BRIERCREST

THEO 759/493: "Left to Our Own De[vices]?"—A Theology of Technology
Winter 2024

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Course Dates: February 19—23, 2024
Course Delivery Method: In-Person Modular

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.

INSTRUCTORS' 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."[1] 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 493/759 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.

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[1] Gill, Richard, "G.K. Chesterton: Social Criticism and the Sense of Wonder" in *VII: Journal of the Marion E. Wade Centre*, Vol. 23 (2006), 16.

COURSE INTEGRATION

THEO 493/759 is deliberately aimed at the intersection of life, ministry, family, the academe, and 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 surrounding technology and theology and will also benefit from a decidedly praxis-oriented exploration of these themes.

COURSE TEXTS

Crouch, Andy, *The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World* (Colorado Springs: Convergent Books, 2022).

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

Hiestand, Gerald and Todd A. Wilson, eds. *Technē: Christian Visions of Technology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022).

THEO 493/759 Course Reader (available on Canvas).

The preferred style for Biblical Studies/Theology papers is Chicago. A shorthand guide is available here: *https://www.mybriercrest.ca/college/documents/* and here: *https://www.mybriercrest.ca/seminary/documents/*.

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

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (https://briercrest.instructure.com) 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).

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ASSIGNMENTS
Please submit all written assignments to Canvas.

Pre-Course Assignments:
Course Reading and Critical Reviews – 20%

As preparation for class discussion and interaction, students must read and complete a critical review of Craig Gay's *Modern Technology and the Human Future*. The review is to be six pages long for seminary students, and college students must write a four-page review. 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 THEO 493/759. 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. A signed attestation that the student has completed reading Andy Crouch's *The Life We're Looking For* will accompany the last page of the review.

Reflection on Relationship with your device(s) – 10%
Students will write and submit a four-page paper (two-page paper for college students) reflecting on their relationship with their device(s).

Course Reading, Reflection, and Critical Reviews Due 19 February 2024

Mid-Course Assignments:
*Specific due dates and discussion schedules will be established by the instructors and clearly communicated as the course approaches.

Handwritten Reflection on Relationship with your device(s) after 30-hour tech fast – 10%

Students will be invited to abandon their devices and computers for 30 hours, during which time they will reflect on their experience once they have "left their own devices" in a safe but inaccessible place (in the hands of the professors). At the end of their 30-hour tech fast, students will hand write a follow up document to the one they submitted as part of the pre-course assignments, assessing the effects of being away from their devices. The assignment is to be four pages, double-spaced (two-pages, double spaced for college students).

Leading a Class/Group Discussion – 10%

Students, in groups, will be assigned one of the chapters in *Technē: Christian Visions of Technology* and invited to facilitate a class discussion on themes arising from their reading. Students will submit a one-page outline of questions designed with key insights and questions that they plan to use as a guide to nurture discussion among their peers.

Eating, Worshiping, Playing, and Resting – 20%

Students will be divided into groups and assigned to lead the class in one essential Christian practice sometime during the week. One group will guide us to prepare and eat a meal together.

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Another group will lead us to worship together. One group will facilitate a time of play. The remaining group will lead us into rest. Groups will be assessed on their ability to 1) guide us into the communal practice with creativity and 2) educate us about a healthy theology of the practice, with an eye on how technology is (ab)used to "enhance" human flourishing.

> Eating together – Group 1
> Worshiping together – Group 2
> Playing together – Group 3
> Resting together – Group 4

Post-Course Assignments:

Theology and Technology Synthesis Paper – 30%

Seminary students will write a ten page paper (*College students will write a six 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 5 scholarly sources must be resourced for this paper including monographs, journal articles, systematic theologies, primary and secondary sources. **Students must approve their topic with one of the instructors of record by 23 February 2024.** Please submit the final paper to Canvas.

Theology and Technology Synthesis Paper Due 19 April 2024

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
In order to benefit fully from a seminary education, to be good stewards of time and finances, and to be considerate of their classmates and faculty members, students must be in class at every opportunity.

Modular Courses
Students are expected to attend 100 per cent 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 (1) 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.

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Online Courses
If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending scheduled meeting times, then up to 20% of meeting time can be foregone. Students missing scheduled meeting times should make every effort to inform the course professor prior to any time missed. 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.

Semester-Based Courses
All students missing more than two full weeks of a particular course from registration to the last day of classes will receive an automatic fail (0%). A student may appeal a course failure due to excessive absences. Successful appeals will be granted only in rare cases where all absences are clearly beyond the student's control. Appeals must be made through the Academic Appeal Process.

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
As members of the Briercrest learning community, students have a responsibility to conduct themselves with integrity and honour. Students who cheat on exams, plagiarize, inappropriately collaborate, or use generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) without instructor authorization in the preparation and/or submission of their assignments violate the trust placed in them by their instructors, fellow students, and the seminary. Any such actions constitute a breach of academic honesty and will result in serious consequences, such as failure of an assignment, failure of a course, or expulsion from the seminary.

Plagiarism, whether intentional or involuntary, is the submission of the work of others, published or unpublished, in whole or in part without acknowledgment or proper documentation. All information, ideas and/or direct quotations taken from other primary or secondary sources must be documented appropriately. Students are responsible to ensure they are using their sources with transparency and honesty. For more details, consult the [Seminary Calendar](#). In addition to being familiar with these pages, instructors assume that you have completed the Briercrest Academic Integrity course on [Canvas](#) and understand the information contained in it.

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Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition (mental or physical) who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should contact the ARC Coordinator in person (L234 in the Library), by phone (1-306-801-6159), or by email (arc@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.). It is recommended that students meet with their professors to discuss the requirements of their accommodations (i.e., how the student will receive lecture notes, or how the professor wants to receive extension requests).

College Calendar

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest College. Please refer to the College Calendar: https://www.briercrestcollege.ca/academics/calendar/

Attendance (Modular Course)

All students missing more than four hours of a modular class will receive an automatic fail, "F" (0%).

Final Exams

Students are allowed 3 hours to write their final exams. Students must write their final exams as scheduled. ALL final exams are mandatory. Failure to write a final exam will result in an "F" (0%) for the course.

Late Assignments

Though individual faculty members may disallow late assignments at their discretion, the following is a statement of policy concerning late assignments:

- All assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the assigned day.
- Typically, late assignments will receive a penalty of five per cent per weekday to a maximum of 25 per cent deducted from the total assignment mark. After five weekdays, no late assignments will be accepted, and the grade for that assignment will be zero.
- Individual faculty members may articulate a modification of this policy, provided it is both approved by the dean of the faculty in which the course is located and stated clearly in the course syllabus.

Assignment Extension Policy

- Individual faculty members may grant extensions, but rarely and only in unusually extenuating circumstances. They will not grant extensions due to other assignments or co-curricular involvement.
- Faculty members do not have the authority to grant extensions beyond 5:00 p.m. of the last day of classes in the semester.

Editing

Another person(s) may read your written work, point out errors or shortcomings (i.e. grammatical errors, structural issues, citations, etc.), and discuss generic solutions, without providing any specific wording to the assignment (i.e. "write x instead of y").

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Academic Resource Centre Referral
At Briercrest, we are a community of learning. Part of being a community means caring for one another. As such, if it is observed that students may benefit from additional support during the semester, they may be referred to the Academic Resource Centre. Neither the referral nor use of supports will appear on academic records.

Personal Technology in the Classroom
To reduce distractions, students should limit their use of portable electronic devices in the classroom to educational, course-specific activities approved by their instructor. Activities such as surfing, texting, chatting, gaming, etc., diminish the quality of learning, both for the individual student and for others in the class.

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