry, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).