

# The Tools that B(l)ind: Technology as a New Theology

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## Abstract

Technology is a new theology. Substantively, technology represents the culmination of human creation undergirded by reason, without reference to the supernatural. In that sense, technology is a kind of secular substitute for theology. Functionally, through its ubiquity and esoteric rules that govern our lives so comprehensively, technology echoes the binding nature of theology as a subset of religion (from *religare*, meaning ‘to rebind’). However, the binding nature of techno-secular theology produces biopolitical violence. In this article, I propose that recognition (‘re-cognition’) of technology as *techne*, a tool to be used for good, rather than a *religare*, a binding, warrants a return to a theological framework to develop a more charitable community. This will facilitate the development and improvement of theology as a means of exploring mystery.

**Keywords:** Technology; Theology; cooperative order; biopolitics; religion.

## I Introduction

Humans have always wondered about their place and purpose in the world, anxious about the quality and length of their lives. Typically, religion and theology have filled this existential void by offering meaning, purpose and satisfaction through a relationship with a deity and associated doctrines and practices. However, while institutional and traditional religion has declined in the West, technology can now provide solutions to these anxieties and desires. Technology has become a new theology.

As Grant and Bennett Moses explain, the emergence of technology as a new theology is merely the latest development in a mythological trajectory, a series of explanatory frameworks or narratives that provide the tools to address persisting existential anxieties or desires in a culture, typically centred around the quality and extent of life. Western culture attempted a theological solution to these concerns in the Middle Ages (deity), a political solution during the Enlightenment (the state), then an economic solution after the Industrial Revolution (the market). In the 21st century, the respective failure of each of these attempted solutions has opened the way for technology to emerge as the fourth node in the trajectory. Examples include genomics to enhance human quality of life and longevity, nanotechnology to cure disease and improve resource efficiency, and artificial intelligence to extend the human body and cognitive capacity.<sup>1</sup> Even the ostensibly mundane ubiquity of smartphones has affected human cognition.<sup>2</sup>

More extreme examples have also emerged, such as transhumanism, which is the enhancement or alteration of a human being through biomedical technology, genetics, artificial intelligence and nanotechnology. The World Transhumanist Association ‘sees technology as the panacea for human ills and limits’.<sup>3</sup> Adherents of transhumanism may draw significant theological and existential value from its doctrine of the myth of progress, which is one of its most substantial dogmas.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, some have gone so far as to call transhumanism a secularist faith.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Grant, *Technology and the Trajectory of Myth*, 1–20.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Wilmer, “Smartphones and Cognition.”

<sup>3</sup> Delio, “Transhumanism or Ultrahumanism?”

<sup>4</sup> Burdett, “The Religion of Technology,” 144.

<sup>5</sup> Tirosch-Samuels, “Transhumanism as a Secularist Faith.”



In this article, I will develop these ideas by exploring both the substance and function of technology as a new theology, a specific type of religion with its origins in historical Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, the terms theology and religion (and even technology) are broad and often contentious. Accordingly, I will begin by clarifying how I use these terms in this article. I have adopted Martin Heidegger's approach, defining 'technology' in a very broad sense, to mean a method of framing or interacting with the world.<sup>7</sup> Technology cannot be reduced to 'the technical' or particular tools, although these are examples of technology.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, technology means a diverse array of things, including instruments, techniques, machines, systems and mentalities; these are subsumed under a theoretical rubric of imagining, understanding, measuring and altering reality that can be called technology.<sup>9</sup> This ontological understanding of technology, strengthened by references to various examples of tools or the technical, accords with well-established abstract philosophical critiques of technology.<sup>10</sup>

In a Christian context, theology generally means the study of God. It is the systematic use of reason to analyse what has been revealed about the transcendent (e.g., God), the immanent (e.g., humans) and the relationship between them. It relies heavily on scripture (biblical theology) but also makes reference to nature (natural theology). Theology develops intellectual doctrines to describe all this (systematic theology), as well as ethical doctrines that prescribe how one ought to live (practical theology).<sup>11</sup> In this article, I use 'theology' as a broad term incorporating all these aspects. I identify how technology operates as a new theology, especially the way in which particular technologies assume and instantiate specific doctrines about human nature and our relationship with the physical and non-physical world, satisfy our existential anxieties and desires and bind us to perform particular behaviours in light of this.

Finally, the term 'religion' is notorious for evading precise and universally accepted definition in theoretical and sociological studies.<sup>12</sup> In this article, religion means a set of systematic beliefs about the transcendent, accompanied by ethical conduct prescribed to give effect to those beliefs. It can be engaged in publicly or privately, individually or in a groups, with at least informal regulation of doctrine and practice by a recognised community.<sup>13</sup> The article will focus on religion in a Christian context and, as explained above, explore the substance and function of technology as a new theology.<sup>14</sup> The subjective–functional approach identifies a new theology as a belief system that is sincerely held and functions in place of a religion. In contrast, the substantive–content approach defines it by analogy, identifying a new theology as a kind of religion based on its essence or core characteristics. A new theology must address fundamental questions concerning life, death, right and wrong. It must be comprised of a set of systematic beliefs and possess formal and external signs such as observance and community structures.<sup>15</sup>

In this theoretical context, I will argue that technology has become a secular substitute—and a poor one—for theology. Technology's ubiquitous yet esoteric rules bind us and eliminate mystery and in doing so, subject us to the violence of biopolitics (which, in brief, means the imposition of legal norms to regulate and atomise human relationships through the exercise of power). However, the secular foundation of violent biopolitics points to a theological solution. Technology should be viewed not as a theology in itself but as a tool that can be used to reveal and enhance theology, pointing to a greater mystery and the good we can embrace to help humanity live together more harmoniously. I am not anti-technology. Rather, I am seeking to redeem it by exposing and transforming a prevalent and insidious version of it.

In Part II of the article, I argue that technology can be viewed as a substantive theology that grounds itself in the material and is understood purely based on human nature and reason, tying itself to the world through a modern application of secular and pagan orientations. Technology addresses the existential anxieties and desires formerly addressed by traditional theology by offering a path to new, awe-inspiring worlds and beings and providing digital salvation from the physical limitations of this life. Yet in Part III, I outline how technology also functions (problematically) as a theology, binding us and our behaviour to the material through a series of comprehensive, ubiquitous, yet esoteric rules. The nature of this technological binding reinscribes a positivist focus on rules, but the added dimension of technology's universality erodes difference and space for critique. In Part IV, drawing on the philosophers Hobbes and Agamben, I explain how this produces a techno-paganism that

<sup>6</sup> Ahdar, *Religious Freedom in the Liberal State*, 145–152.

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*.

<sup>8</sup> Harman, "Technology, Objects and Things in Heidegger," 17–19.

<sup>9</sup> See Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy*; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*; Jones, *Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Bergunder, "What is Religion?"; Platvoet, *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion*; Saler, "Conceptualizing Religion."

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the literature that contributed to this definition, see Deagon, "Towards a Constitutional Definition of Religion."

<sup>14</sup> I note the Christian context for the development of anthropological categories of religion, as explored in, for example, Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

<sup>15</sup> Ahdar, *Religious Freedom in the Liberal State*, 145–152.

culminates in a biopolitics of violence, where the immanent orientation of techno-secularist theology reduces individuals' existence to 'bare life'.

In Parts IV and V, I propose a theological solution grounded in the concepts of Radical Orthodoxy, a particular version of Christianity. As a theological movement, Radical Orthodoxy positions itself against 20th-century theology that sought to align with the tenets of modernism. Similarly, the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment also calls for the abolition of secular modernity (which itself gave rise to technology as a kind of theology).<sup>16</sup> Thus, as a postmodern movement, Radical Orthodoxy can engage in the vernacular of contemporary critical thought while simultaneously returning to pre-modern sources of knowledge without simply reinscribing pre-modernity.<sup>17</sup> Radical Orthodoxy is also post-secular in that it eliminates the modern distinction between the secular and the sacred as well as the supposed conflict between faith and reason.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the theology it espouses is orthodox because of its commitment to creedal Christianity, the patristic matrix and more specifically, to affirming and reclaiming a richer and more coherent form of Christianity that had gradually been lost after the Middle Ages. Its theology is radical in returning to Christianity's roots, rethinking Christian tradition and boldly critiquing modern society and culture, including technology.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, rather than viewing it as a theology in itself, technology should be understood as a tool that reveals mechanisms for interacting with and gaining understanding of the material and spiritual worlds. Such a theological approach to technology repositions human beings as part of a cooperative order connected to the transcendent, instead of hostile intruders trespassing upon the space of the immanent, intruders who must be managed through violence. Hence, in Part VI, I propose that technology is not an end in itself but the means to an end: the exploration of mystery that can be pursued collectively and harmoniously by humanity.

## II Technology as a New Theology: Substance

Essentially, as an enterprise, technology can be viewed as a theological endeavour. Technology is similar to theology in that it evokes strong emotions, such as devotion and awe. Technology has become a new secular theology, 'with its own clerical caste, arcane rituals, and articles of faith'.<sup>20</sup> There is an established practice of embracing technology without question, a kind of technological trust. Stahl calls this 'technological mysticism'.<sup>21</sup> It is an implicit theology, which is different from the explicit theologies of traditional religions such as Christianity. In this sense, technology represents the culmination of human creative ability undergirded by reason, without reliance on revelation. It is the kind of theology that is, to quote Ronald Dworkin, 'religion without God'; it is a pursuit of transcendence through immanence, or a sacralisation of the immanent.<sup>22</sup> Theologically, technology's focus on this world rather than the other-worldly, on the material and physical rather than the spiritual, is akin to ancient paganism.

As Steven Smith's work demonstrates, if theology is understood as relating to the sacred, then technology, as a kind of secular or pagan theology, differs from traditional religion only in its placement of the sacred. It positions the sacred within the physical world, consecrating the immanent, in contrast to the transcendent theology of a religion like Christianity.<sup>23</sup> In pagan theology, this world is the only home we have, and the only things worth being concerned with are this life and its pleasures.<sup>24</sup> Paganism affirms the reality of the sacred but positions sanctity within nature (the immanent), while Christianity asserts a transcendent sanctity that is supernatural but also interacts with this world.<sup>25</sup> Smith links the pagan orientation with a particular version of the secular that focuses on this world but also imbues aspects of this world with a sacred quality. He pointed to Ronald Dworkin as a prime example of a scholar who has articulated a perspective that embraces an immanent sacred while rejecting a transcendent deity.<sup>26</sup> Dworkin proposed an expanded definition of religion based on values and ethical independence, or 'convictions about life and its responsibilities'.<sup>27</sup> According to Dworkin, the sacred attitude accepts the objective truth of two aspects of value: (i) human life has objective meaning and (ii) the universe is something of intrinsic value and wonder.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 33.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 42–43.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 74.

<sup>19</sup> Milbank, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Noble, *The Religion of Technology*, 3. See also Stolow, *Deus in Machina*; Herzfeld, *Technology and Religion*.

<sup>21</sup> Stahl, *God and the Chip*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> See Dworkin, *Religion Without God*.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City*, 111.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City*, 114.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City*, 223.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City*, 217–258.

<sup>27</sup> Dworkin, *Religion Without God*, 117.

<sup>28</sup> Dworkin, *Religion Without God*, 10–11.

Therefore, as a new theology, technology involves the pursuit of the transcendent through the immanent. As Rivers notes, the theology of technology is ‘non-transcendent’ and ‘based solely upon sense experience’; it ‘will produce no transcendental deities, because it is tied completely to the world’.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, technology is a manifestation of human will and capacity undergirded by purely secular reason, without reference to a deity or traditional theological belief. Technological mysticism is, therefore, born of the secular, which is itself a kind of faith with foundations in Christian theology. The theological origins of the secular, which is one of Radical Orthodoxy’s central arguments, amounts to the claim that behind secular politics is the epistemology of secular reason, which is in turn undergirded by a particular theological ontology of univocity and non-participation.<sup>30</sup> In short, the secular is a theological idea dependent upon and invented from a theological framework, based on theological assumptions.

To articulate the details of this argument, Milbank argued, in brief, that Duns Scotus’ perspective on the univocity of Being (that God and creation exist in the same way) and the separation of theology from philosophy are related, since the univocal nature of Being implies an *a priori* notion that is then applied to God, rather than considering God the very paradigm or distinctive pinnacle of Being. Therefore, this notion of Being, detached from the divine nature and revelation, separates ontology from theology, or metaphysics from revelation. Being can be apprehended by pure reason apart from faith.<sup>31</sup> In place of a Thomist participatory framework that understands the immanent as suspended from the transcendent, Duns Scotus assumed an ontology based on a univocal or flattened Being, one that denied the depth of Being and unhooked it from the transcendent, allowing the emergence of a secular plane and secular reason that are completely independent of the transcendent.<sup>32</sup> As such, the secular realm arose from the theological idea that God exists and can be known through natural reason, apart from revelation.<sup>33</sup>

Further, I have demonstrated that the emergence of the secular through this emphasis on human will and autonomy apart from God enabled purely secular theories of the state to develop, especially theories such as that of Thomas Hobbes, which vested absolute power in the state, replacing God as the supreme source of authority.<sup>34</sup> Grant and Bennett Moses also allude to this transition from the absolute authority of God to the absolute authority of the state.<sup>35</sup> The theological debate concerning voluntarism or the absolutist idea of God, and whether God could be known through reason without revelation, created the foundation for the secular transmission of authority from God to the state, culminating in Hobbes. Then, as mentioned in the Introduction, the state’s failure in this mythological trajectory eventually gave rise to the dominance of technology as the mechanism for asserting human control and understanding our place in the universe and how we should live. Szerszynski contended that we should see ‘the modern secular, including science and technology, as a distinctive product of the West’s religious history’ with ‘its own concealed theology’.<sup>36</sup> This implies we should see that which is superficially secular as being firmly rooted in the sacred.<sup>37</sup>

As a substantive theology, technology has effectively replaced traditional theology and has made humanity the source of authority rather than deity. Technology addresses the existential desires and anxieties that make theology necessary. Advertisements for technology such as high-definition televisions offer entry into unique worlds and promise to change or blur reality with the magical.<sup>38</sup> Consumers pursue something beyond themselves, a desire for a sacral experience, the sublime. This experiential theology can fit within Dworkin’s broad conception of religion as a diverse expression of that which produces value and awe based on individual preferences.<sup>39</sup>

Technology is a practical application of human activity, which challenges traditional theology because of the way it accumulates in the world, materially and rationally satisfying our yearnings.<sup>40</sup> Timothy Campbell also argued that modern politics captures life through technologies of communication and consumption that promise protection from mortality, inequality, disability,

<sup>29</sup> Rivers, “Technology and Religion,” 527.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 99–100.

<sup>31</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 305–306.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 8889.

<sup>33</sup> See Deagon, *From Violence to Peace*, 90–94.

<sup>34</sup> Deagon, *From Violence to Peace*, 97–100.

<sup>35</sup> Grant, *Technology and the Trajectory of Myth*, 1–20.

<sup>36</sup> Szerszynski, “Rethinking the Secular,” 814. See further details in Deagon, *From Violence to Peace*, chap 2 and 4.

<sup>37</sup> Szerszynski, “Rethinking the Secular,” 815–816.

<sup>38</sup> Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 93. There is significant literature on the relationship between technology and magic: see, e.g., Stivers, *Technology as Magic*.

<sup>39</sup> Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 95.

<sup>40</sup> Rivers, “Technology and Religion,” 519–520.

boredom and loneliness.<sup>41</sup> We have already seen that Grant and Bennett Moses attribute the entire existence of the mythological trajectory to the need for, and failure of, mechanisms to address existential anxieties, including both traditional theology and technology.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Yuval Noah Harari claimed that because of technology, humans will achieve extended lifespans (if not near immortality) and that human beings are themselves comprised of algorithms.<sup>43</sup> As a result, new ‘techno-religions’ will emerge and promise ‘salvation through algorithms and genes’.<sup>44</sup> One type will be ‘techno-humanism’, through which a new model of human will be created, one that retains many human features but with enhanced mental and physical abilities (i.e., the transhumans mentioned in the Introduction).<sup>45</sup>

Rivers summarises the structurally theological characteristics of technology as follows:

These characteristics are numerous and include the following: technology’s techniques have become its rites of passage, its dogma is preserved in scientific and technological rationality, its catechisms or books of instruction are printed as technical journals and specialized manuals, its places of worship are in the form of academies of science and university laboratories, its ecclesiastical councils are represented in professional conferences, its priesthood is evident in the expanding body of scientists, technicians and engineers, its sacred history is revealed in the idea of progress, and its theology is its accumulative presence in the world. At some point, it may develop a holy book that will contain its sacred texts.<sup>46</sup>

Hence, substantively, technology is theological because it is grounded in a quasi-pagan, immanent sacredness, it aims to ‘save’ humanity by addressing existential anxieties regarding the quality and length of life and it shares some of the structural characteristics of traditional theologies. In the next section, the concept of technology as a new theology will be developed further by examining the binding nature of technology, a role traditionally reserved for institutional religion.

### III Technology as a New Theology: Function

#### *How Technology Binds Us*

Traditionally, religion (from Latin *religare*, meaning to rebind) provided normative order, binding society and community together through a common acknowledgement of the divine and a system of scripture-based rules that prescribed moral practices and shared values.<sup>47</sup> However, traditional institutional religion is weakening. The theologies and spiritualities currently on the rise in the developed world are more akin to Dworkin’s idea of religion, which focuses on an individual life narrative grounded in the here and now, expressed through individual ethical choices rather than a prescribed social role. Even within institutional religion, there is a trend towards the ‘indexical’, an individual orientation towards the immanent.<sup>48</sup> Technology, as we have already seen, is well-situated as a Dworkinian replacement for traditional theology because of its focus on the individual, this world and sacralisation of the material. Indeed, even Possamai-Inesedy and Nixon, in their edited volume, which presents a critical analysis of the current state of research on religion and theological belief systems in the field of the digital social, observe that the weakening of organised religion correlates with the rise of the internet and digital technology, which has instantiated new forms of communication and democratised theology.<sup>49</sup>

As Szerszynski observed, ‘the immediate appeal of technology seems to be indexical, in terms of its pragmatic power to meet the particular needs of particular individuals’.<sup>50</sup> Caiazza explained this in terms of ‘techno-secularism’, which focuses on the ethics of the individual and lived experience discovered through theological thought and action.<sup>51</sup> Technology ‘promises’ to meet ‘particular needs and desires’ and ‘release [us] from earthly limitations and uncertainties’.<sup>52</sup> Hence, with the decline of traditional theologies, technology has emerged as a new (theological) binding force. This insight can be traced back to Martin Heidegger, who claimed that ‘everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to

<sup>41</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*. For example, gaming can provide psychological relief from these ‘RL’ (real life) limitations: Possamai-Inesedy, *The Digital Social*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Grant, *Technology and the Trajectory of Myth*, 1–20.

<sup>43</sup> Harari, *Homo Deus*, 21, 83–85. See also Ahdar, “Navigating Law and Religion,” 12. Ironically, Harari and his fellow techno-futurologists have also been characterised, persuasively, as part of an emerging religious movement. See, e.g., Amarsingam, “Transcending Technology.”

<sup>44</sup> Harari, *Homo Deus*, 349.

<sup>45</sup> Harari, *Homo Deus*, chap 10.

<sup>46</sup> Rivers, “Technology and Religion,” 526.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Freeman, *Lloyd’s Introduction to Jurisprudence*, 708–712; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 51–74; Sandberg, “The Sociological Dimension of Law and Religion,” 29; Taylor, “Exploring Religion, Nature and Culture.”

<sup>48</sup> See Heelas, *The Spiritual Revolution*.

<sup>49</sup> Possamai-Inesedy, *The Digital Social*, 6–7.

<sup>50</sup> Szerszynski, “Rethinking the Secular,” 818–819.

<sup>51</sup> See Caiazza, “Athens, Jerusalem, and the Arrival of Techno-Secularism.”

<sup>52</sup> Szerszynski, “Rethinking the Secular,” 819.

which today we particularly like to pay homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology.<sup>53</sup> Technology may appear benign but like a theology, we can adapt to it and give it the potential to rule us in substantive and functional ways. As we will see in the next section, by nature, technological binding functions as a series of universal rules in place of theology. This, of course, does not detract from the improvements to human life that technology has provided. However, as Heidegger alluded to, when technology is elevated to the level of theology, when we blindly trust it, ultimately, technology can become sinister and insidious—because binding techno-secularism involves a comprehensive, ubiquitous system of esoteric rules that govern our lives.

### *The Sinister Side of Technological Binding*

First, technology's reign is ubiquitous. Further, as a new theology, technology can give rise to a kind of 'data religion', which builds on the claim that humans are algorithms and just another means of processing data. At a simple level, one example is Facebook algorithms, which record user preferences to inform, predict and influence users' decisions. In the context of technology as a new theology, the highest good is 'information flow'; humans have 'completed their cosmic tasks, and they should now pass the torch on to entirely new kinds of entities'.<sup>54</sup> The theology of 'dataism' is founded upon the notion that 'the universe consists of data flows, and the value of any phenomenon or entity is determined by its contribution to data processing'.<sup>55</sup> As Harari explained:

... this cosmic data processing system [c]ould be like God. It will be everywhere and will control everything, and humans are destined to merge into it. This vision is reminiscent of some traditional religious visions... Indeed, in Silicon Valley the Dataist prophets consciously use traditional messianic language.<sup>56</sup>

This manifests as a 'techno-paganism' where technology rules without limits—where we are all in the digital and the digital is in us.

In critiquing the idea of 'Law Unlimited', MacNeil expressed similar sentiments.<sup>57</sup> His comments apply just as aptly to 'Technology Unlimited':

Is this world Davies conjures up, in which law is everywhere—the trees, machines, us—another version, albeit techno-pagan, of mediaeval natural law, where we are all 'participated' [sic] in some vast ecological Over-Soul, in us more than ourselves, connecting each to each? A noble critical dream—which could turn into an anxious Kafkaesque nightmare, with nowhere to run, no space to hide... [A]t least, legal positivism left us free psychically, as long as one obeyed physically.<sup>58</sup>

The ubiquity of the technological space, and the superimposition of humans into and onto that space, implies there is no separation, space or scope for any critique or resistance at all against these binding rules.<sup>59</sup>

Second, technology's reign is esoteric. Nicolas Suzor called binding technological rules the 'secret rules which govern our digital lives' and explores the (mostly discretionary and hence, 'lawless') power of large platforms like Google and Facebook to control content.<sup>60</sup> Suzor identified that 'the internet is governed in a lawless way', meaning that companies and platforms that make decisions affecting our digital lives are not regulated to ensure fairness, nor are they subject to laws that limit their power; their discretion is 'almost unlimited'.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, these decisions are made by personal and private actors 'behind closed doors', so the standards applied and the rationale for those standards remain unknown.<sup>62</sup> Ahdar agrees, identifying the potential for 'techno-regulatory mechanisms' to be used by the state or private actors (such as Google or Facebook) to restrict religious or political speech they deem harmful to society through, for example, setting internet filters to block that speech.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Harari, *Homo Deus*, 351, 381.

<sup>55</sup> Harari, *Homo Deus*, 307.

<sup>56</sup> Harari, *Homo Deus*, 381.

<sup>57</sup> See Davies, *Law Unlimited*.

<sup>58</sup> MacNeil, "Boundary, Crossing, Pathway," 138.

<sup>59</sup> Even Davies admitted this is a 'difficult problem' for which she does not have 'a satisfactory answer'. See Davies, "Extra-Legal Theory," 152.

<sup>60</sup> Suzor, *Lawless*.

<sup>61</sup> Suzor, *Lawless*, 11.

<sup>62</sup> Suzor, *Lawless*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Ahdar, "Navigating Law and Religion," 13–14.

Such ‘techno-regulatory mechanisms’ have the capacity to completely control human behaviour, a form of ‘technological management’, giving rise to the third aspect: technology’s reign is comprehensive.<sup>64</sup> Roger Brownsword defined technological management as follows:

Broadly speaking, by ‘technological management’ I mean the use of technologies—typically involving the design of products or places, or the automation of processes—with a view to managing certain kinds of risk by excluding (i) the possibility of certain actions which, in the absence of this strategy, might be subject only to rule regulation, or (ii) human agents who otherwise might be implicated (whether as rule-breakers or as the innocent victims of rule-breaking) in the regulated activities.<sup>65</sup>

Technological management involves designing structures that render non-compliance with the rules practically or literally impossible. Brownsword’s repeated references to the philosopher HLA Hart reinforce the positivist foundation of technological management, even as Hart’s analytical framework becomes obsolete in the technological context.<sup>66</sup> Despite this, the practice of technological management itself is not new. A lock is a primitive method of technological management that enforces a rule against stealing by ensuring that stealing is not physically possible. For a more modern example, consider the rule that golf carts are not to be taken beyond the green. Geo-fencing technology means anyone who drives the cart beyond the boundary will find that the vehicle is immobilised.<sup>67</sup> However, with ongoing advances in modern technology, the potential scale of technological management is immense and unprecedented. As Brownsword explained:

Given the present trajectory of modern technologies, it seems to me that technological management (whether with driverless cars, the Internet of Things, blockchain, or biomanagement) is set to join law, morals and religion as one of the principal instruments of social control. To a considerable extent, technological infrastructures that support our various transactions and interactions will structure social order.<sup>68</sup>

Therefore, recognising technology as a binding mechanism, or a structure for social control that effectively replaces theology, raises several concerns. Technology may ‘diminish our autonomy and liberty’ and may have difficulty reflecting ethical perspectives; it might even ‘compromise the conditions for any kind of moral community’.<sup>69</sup> The issue of internet filters that prevent the publication of ‘undesirable’ theological or political views, as raised earlier, is an example of this.<sup>70</sup> Such technological management will affect fundamental freedoms of speech and religion directly, while indirectly it will preclude the kind of robust debate that produces a flourishing democratic community oriented towards the good. It would eliminate mystery, the communal exploration of what is good (or not good) for a society to pursue. As Brownsword put it, ‘if we are regulated so that we can only do the right thing, does it matter that we lose the opportunity to do the wrong thing?’<sup>71</sup>

#### IV Against Positivist Techno-Pagan Biopolitics

##### *Technology as Biopolitics*

While traditional theology has been criticised, at least its power is discrete and preserves individual freedom to will and act. However, a ‘positivist’ focus on rules and the will remains problematic in the technological context because it views humans as atomistic individuals in competition with each other, who require regulation or management through the violence of law (‘biopolitics’).<sup>72</sup> Campbell, in particular, links mass media and bioengineering to a ‘terrifying lack of distance’ and the ‘relentless dismantling of community’.<sup>73</sup> He associates Heidegger’s initial articulation of technology as binding with Agamben’s explorations of biopolitics, demonstrating how the essence of technology implements a system of violence where individuals are treated as ‘bare life’. Campbell even goes as far as to claim that ‘to the degree we speak about biopolitics today, lurking beneath is a conception of technology deeply indebted to Heidegger’s elaboration of it’.<sup>74</sup> Campbell proposed that ‘this is one of Agamben’s most singular contributions to contemporary philosophy: the drawing forth of an implicit sacralization from Heidegger’s ontology’, implying this conception of technology has theological connotations.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Gavaghan, “Lex Machina.”

<sup>65</sup> Brownsword, *Law, Technology and Society*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> See, e.g., Brownsword, *Law, Technology and Society*, 3, 4, 5, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Brownsword, *Law, Technology and Society*, 6–7.

<sup>68</sup> Brownsword, *Law, Technology and Society*, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Brownsword, *Law, Technology and Society*, 9–10.

<sup>70</sup> Ahdar, “Navigating Law and Religion,” 13.

<sup>71</sup> Brownsword, *Rights, Regulation and the Technological Revolution*, 256.

<sup>72</sup> Milbank, “Paul Against Biopolitics,” 24. Generally, see also Deagon, *From Violence to Peace*, chap 4.

<sup>73</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*.

<sup>74</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*, 34.

On Campbell's reading, Heidegger explained that technology 'creates a tear in Being' by distinguishing between people depending on their relation to technology.<sup>76</sup> Technology has a 'pernicious effect' on people's relationship to Being, for when people rely on technology they are 'dominated' by it such that they 'lose themselves'; they are a 'mere object or slave'.<sup>77</sup> Campbell argued that consequently, technology produces the biopolitical effect of a 'technologically inflected' people. For example, the use of mass virtual communication devices in wartime is a kind of technological management that constructs a body politic to be used in an emergency and draws individual people near to this mystery, but it is a 'nearness which still holds back something in reserve'.<sup>78</sup> Campbell explained:

... the biopolitical effects of technology are felt decisively in short-circuiting the proper defences of the individual vis-à-vis the larger body politic. Subjects are created who are willing to die... to defend against aggression by deploying one of the most powerful modes for increasing the biopower at the 'liberal' state's disposal.<sup>79</sup>

In other words, technological management entails biopolitics because it trains people to act in particular ways, especially in ways that merge various individuals into a singular body, then requires sacrifice to preserve the body, such that the life of the individual only has value based on their availability to die.

Hence, Campbell said that for Agamben, technology can be 'immediately transformed into a catastrophic power over life'.<sup>80</sup> Technology 'radically alters... the way human beings relate to one another and to themselves' by carrying death onto life's stage.<sup>81</sup> Campbell concluded that 'we find ourselves deeply immersed in a terrifying world of technology, in which communication has biopolitical consequences in that when communicating, individual difference is excluded'.<sup>82</sup> The nature of this biopolitical violence articulated by Agamben, where the state has absolute power over the life of the individual and excludes difference through technological management, can be genealogically traced to theorist Thomas Hobbes and, as was discussed in Part II, has its conceptual foundation in a particular kind of theology.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Biopolitics and Violence***

I will begin with Agamben and work backwards. Disturbingly, Agamben contended that the notion of the concentration camp 'signals the political space of modernity itself'. In other words, the concentration camp is our modern world.<sup>84</sup> In this space where law is permanently suspended, 'its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life' such that 'the camp was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realised, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation'.<sup>85</sup> Briefly, Agamben distinguishes between *zoe*, which refers to 'bare life' (*homo sacer*) or physical existence, and *bios*, which refers to 'the life of the citizen' or a specific form of engaged life. In an emergency, the state determines which category certain people fall into and if the state decides people are *homo sacer*, it removes their rights to protection by law, since as non-citizens, they are no longer under the law. However, law can still be imposed on them in a violent way.<sup>86</sup> Here, Agamben sought to extend Carl Schmitt's notion of the 'state of exception' as the 'temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger' to a 'permanent special arrangement which, as such, nevertheless [sic] remains outside the normal order' through the concept of exclusion in the camp.<sup>87</sup>

Schmitt articulated a view of law and sovereignty based on the ability to 'decid[e] on the exception', where the exception 'can at best be characterised as a case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state'.<sup>88</sup> As such, on the basis of a perceived threat of violence to the state, the sovereign can decide to suspend the operation of law to (potentially violently) eliminate the threat.<sup>89</sup> This notion of absolute state sovereignty can be found in the work of 17th-century political theorist Thomas Hobbes. According to Hobbes, the end or purpose of the commonwealth, or the legal system, is security.<sup>90</sup> Hobbes argued that we 'would not observe the Laws of Nature... without the terror of some power' and that by creating the Leviathan as legal sovereign, we

<sup>76</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*, 8–10.

<sup>78</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*, 21–22.

<sup>79</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*, 21–22.

<sup>80</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*, 35.

<sup>81</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*, 81.

<sup>82</sup> Campbell, *Improper Life*, 36.

<sup>83</sup> Generally, see Deagon, *From Violence to Peace*.

<sup>84</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 177.

<sup>85</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 174.

<sup>86</sup> See Agamben, *Means without End*.

<sup>87</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 167.

<sup>88</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5–6.

<sup>89</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 9–10.

<sup>90</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 113.



escape ‘from the miserable condition of war, which is a necessary consequence... of the natural passions of men when there is no visible power to keep them in awe and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants...’—for the Leviathan destroys all parts of society that threaten society itself.<sup>91</sup>

In his characterisation of the state of nature, Hobbes continued the emphasis on clashing wills: ‘[T]he condition of man... is a condition of war of every one against every one, where everyone is governed by his own reason.’<sup>92</sup> If the will is paramount, human relationships are characterised by the clash of wills and contracts to restrain these wills. However, according to Hobbes, there is only one way to construct a state power that will ultimately protect citizens from actual or threatened internal or external violence and the forsaking of covenants. Based on a (fictional) state of nature characterised by violence, Hobbes proposed a contract between the members of this state of nature, agreeing to submit all of their wills to one mammoth will, the Leviathan, which is charged with protecting a society and its members through absolutely sovereign coercive force, or violence.<sup>93</sup> Hence, the Hobbesian idea of a singular sovereign entity that excludes difference and enforces power over life and death through violence is the conceptual foundation for technology—and technological management—as violent biopolitics.

Thus, we can also trace to Thomas Hobbes the pernicious idea that the only common human value binding us together is bare life, bare existence—because in the state of nature, physical survival is paramount and it is all that Leviathan is bound to protect under the Hobbesian social contract. To Agamben, this emphasis was apparent in the way modern societies (having replaced common transcendent good with diverse personal aspirations, as is characteristic of Dworkin’s religion and technology as a new theology) have subverted the distinction between bare life and citizenship, and end up combining the concept of citizenship with bare life.<sup>94</sup> The good life has become synonymous with maintaining bare life. Though we can all agree that preserving bare life is crucial, biopolitics emphasises this to the extent that it detracts from particular forms of good life. In this vein, Martin argued that technology fundamentally alters human ontology through mechanisms of control that detract from the good. Human existence becomes objectified as merely material and the consumption/optimisation models of life, which can be infused in us by (for example) the internet and social media, preclude the genuine society and contemplation required to properly cultivate the good life.<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, the pursuit of technology as a new theology represents the substitution of the good life for bare life. With the decline of common transcendent meaning, people construct their own individual immanent meaning through, for example, prolonging their biological existence with technology. However, this meaning becomes focused on mere existence rather than pursuit of the good, excluding the virtues of individual difference and substituting them for a singular kind of bare, separate, competing physical life akin to the Hobbesian state of nature. Bare life, therefore, does not unite individuals within a community but blinds, separates and alienates. A society of competing individuals requires (technological) management, which leads to the imposition of violence characterised, paradoxically, by a lack of distance and the dismantling of community. This is the path to positivist techno-pagan politics. As MacNeil argued, in the world of rule unlimited, we are not even free to psychically disobey. ‘Connectivity could erode, even erase difference because it doesn’t vouchsafe the space for critique that natural law’s “free will” afforded its subjects (*lex iniusta non est lex*). To which I might say: come back Thomas Aquinas, all is forgiven!’<sup>96</sup>

### ***A Theological Solution***

MacNeil’s reference to natural law points to a solution grounded not in a positivist (Hobbesian) techno-secularist infrastructure for human life, which leads to a violent biopolitics, but in contrast, to a new conception for human flourishing can that be found in the theological tradition of natural law and being-in-community, as articulated by John Milbank.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, we have already seen that Hobbesian political ontology is grounded in a certain theology, so it makes sense that this can be addressed through a theological framework. For Milbank, ‘Augustine already put the idea of the peaceful community at the centre of his theology; thought of God, of revelation from God, was for him inseparable from the thought of heaven... the heavenly city meant for Augustine a substantial peace.’<sup>98</sup> Milbank recognises that ‘one way to secure peace is to draw boundaries around “the same” and exclude “the other”’.<sup>99</sup> Here, there is the dualistic violence of the included versus the excluded, ‘an ever-renewed conflict’,

<sup>91</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 113.

<sup>92</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 86–87.

<sup>93</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 116.

<sup>94</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*.

<sup>95</sup> Martin, *Transfiguration*.

<sup>96</sup> MacNeil, *Boundary, Crossing, Pathway*, 138–139.

<sup>97</sup> Generally, see Deagon, *From Violence to Peace*; Milbank, *Being Reconciled*; Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*.

<sup>98</sup> Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” 269.

<sup>99</sup> Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” 269.

which is the ‘traditional mode of violence’.<sup>100</sup> However, in Christianity, there is no exclusion, only ‘that which denies and takes away from Being... the violent’ or the negative (i.e., evil).<sup>101</sup>

To articulate an alternative Christian foundation for a community based on true peace rather than violence, Milbank proposed the model of the Trinity, God as three divine persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; this is an ‘infinite relation’ of love and perfect peace, since God as Trinity is both unity and ‘Himself community’ and can, therefore, provide a ‘differential ontology’ or a mode of being that allows the pursuit of individual virtue within the harmonious existence of difference in a community.<sup>102</sup> Thus, the new Christian imagination of peace can be defined as ‘the reconciliation of virtue with difference’.<sup>103</sup> In this sense, Christianity can rescue virtue from violent, agonistic difference because the Christian Trinity—the ‘infinite flow of excessive charitable (love) difference’—is in a very genuine sense, a manifestation of unity.<sup>104</sup> Christian Trinitarian ontology reconciles the individual and the community, promoting peace through the unity of individuals within the community.

One could object, arguing that we have seen this before. Grant and Bennett Moses identify that theology or ‘deity’ was the first proposed solution to human existential anxieties but ultimately, this solution has failed. However, there are at least two reasons why a return to theology is warranted. First, a pragmatic reason: all the solutions in the mythological trajectory thus far, including technology, as this article has suggested, have failed. We lose little by going back to theology. Second, and more importantly, the principled reason: because techno-paganism is grounded in and contingent upon theological assumptions, it is sensible to propose a theological solution. However, this would not mean merely returning to the deity of pre-modernity; we would go back so that we can move forward with a new and updated set of critical tools. In this modern context, Milbank followed Augustine in the sense that Augustine deployed a Christian ontology of peaceful community in his theological critique of pagan violence. However, due to Augustine’s ‘over-intellectualism and interiority’, as well as developments in modern and postmodern critical thought that should be incorporated, Milbank also identified Augustine as the primary thinker to be reinterpreted and overcome to successfully arrive at a theology where believing in a deity enables the good, satisfying our existential desires and anxieties.<sup>105</sup> Consequently, Milbank described his theological project as ‘Postmodern Critical Augustinianism’. It can also be partnered with the broader ‘Radical Orthodoxy’ project which, as discussed in the Introduction, seeks to redefine established modern categories in terms of theology rather than the secular.<sup>106</sup>

In this context, Radical Orthodoxy means the ‘radicalism of orthodoxy... [a form of] Christianity [that] placed love above law; it put the person-in-relation before either the collective or isolated individual; it made the habit of association primary and yet it never instrumentally subordinated the person to collective interests.’<sup>107</sup> It produced ‘a “true” body of ecclesial unity-in-diversity, neither atomically individualist nor collectively universalising on an abstract basis... a new sort of “interpersonal” society’.<sup>108</sup> Further:

The case of Radical Orthodoxy is that, to have all this in the most radical and least perverted form, it is always necessary to go back to Christian ‘roots’, because otherwise the whole thing will eventually collapse—towards individualism, a neo-pagan

<sup>100</sup> Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” 270.

<sup>101</sup> Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” 269. Milbank argued that evil is the ‘privation of Being’, adopting Augustine’s account of evil as negative, and that evil can be committed in the most extreme sense, even inadvertently, by those who imagine they are ‘fulfilling the goods of order, obedience, political stability and social peace’. Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 1–2, 4. As an example of how this refers to the earlier discussion on technology as a quasi-pagan theology of the immanent secular, Milbank stated:

... if we allow that ‘totalitarianism’ be replaced by the wider concept of ‘secular immanence,’ which is totalizing and terroristic because it acknowledges no supra-human power beyond itself by which it might be measured and limited, then we can still agree that 20th-century politics has displayed something unprecedentedly sinister. For in the instances of the Holocaust, the Gulag and US foreign policy, law has itself consented to criminal principles and dedicated the resources of the State to mass murder on a legal, organized and bureaucratic basis. (Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 5).

<sup>102</sup> Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” 274.

<sup>103</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 332–333.

<sup>104</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 380–381.

<sup>105</sup> Hankey, “Theoria versus Poesis,” 388, 390. Milbank defined ‘interiority’ as ‘access to the transcendent by a pure inward turn... at the expense of exteriority’ or at the expense of the external God revealing Himself as a gift. See Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 206–207. The emphasis on interiority is characteristic of technology as an immanent secular theology and should be avoided. This also addresses another possible counterargument implied by MacNeil, who criticised ‘Law Unlimited’ as a potential return to medieval natural law, albeit techno-pagan. Importantly, the return advocated for here is not a return to purely medieval natural law but to a theological natural law that is informed and improved through its engagement with modernist and postmodernist thinking.

<sup>106</sup> Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” 278.

<sup>107</sup> Milbank, “The Grandeur of Reason and the Perversity of Rationalism,” 393.

<sup>108</sup> Milbank, “The Grandeur of Reason and the Perversity of Rationalism,” 393.

enslavement and a post-Christian utilitarian control through false ‘care’ of merely material bodies—without the quite specific Christian metaphysical underpinning.<sup>109</sup>

In other words, cultivating the good life, which produces ‘unity-in-diversity’, requires a return to Christian theology. The current reigning alternative is technology as a substitute theology, grounded in the pagan biopolitics of immanent individualism, which sacralises the material. As such, we have two options before us. Conflating the life of the citizen with the preservation of physical life could result in pure self-preservation with no consideration for others, as part of the Hobbesian war of all against all. Choosing this option would make our existence ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’.<sup>110</sup> Alternatively, preservation of physical life in conjunction with, but distinguished from, a specifically engaged form of the good life of the citizen could entail, as Milbank exhorted, acting charitably to break through ‘the existing representation of what is our duty towards our neighbour and towards God’ and ‘break through the bounds of duty which “technically” pre-defines its prescribed performance’.<sup>111</sup> Thus, this theological framework offers a new and better solution to our existential anxieties; it is the final and necessary step in our mythological trajectory.

## V Rethinking Technology

### *Christianity and Cooperative Order*

Returning to theology, as I propose, would resolve the problem of technology as biopolitical violence and satisfy our existential desires and anxieties by providing a framework for a harmonious community where self and other (neighbour) are loved and built up together. It would require the development of what Joel Harrison called ‘a cooperative order’.<sup>112</sup> In a cooperative order, ‘all persons are given their appropriate positions’; there is ordered harmony in the community, where all citizens contribute and fulfil their respective roles.<sup>113</sup> The coordination of different communities, and individuals within those communities, is attentive to the dignity of persons and their place within the created order, enabling the pursuit of shared good in different ways.<sup>114</sup> These relationships are perfected in a life of charity—selfless affection—recognised through mutual dependence and responsibility, and demonstrated by offering ourselves as gifts of service.<sup>115</sup> Ultimately, such a harmonious human community, which satisfies our existential desires, is grounded in the highest good, the object of our desires and satisfaction of our anxieties: God Himself. Relating to God in this way also deepens our horizontal relationships: ‘Love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself.’<sup>116</sup>

Augustine argued that to love a person for the sake of God invests them with a ‘transcendental significance’ as one loved by God.<sup>117</sup> A harmonious social and political order is predicated upon common agreement on the objects of love. Whereas the love of the ‘earthly city’ is disordered, focusing on self, ambition and conflict, the love of the ‘heavenly city’ focuses on God and, therefore, reconciliation with the other. ‘Orienting oneself to God commits one to a deeper relationality with others.’<sup>118</sup> These ‘networks of charity’ can extend throughout social, economic and political contexts, manifesting in the freedom of the Church, economic and political associations, trade unions, educational bodies and families.<sup>119</sup> For Augustine, they are grounded in a love of God and neighbour and displayed in right and virtuous living—a life of charity.<sup>120</sup>

### *Technology as a Tool for Revelation*

Adopting the theological approach proposed in this article will require fresh recognition of technology, in the etymological sense of ‘re-cognition’, rethinking technology’s role or, as Heidegger put it, the ‘essence’ of technology. I have already addressed the question of technology as a *religare*, a binding in the theological sense, which must be rejected. According to Heidegger, rather than simply dismissing technology, it can be recognised (literally rethought) as a tool through which mystery can be revealed. This refers to an earlier understanding of technology as *techne*, a tool. However, *techne* is not merely an

<sup>109</sup> Milbank, “The Grandeur of Reason and the Perversity of Rationalism,” 393.

<sup>110</sup> See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 78.

<sup>111</sup> Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 134.

<sup>112</sup> Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 94–98.

<sup>113</sup> Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 96. See also Augustine, *The City of God*, 876.

<sup>114</sup> See Harrison, “A Communion in Good Living.”

<sup>115</sup> Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 97.

<sup>116</sup> Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 97. See also Luke 10:25–27.

<sup>117</sup> Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 94.

<sup>118</sup> Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 95–96.

<sup>119</sup> Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 97.

<sup>120</sup> Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 97–98.

instrument or an implement but a method for framing and interacting with nature to bring-forth, ‘unconceal’ or ‘reveal’ nature.<sup>121</sup>

For Heidegger, the essence of technology is revealing. A number of his statements demonstrate this: ‘Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.’<sup>122</sup> ‘Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens.’<sup>123</sup> ‘The essence of technology is in a lofty sense ambiguous. Such ambiguity points to the mystery of all revealing, i.e., of truth.’<sup>124</sup>

Heidegger argued that the ‘unconcealing’ or ‘revealing’ produced by technology constitutes *aletheia* (from *alethes*, the negation of hiddenness), which is an ancient Greek word translated as ‘truth’. More significantly for our purposes, in the New Testament, *aletheia* is translated as ‘truth’.<sup>125</sup> In the New Testament context, *aletheia* refers to the truth of Christian theology—the truth that God has been revealed about Himself and humanity in the scriptures; the truth of the gospel (good news) of Christ as the revelation of God in human form, who died and was resurrected for the forgiveness of sins; and truth as a character virtue, where a person ‘is free to speak forthrightly without adverse affection, falsehood, simulation or deceit’.<sup>126</sup> In short, when recognised appropriately, technology can be a tool or method for revealing mystery through interaction with the world, which enables the pursuit of true theology. For example, using technology in scientific endeavours can reveal the age and origin of the universe and the precise nature of universal constants, from which some have attempted to deduce theological propositions regarding a Creator.<sup>127</sup> Studying the quantum world, a pursuit that has been enhanced significantly by technology, has revealed the entanglement and symmetry between humanity and nature, with implications for the interconnectedness of the world, human free will and decision-making, and even the nature of ‘God’ as a harmonious and rational agent who is somehow present in a physical world that can be mathematically analysed.<sup>128</sup>

This reframing of technology as the pursuit of mystery can be a catalyst for the quest of true theology, developing and enhancing theology and theological engagement.<sup>129</sup> It could also be used to propel people towards personal virtue. Technology considered as a tool rather than an end in itself could promote virtue by enhancing the development of cooperative order: for example, by providing data to help coordinate charitable activities and target programs to meet specific areas of need more efficiently or by revealing and enabling new social roles, relationships and abilities to help us care for others, such as using communication technologies to connect with those who are physically isolated.<sup>130</sup>

## VI The End of Technology and the Beginning of Mystery

Technology is a poor substitute for theology. It is ‘misdirected’ theology because it claims to know all and solve all while also ruling all.<sup>131</sup> Unfortunately, its rules can bind in the worst sense: they are esoteric yet ubiquitous and comprehensive, prescribing and proscribing human behaviour in such a way as to threaten fundamental freedoms. Technology’s biopolitical effects produce violence by reducing citizens’ lives to bare life. Rather than the techno-pagan biopolitics of violence, Christianity offers a cooperative order. This Christian framework assumes the intrinsic dignity of the life of the citizen along with physical existence, such that an engaged life is possible, a life oriented towards the good, where this orientation is encouraged and enabled by networks of charity enhanced by technology. Here, technology can be recognised as not an end in itself but as facilitating revelation. Technology, reframed as a tool that reveals (not merely as an object but as a method of interacting with and reframing the world), points to a greater mystery that we can explore collectively and harmoniously, leading to the emergence of true theology and virtue.

<sup>121</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 8–9.

<sup>122</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 8.

<sup>123</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 9.

<sup>124</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 20.

<sup>125</sup> Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, 1005; StudyLight.org, “Entry for Strong’s #225 – Aletheia: Thayer’s Definition.”

<sup>126</sup> See Deagon, *From Violence to Peace*, 121–122.

<sup>127</sup> See, e.g., Collins, “The Teleological Argument;” Craig, “The Kalam Cosmological Argument.”

<sup>128</sup> See, e.g., Hodgson, *Theology and Modern Physics*.

<sup>129</sup> See, e.g., Ahdar, “Navigating Law and Religion,” 11–15. A related argument might be that an authentic Christian theology has always provided an alternative perspective that repositions the ‘religious’ in the minds of those that attend to it and that the same potential can be realised through technology. That is, Christian theology offers not so much a solution to the religiousness of technology but a perspective that positions technology in a much larger and more meaningful space and in doing so, makes its active role visible. I am grateful to Andrew Gibson for raising this point.

<sup>130</sup> Brock, *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age*.

<sup>131</sup> Compare Ahdar, “Navigating Law and Religion,” 11–15; Harrison, “Dworkin’s Religion and the End of Religious Liberty,” 93–98.

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