

Addicted to Shiny Things: Why & How to Find Freedom in the Age of the Internet

Elyse Fitzpatrick

- Introduction
 - A very brief history of the world (of new technologies)
 - *Those who acquire [X] will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on [X] to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of by their own internal resources...And as for wisdom, your pupils will have the reputation for it without the reality: they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction, and in consequence be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant.ⁱ*
 - The written word
 - The wheel and domestication of the horse
 - Metals
 - The printing press
 - The compass
 - Magnifying lenses
 - The clock
 - Paper currency
 - The steam engine
 - Electricity/the electric light
 - The telegraph, telephone, television
 - Antibiotics
 - Computers
 - The internet has changed and will continue to change each of these technologies. Who needs a compass or clock or paper currency? Who needs to travel anywhere when there is VR? Who needs a telegraph, landline, television? Who needs a computer when you have a smartphone?

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- Where we've come in the last 20 years
 - *To be hooked up to the crowd is a very particular way to go through life.*
 - Number of cell phones:
 - Number of apps for smart phones:
 - Number of blogs per day:
 - Number of websites:
 - Number of Google Searches per day:
 - Number of hours spent before a screen:
 - Number of hours spent on TV:
 - Number of Netflix streaming subscribers:
 - Number of cable TV subscribers:
 - Percentage of e-sales
 - Amount of emails sent per day
 - Text messaging is the most used data service in the world.
 - Social Media:
 - Gaming:
 - Photos
 - All of this has happened in the last 25 years.
 - Won't even discuss AI.
- Does technological change matter?
 - Isn't technology neutral?
 - *Every technology is both a burden and a blessing; not either-or, but this-and-that.*ⁱⁱ
 - *Once we admit a technology, "it plays out its hand; it does what it is designed to do."*ⁱⁱⁱ
 - We become addicted to the possibility of being tapped on the shoulder by 6 billion people 24 hours a day

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- Everything can be addictive, but aren't there some things that by their very nature are more so?
 - Convenience
 - Benefits
 - Ubiquity
 - The internet changes the way that the neurons in our brain are connected. We're losing the ability to think deeply because of distractions. We're becoming more and more dependent.
- When a tool becomes an addiction
 - Hallmarks of addiction
 - Any activity, substance, object, or behavior that has become the major focus of a person's life to the exclusion of other activities, or that has begun to harm the individual or others physically, mentally, or socially is **considered an addictive** behavior.
 - Satisfaction/lostness
 - Habitual craving for more
 - Self-deception
 - With screens, the problem is the crowd itself and why we're drawn to it so powerfully
- Suggestions for finding freedom from these shiny things...
 - Unplug
 - Unplug for certain specific and regular periods of time: Sabbath: Saturday night through Sunday night
 - Unplug from certain uses for a season or permanently: i.e., social media/gaming/texting/streaming
 - Designate certain places as connectivity-free zones (church, dinner table, bedroom)
 - Purposefully engaging with people *sans* connectivity

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- Purposefully engaging in thought, meditation, prayer
- Why?
 - The Love of God (Matt 22:38-40)
 - The Love of Neighbor
- How?
 - The gospel:
 - Everything you need to know has been given you in Christ.
 - *I'm afraid I might miss something.*
 - *I'm afraid of being unreachable.*
 - All the love you need has been given you in Christ.
 - *I need to see who likes/doesn't like me*
 - You can face the realities of your life without the comforts of distractions.
 - *I'm afraid of boredom.*
 - *I'm afraid of what my life actually looks like.*
 - *I'm afraid of being left behind.*
 - You can live at peace.
 - *All things are mine, and I am Christ's, and Christ is God's.*
 - You can face the seeming emptiness of a one-on-one with God or neighbor.
 - *What if they see me as I am? VR is simply another fig leaf.*
 - *What will I say?*
 - *What if they don't like me?*
 - *If I can't edit myself, what if I look stupid?*
 - You can face the joys and sorrows of a real life, rather than a virtual one and know the enrichment of love in a sin-cursed world.

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- The church:
 - You can face your brothers and sisters knowing that you are one of them. Flawed and deeply loved.
 - You can discover the joy of face-to-face human communication and the sorrows of face-to-face conflict

For Further Reading

- Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone*
 - *Home: How Heaven and the New Earth Satisfy Your Deepest Longings*
- Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*
- William Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry: Building a Good Life in the Digital Age*
- Ed Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grace*
- Mark Shaw, *Hope & Help for Video Game, TV, and Internet Addiction*
 - *The Heart of Addiction*
- Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*

ⁱ Plato, *Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII*. New York: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 96;
Quoted in Neil Postman, Neil Postman, *Technopoly*, p. 4.

ⁱⁱ Postman, p. 5

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 7