



Douglas Groothuis

the soul in
cyberspace

Summary: Sergio Ruben Tangari

The Soul in Cyberspace

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I just finished reading Douglas Groothuis' book *The Soul in Cyberspace* and the content while troubling did not disappoint with insight. While written in 1997, it is nevertheless relevant for today. Groothuis considers how computer technologies in their varied forms can and succeed in damaging the soul.

This damage occurs—be it through e-mail, chat rooms, online video games, pornography, etc.—when opportunities to engage through such media serve to dehumanize people. That is, through such mediums people learn to live in a detached reality where “information” is confused with communication as virtual simulation replaces the embodied reality.

According to Groothuis, while these technologies have many positives, he fears that they have a stupefying effect on the user when not responsibly applied. Since writing this book, new technologies like the I-phone have revolutionized the way we communicate, study, and do commerce. They also have become potential intruders to the “contemplative” life by the noise said gadgets bring, of which we are unaware.

Sometimes to understand where we are there's a need to remove ourselves from our circumstance. For example, I noticed how noisy my life is after returning from a backpacking trip. It was early November when I went on this trip with my friend Vic to the Eastern Sierra's in California. The surrounding landscapes of trees, streams, lakes, tundra, wildlife, crisp air, blue skies and sound of silence utterly soothed my soul. But the solace I came to experience was short lived.

Driving home I felt awkward. Inwardly I was unravelling as I left behind the quiet surroundings and approached the noise of city life. I felt like a misfit where I live and an increasing sense of sadness came over me. After several weeks of “re-adjusting” and my wife concerned about my melancholy state asked, “What's wrong with you?”, it occurred to me that city noise robbed me of the solace the mountains gave to me. It's as if I've lost my way in a very real sense.

The point is that I had to remove myself from my surroundings and many “technologies” in order to realize how much noise continuously bombards me. This noise tends to retard my soul from contemplation—on what's important in life; on the need to reevaluate, etc.,—what adjustments do I need to make now in

life; or rejuvenation—how can I face the upcoming challenges of life with hope and perspective?

This is a gargantuan issue and one we “teched-out” people need to understand. As a Christian disciple, we are to consider how Christ lived and follow his example—going to the quiet in prayer was a constant in his routine: what’s ours? Groothuis uncovers through this book how times of solace and reflection are robbed from us and considers how we can prevent it from occurring.

The blessings of technology always bring with it a dark side that we need to understand and manage. Must reading for learning how to wisely navigate the shoals of our 21st century idol of *technology*.